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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Ref. no:	16

Interviewee Surname:	Shiffman
Forename:	Ellen
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	26 May 1924
Interviewee POB:	Breslau, Germany

Date of Interview:	15 May 2003
Location of Interview:	Liverpool
Name of Interviewer:	Rosalyn Livshin
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THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE

INTERVIEW: 16

NAME: ELLEN SHIFFMAN

DATE: 15 MAY 2003

LOCATION: LIVERPOOL

INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 33 seconds

R: First tell us your name.

ES: My name is Ellen Marley Shiffman, née Rosenthal.

RL: Do you have any other names? Any nicknames?

ES: No.

RL: Do you have a Hebrew name?

ES: Elsa, I think.

RL: And when were you born?

ES: I was born on the 25th of May 1924.

RL: How old does that make you now?

ES: I'm nearly 79. I was born in Breslau, which at the time was situated in Upper Silesia, Germany. But since the Second World War it has become Polish and it is now called Wroclaw.

RL: If you could just tell me your parent's name, and where they were born.

ES: My mother was born Jarislowsky and she was born in Berlin in 1896. My father was born in Breslau, in 1884.

RL: And what was his name?

ES: Felix Rosenthal.

RL: First of all looking at your mother's family, could you tell me something about your mother's family background?
Tape 1: 2 minutes 33 seconds

ES: Well my mother's grandparents were traders at the Czech border, it was actually called Holtchina-Lentchen [?] but it does not exist anymore, and they were near the border, and they had I think a general shop, and they were also lending money, and then when they had children one of the sons who was my grandfather, became a banker, and it started from the original business, and he went to Berlin and became a very successful merchant banker. There were other children, and I really do not know such a lot about them, I just know that one of my grandfather's brothers went to France at the time of the Franco-Prussian war. And it wasn't right for him to go as a German and he remained Jarislowsky and he was Polish and he also became a successful banker there. All we know is that one of his daughters then married into the British aristocracy but that's where it finishes, she really didn't have much to do with the family. I know that my mother wrote to her when we emigrated from Germany, but never got a reply. I don't really know an awful lot about the other brothers, and as I say, my grandfather settled in Berlin, and was very successful.

RL: And did the bank have a specific name?

ES: It was called Jarislowsky and Co.

RL: And how many children did he have?

ES: He had five children. He had five boys, and three girls. And his eldest son had inherited the financial acumen and his father actually had to retire in 1908, because of illness and when this son was older, at that time he was very young, it was I think just after the First World War, he took up the business and did extremely well. Unfortunately he died in 1929 having caught scarlet fever from his children. The children survived but he died at the age of 29. And after that things were not so good, and eventually after the Wall Street crash, I think the bank went into decline. And with the coming of the Nazis as well it was eventually liquidated. My mother was the eldest daughter, and she was quite unusual at the time, she did social studies, and she did voluntary work, with deprived children, and in 1920 she married my father, and another of her sisters became an economist, and later emigrated with her husband to America. Her husband had been a Minister of State in the Weimar government, which as you probably know did not last very long, and there was a successful collaboration between this aunt Edith her husband and they did a lot of work in America, and after that she continued, she was in her 80s and she travelled to India and made a report on the economic situation, and the harvest, and this that and the other. And she died last year at the age of 103. And younger sister…

Tape 1: 7 minutes 18 seconds

RL: And what was her married name?

ES: Her married name was Hirsch. Another sister married quite young, she didn't pursue a career, and she died last year at the age of 99. Then there was the younger son, and he wasn't very successful, he went into the business, and somehow he didn't get on with his brother or the other people in the bank and didn't really do very much and eventually emigrated and died in Switzerland I think in the 1970s.And that's the family.

RL: The sister who died at the age of 99, where was she living?

ES: In America. They were all… you know, managed to get out, which was very lucky. So that family were, managed to get out, it was a different story with my father's family.

R: And they grew up in Berlin?

ES: Yes.

RL: Did your mother tell you much about the social work, and the work she was doing?

ES: Yes. She was really an exception because you know daughters of comfortable families really didn't do that kind of work, and she really did work with deprived children, delousing them, washing them and everything, and she really felt she was doing a worth-while job.

RL: How about your father's family, his family background?

ES: Well, his father, came from a place called Beuten in Hungary, and later on came to Breslau, and was Chief Rabbi of Breslau, and the father was married twice. His first wife died and he married again and there were a lot of children you know, I've got it written down here. … Seven children. And they, three of them died in the Holocaust. The youngest child was born in 1905, and the eldest in 1870. And I only found out later when I was in England, I met a lady who had been a psychiatrist, and she told me this youngest boy was suffering from depressive illness, and the Nazis killed him long before the concentration camps killed the Jews. You know, they experimented, and I think they had a van and they just took him and gassed him, you know. And one of my aunts and another uncle died in the Holocaust. Another brother of my father's who was a doctor managed to get to Israel.

Tape 1: 11 minutes 12 seconds

RL: Which occupation had they gone into?

ES: Well my father was a professor of medicine at Breslau University, his brother was a gynaecologist, one of my aunts was a teacher, and there was one brother who unfortunately was deaf and dumb, and I think he just had a very ordinary occupation.

RL: What kind of religious education did your parents have?

ES: Well my father came from a very orthodox background, and he was actually sent as a boy of 18 to study for the Rabbinate at Florence University, where his uncle by marriage was the Chief Rabbi. But he was very rebellious and he spent the whole year learning Italian and Italian culture. And he told his father he did not want to become a Rabbi, and he enrolled as a medical student and became a doctor. But he was very cynical, and you know, we weren't that orthodox at home, and my mother came from a more Liberal background. But we belonged to a Liberal Shul but I was deep down I was very religious and observed everything and went to Shul every Shabbos and gradually became very cynical with all the things that were happening. I'd been to an ordinary school and then went to a Jewish school; we couldn't go to a normal one. I'd been to the Liberal Cheder, and where I was top of the class, and when we had to go to a Jewish school they put me in with the ultra-orthodox, and the other Liberal

children, their Hebrew was not that good, and they had a special class, and I thought it was too much for me, and unfortunately I became very cynical.

RL: Which shul did your parents go to in Breslau?

ES: Well there they went to the orthodox Shul but I cannot remember which Shul it was because in 1930 we left Breslau to come to Hamburg, so my memory is a bit hazy.

RL: And in Hamburg?

ES: We went to the Liberal Shul.

RL: Do you know how your parents met?

ES: Yes I think it was what they'd call a shidduch, you know, this one on this side, and that one on that side. My father was twelve years older than my mother, and he was so absorbed in the medicine and everything, he hadn't really met many women, and so somebody knew this one, that one, and I think it was an arranged marriage.

Tape 1: 14 minutes 19 seconds

RL: When did they marry?

ES: They married in 1920.

RL: What had happened to your father during the First World War?

ES: He served in the First World War, and he had actually got an Iron Cross, first class, yes.

RL: Did he tell you anything about his war-time experiences?

ES: Well I only remember, vaguely, a lot of things were terrible, he had to be there when they hanged some people for some reason and it was very traumatic, you know.

RL: Do you remember where he served?

ES: Well I think he served, you know… they fought against the Russians, it was in Eastern Europe, you know, and that's where he was.

RL: You say he was a professor of medicine. Did he ever talk about any difficulties he might have encountered in the course of his training, or any anti-Semitism he may have met?

ES: No he never mentioned anything. I don't think he experienced any difficulties, you know. But then in 1930 he was offered a post as Chief Physician at the Jewish hospital in Hamburg, and he took up this post. Now this hospital was founded by the uncle of Heinrich Heine, the poet, and he was Jewish, but he didn't practise, and that's where he worked.

RL: Moving on to your memories, what is your earliest memory as a child?

ES: Well I remember growing up in Breslau, we lived in the Kaiser Wilhelmstrasse, and we had a flat, on the second floor and my father had a practice in the house, a private practice in the house and I went to a Montessori Kindergarten and then had a short time at school there, because in those days in Germany, children didn't really go to school till they were six. And it was a happy childhood, you know. I can't really say anymore, at that time everything seemed to be alright, you know, the Nazis hadn't really done anything yet, although you know, storm clouds were gathering, you know.

RL: What district was the apartment in Breslau, what part of Breslau was it?

Tape 1: 17 minutes 26 seconds

ES: I don't know, I think it was on the outskirts, because I mean I was usually taken to walk in a park, you know.

RL: And then you moved to Hamburg, can you tell me about that?

ES: Well Hamburg was a lovely place, it was one of the Hanseatic cities, and people were very nice, they weren't like in the south of Germany and they were really very reluctant to be taken over and become Nazis. And it was a lovely place. We lived in a house at first and later on we moved to a flat which was just off the canal and opposite the block of flats with a wharf and we had a little canoe which would go in the water, you know, a boat, and we could get right into town, just paddling, you know a river called the Alster, and that went right up to the inner city, and I had a very happy childhood, and really, until all these laws came in, I was quite protected, you know, I mean I can't say that I really suffered, you know.

RL: What school did you go to?

ES: Well at first I went to a little, I think in England I think they had schools called 'Dame's schools', it was almost like that, it was run by two old ladies, I think they were Jewish, but you know it wasn't a Jewish school, you only stayed there, it was like a primary school, and in the last year when I was there they were forced to take on a young Nazi teacher who… I mean I think he tried to indoctrinate us a bit but he knew we were Jews, you know, but they were forced to do that. And I think he was trying to teach us the 'Horst Wessel song' you know and all this kind of thing, but it was lost on us.

RL: How many Jewish children were there?

ES: Well it was a mixture, there were some Jewish children, some non-Jewish children, you know. But it was a very funny arrangement, because they had two sessions, there was one lot that went from eight to eleven, and that was the… we were finished with the day then, and the second session was from 11 to 2, because it was only a tiny school, they couldn't get all the children in, it was extraordinary. And then in Germany they had, they didn't have an 11-plus, they had something like a 10-plus, but if you were a good scholar, you were exempted from that, and then I went straight on to a Jewish school from there you know.

RL: Did you have non-Jewish friends from the first school?

Tape 1: 20 minutes 41 seconds

ES: No, not really, I can't remember if I had any you know.

RL: How did you get on with the non-Jewish pupils?

ES: At that time it was alright, you know I mean there was no trouble really, you know, I mean in those days you know, it was the same in this country, I think much easier to get domestic staff, you know and no trouble really. It was just later that we had a young girl, a maid, and she got married and I used to visit her when she was married, and she had a child, and she told my mother one day that she didn't want me to come anymore. She said that it wasn't that she wanted to stop it, but her husband was unemployed, it was very difficult in Germany, and he'd been offered a job, but he had to join the Nazi Party. She said she didn't approve, but they didn't have enough money to live on, and that, you know so I didn't go anymore, but it was brought home to us you see, that there was this dire economic situation, you know, and that's how it started with a lot of people, in order to get a job, they joined the party.

RL: Could you describe your home in Hamburg?

ES: Yes we had a second floor flat, overlooking the canal, quite spacious, there were four bedrooms, a dining room, a salon, you know like a lounge, and then there was a waiting room for the patients, where my father practised, two tiny little balconies, and it was all, it was very good, it was very comfortable, and when the trouble started, 1933 was a very bad year, when the Nazis came into power and a lot of nasty things went on, but then it seemed to settle down again a bit. And I know my parents in 1934, they went to what was Palestine then, to have a look, because they were thinking of leaving, and they found it was so primitive then, and found they couldn't give up on their comforts and everything, and anyway 'this won't last forever, surely, you know, sooner or later, another party would come in', but it didn't happen. And then they started passing all the different laws, in 1935, they passed laws, you know racial laws, and gradually, gradually you know, Jews were turned out of jobs. My father was alright, because he worked in a Jewish hospital, but the ordinary doctors were not allowed to treat non-Jewish patients, so we still had a livelihood. And my father was quite well-known in medical circles. He was offered a job at a male clinic in America but it was a…. there was no pay and he couldn't do it, you know, because at that time the laws were such you couldn't take your money out.

Tape 1: 24 minutes 28 seconds

And gradually things got more difficult. And my brother, who was still at a German school, he had a tough time, he was bullied, and they were making derogatory remarks about the Jews, and he showed some behaviour problems. So they took him out of that school, and in 1936 sent him to England, to a Public School. Somehow, I don't know how, they managed to find the funds, so he left Germany but he could still come home in the holidays. And then at the end of 1937 they decided that it was no good, one could see what was going on, and my father was vouched for by Sir Henry Dale, who was a very eminent British Scientist. And he came to England, and he had to take all his medical exams again, in order to eventually get the license to practise, and eventually in 1938, six weeks before Kristallnacht, it was just my mother and myself at home, we came to England. At that time you were only allowed to take about I think ten percent of your money, all the rest went to the Nazis, and you know we had to pay a Reichsfluchtsteuer, which was a tax because you were emigrating, and generally it was made difficult, they wanted to get rid of the Jews but then it was also made very difficult to get out, and we were, I consider we were one of the lucky ones, and so we came to England

in 1938, and my father had by then I think passed all his exams, he had a paid research job at Leicester University College, and the Principal was the father of Richard and David Attenborough, and I remember going there for tea, and they were very good, they'd taken in a young girl who had come in on the Kindertransport, and they'd also had two girls who came in on a domestic permit, because for people, the only way to get out is a domestic job, I mean there were people with degrees, and lawyers, and they came to do domestic work, just to get out, you know.

RL: Can I just ask you a few more things about life in Germany before we move on to the English side. Your father, did he belong to any, any clubs or organisations, was he active at all?

ES: Well when he was a student there was a student society, it was a Jewish one, it was called 'KZ', 'KZ', and they did all this duelling, you know that was a fashion in the student circles you know, and they got these scars, you know, but I think that is about all I can remember, you know.

RL: Was he active in any communal activity?

ES: No, he wasn't. He was entirely absorbed in his work. He did quite a lot of research. He'd written quite a lot of books, you know, he was really, you know, an academic.

Tape 1: 28 minutes 21 seconds

RL: What field of research was he involved in?

ES: Well, he was an internist, medical, his speciality was liver diseases, you know.

RL: You said he wrote books?

ES: Yes.

RL: What about your mother? What did she do, did she belong to anything? Was she active in anything?

ES: No. I really don't think so. She was quite busy bringing us up because we, my father really didn't have much to do with our upbringing, that was the thing, it was all left to the women, the men were you know, expected to do anything, you know, they were waited on, you know, his clothes were put on, you know, they didn't have to do anything, not like nowadays, you know.

RL: How many children were you?

ES: Just the two of us, my brother and I.

R: What would you do in your spare time with your family, how would you entertain yourselves?

ES: We went swimming, we played tennis, in the winter, I remember I was an avid reader, you know, and we had this little canoe, and sometimes at the weekend, we didn't have a car in

those days, my father didn't learn to drive until he was 50. We went on outings, you know around Hamburg.

RL: Did you visit the theatres?

ES: From what I remember we couldn't go to the theatre anymore, it wasn't allowed, but they had what they call a 'Kulturbund', which was a sort of club, a culture club, and they put on plays, and things, and cinema shows, and in the Jewish.. they had a lot of plays, you know, community house they put on plays and films, and I remember actually that one of the actors, when the actors came they couldn't stay in hotels, they were put up with families and I remember an actor being in our house, rehearsing his lines and everything, and I was always interrupting him, you know, he got quite mad with me, you know, I was quite mischievous, you know.

RL: Did your ---, was your father interested in Zionism at all?

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ES: No, not really, I don't think anyone was interested in Zionism at all. I know they went to Palestine with a view of emigration, but no, we didn't, we were all hoping that this wouldn't last, you know. And I think a lot of the German Jews were quite assimilated, and really considered themselves good Germans, and they thought that specially if they had fought in the First World War, that nothing would happen to them. But that was all wrong.

RL: What sort of social circles did your family mix in?

ES: Well they mixed with other doctors, you know, and but I think they didn't have much of a social life, my father was always so busy, he really didn't care so much about that, but I know we went on nice holidays because he could no longer really go on holiday in Germany, because everywhere they had those notices: 'Jews not allowed' and I actually remember, you know, we had somebody to look after us as children, and this girl was blonde, blue-eyed, and she was Jewish, and we went to a swimming pool which I think a week before had been alright to go to, and they put a notice up: 'Jews not allowed' and I said 'I'm going home, and she said 'come on, come on, I'm blonde I look Aryan', and I remember being terrified. And nothing happened to us, but never again, I just didn't chance it, you know.

RL: Did you ever experience anti-Semitism?

ES: Well in about 19… I didn't experience it; it was just brought home to me. In 1937, a friend of mine, actually I've got a picture of her, and her father was a businessman. And they started to take businessmen and put them in concentration camps, because it started then, but there was no gassing or anything, and he'd been in a concentration camp for about three weeks, and there was a ring at the door, and the postman delivered a parcel, and when the mother opened it, the letter there: the husband, he died of pneumonia. Nobody knows how he died, he was probably beaten to death, and you know, that was what happened. But I don't really know, you know we didn't sort of move in business circles, but at that time, if you were caught smuggling out money, which a lot of business people tried, you got the death penalty, but no country would want you without money. You needed some money, so I think they desperately tried to do something about it, you know, very difficult.

RL: Did you or your parents have non-Jewish friends?

Tape 1: 35 minutes 2 seconds

ES: Yes my mother had two non-Jewish friends who had been to the, this college where she did the studies, the social work. They were both non-Jewish. And she was very close to them. And I remember one of her friends was married to a man who had been adopted as a child, and later on they found out that his natural father had been Jewish, and this man had fought in the First World War with Hermann Goering, and they just made him an honorary Aryan, just like that, although he was 50%, you know, but nobody knew that at the time. But those were my mother's great friends.

RL: Do you remember where you lived, were there other Jewish people living in the same apartment?

ES: Oh yes, yes, there were quite a few where we were, you know.

RL: You remember the Liberal Cheder that you attended. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

ES: Well at that time you see the children didn't go to the Jewish school, I went there from when I was six to when I was ten. And I was very interested in it, you know, and I was you know, quite good at it. I used to go on a Sunday for about two to three hours. And that's really all I can tell you.

RL: It was attached to the synagogue?

ES: Yes, it was a very modern synagogue, a very, really a very modern building, after, and the Nazis later took it over and made it into a radio station. But I mean I saw that again when we went back in 1987. And they then had a plaque there that this was where they, that originally it was a synagogue.

RL: Do you remember the Rabbi?

ES: No, I really don't.

RL: Religiously what kind of observances were kept at home?

ES: Well not very much, and this was I think entirely due to my father. You know, he had become so cynical. I remember, at Pesach, we had Matzo, but we also had bread at the same time. So no, we weren't very observant. I went to Shul at Sabbath, my parents went for holy days, you know, and I was very taken by religion at that time.

RL: Any other practices that stick in your mind, things that the family did?

Tape 1: 38 minutes 35 seconds

ES: What, you mean Jewish practices?

RL: Yes.

ES: This was you know, large number of the German Jews were very assimilated, you know, and no, I can't really say. But I remember when it came to Yom Kippur I used to think about all the sins I had committed, and I was really very well into religion, but gradually, gradually, with all these things happening, I became cynical myself.

RL: Did you know your grandparents?

ES: Oh yes, but only my mother's parents. My father's parents, my grandfather who had been the Chief Rabbi, he died in 1920, so I never knew him. And his wife had died, his second wife had died several years before, she was only 54-55. And I remember my father telling me the story that when she was 50, she developed a swelling in her abdomen which was diagnosed as an ovarian cyst, which got bigger and bigger, and then one day she went into labour at the age of 50 and had her last child, that was quite something, you know, he told me that. And that was the youngest child, which was born in 1905. but you see she came from a very religious family, and her brother, was a man called David Kaufmann, who is, I think I mentioned to you, was a Jewish sage, and was a Rabbi, and a philosopher, and he was very well thought of, and there is still a section on him in the Budapest, the Jewish Section of the Budapest Museum in Budapest, but he died quite young. And I have a biography of him, but it's all in German. And you want to know… that's from my father's side.

RL: This was your grandmother' brother?

ES: Yes, my grandmother's brother, on my father's side.

ES: And I never knew him.

RL: Coming onto making efforts to leave the country, were you aware of what went on behind the scenes in terms of having to get a permits or….

ES: It was very difficult. I mean yes my mother had to deal with all this really, you know. Yes it was very difficult. But if you found a sponsor then you would get a visa to come to England, and we were very lucky, but if you couldn't find a sponsor, you know, later on you couldn't get out. Some people managed to get to extraordinary places, they went to Shanghai, to South America, but it's really a question of the money,

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people who were well to do they couldn't take their money with them. When we came to England there were no benefits, you know, like asylum seekers get now, I think the Jewish community helped those who didn't have money, but I mean my father got a license to practise and then got his own money you know.

RL: Were other families leaving Germany at the time, the time that you left?

ES: Oh yes, the time that we left. But it was very very difficult. The later you left it; you know if you came out in '33 it was quite easy. Those people were the lucky ones because they could take their possessions with them. It was very difficult. Six weeks before Kristallnacht there were all sorts of regulations, about the furniture, it couldn't be new furniture. It had to be so many years old. And I remember my mother had bought a dining table the year before,

so it was turned upside down, and it was painted with cocoa butter, you know for the under surface to look old, and then you had to bribe the shopkeepers to say that this table was so many years old, it was very difficult, you know.

RL: What did the family manage to take out?

ES: We managed to take furniture, and clothes, and my mother at that time she bought clothes, there was no restriction, I had different clothes you know that were different sizes. I still remember that when I was at medical school in the forties I still wore German clothes. And I felt very conspicuous because they were so different from the English ones, but we had so many clothes, I mean it didn't matter to me with the coupons, we had so much but we had to be very careful with money you know, there wasn't very much of it.

RL: So was there no restriction on how many cases you could take?

ES: I don't think so, it was the furniture, you know, it was just the furniture, but we brought out all our German furniture, and bedding, and things like that. Oh ya, it was mainly the money. It was only later, after Kristallnacht that people were only allowed to take one suitcase. And I think we were very lucky. Actually I remember when we had landed in England all the furniture went into a container, and it was very difficult to get it because…. No, sorry, I'm wrong we had a container, whereas in England all this didn't come in until after the war, and this container had not arrived in England at the time of the Kristallnacht, it was in transit, and we,

Tape 1: 45 minutes 35 seconds

you know, we thought we would never get it, and one of the Jewish lawyers we had to instruct him to find out what had happened, but it arrived a few weeks after Kristallnacht it all came.

RL: Were you able to take out any silverware?

ES: Yes, we took out silver, and jewellery, I don't think there was any trouble about that, yes, we got that out.

RL: You said that your brother went to a public school, which school was that?

ES: It was the Perse School in Cambridge, and it had a Jewish house, where they were you know strictly kosher and all that, but they had a Jewish house, and he just stayed there until he was sixteen, by that time we'd arrived here, and we really didn't have the funds to keep him there any longer, and he came back to Leicester.

RL: Do you remember the day you and your mother left? Can you describe it to me?

ES: Yes. We left on the 1st of September 1938, and after we left the flat, after there had been quite a dispute with the concierge, who was making it quite difficult for all the furniture to be taken out. And I remember there was an argument about washbasins. My mother said the washbasins belong to us, and we were terrified that he would call the Gestapo or something. It was resolved somehow; I suspect my mother gave him money or something. And then we got the train to Hoek van Holland, and I remember I'd been on the train, and there was an English couple, in the compartment, and they offered me some chocolate, lovely chocolate, I hadn't seen anything like this for a long time. And my English at the time was not bad, because I'd

learned English from the age of six, because my mother had gone to school in England for a year, and I was very pleased that I could talk to them. And then we took the ferry to England, and we arrived in England exactly one year before the outbreak of war, and we went to Leicester, and stayed in a hotel until we found a house, and my father was already waiting for us you know.

RL: What were your first impressions?

ES: Well my first impressions were, you know, in, on the continent, once the 1st of September came, you dressed in your winter clothes. My first impression was how lovely the climate was, and it was a hot summers' day, and I was dressed in a
Tape 1: 48 minutes 57 seconds

winter suit, you know, and no, I loved it, I had been looking forward to coming here, and a school had already been found for me, and when term started I went to the new school and they were absolutely marvellous to me. The headmistress, and the teachers, and the teaching in this country, one always thought the teaching was better in Germany, but they, I never missed a year, they put me in the right class for my age, but my mathematics wasn't as good, it wasn't up to standard, and I remember the class teacher, the form teacher, stayed behind, to give me extra tuition free of charge, and really they hadn't seen many refugees you see. I think in some places there were a lot of refugees and that perhaps put people off. But I was the first refugee there, so they were very good to me.

RL: Which school was it?

ES: It was Wyggeston Grammar School in Leicester.

RL: How did you get on with the other people?

ES: I got on very well, you know, I picked up, and the other children were very nice to me; I don't think there were very many other Jewish children in the school, and this was two years before School Certificate, or O-Levels or whatever you call it. And you know, I think I started quite well, I remember the first test I did, it was unfortunate, I, they gave us questions, and you were supposed to write down the answers, and I thought you write down the questions and then you've got time for the answers, so that was a fiasco, I mean I did all the wrong things. But after that I got on alright, you know, and you know, I actually had very good results later. And that's another story. When we came to the School Certificate I was whisked away. I don't know whether you want me to tell you about this now. When war broke out in 1939, all German Jewish refugees were enemy aliens, and they were put in three categories. A were quite harmless, B so-so, C, they couldn't trust them. I was under the age of 16 so I wasn't classified. My brother was 18 and he was classified as B and my parents were A. And at the time of Dunkirk, on my 16th… Oh. Dunkirk… I don't know. Anyhow, in 1940, on my 16th birthday, when I came home from school, the lady next door, who was in the WVS, with the power of arrest, came and took me away, to be interned, leaving my parents behind. And they took us in a place in Derby, where we stayed overnight, and then they took us to Liverpool, Liverpool Lime Street. When we emerged, angry crowds lined the street, because there were the terrible Germans coming out of the Station. And we were marched to the Docks, where they'd opened an old sailor's home, that hadn't
Tape 1: 53 minutes 9 seconds

been used for five years, and they kept us there overnight. And it was terrible because there was some flooding, and we had filthy dirty mattresses, and there was no food, but oh I forget, as we marched, as we were marched to this place, the local Liverpudlians were throwing stones at us, because they were ignorant, they didn't know, they thought we were Nazis. Anyhow we got to this place, and I must say, there was a policeman there, a very kind policeman, and he went home, I'll never forget that, and brought me a piece of apple pie that his wife had baked, he felt so sorry for me. And the next day we were put on a boat to the Isle of Man. And we were housed in the boarding houses that had all been vacated by holiday makers. And the landlady received from the government for people over 18, £1 a week, and for people under 18, 10 shillings, and so more or less on half rations, as you were under 18 when you have a very good appetite, and the others got more. But apart from that, it was more like a holiday really. Lovely weather, we were allowed to roam around Port Erin and I can't say that we were ill-treated or anything like that, no. It was just difficult being away from home.

RL: And your parents weren't taken? And your brother?

ES: No my brother, a few weeks later, that was I think at the time of Dunkirk, that was I think at the time of Dunkirk, and there was a big panic, and they decided to intern all the 'B's. And my brother was taken to Huyton. And a lot of the people were put on the boat to Canada, and there was one called the Arandora Star, and that was sunk by U-boats, but thank goodness he was never shipped out. In the meantime, my headmistress and the Chief Constable of Leicester, made a special application to the Home Office and they released me after six weeks. And I was the first person to be released from the Isle of Man. Now while I was there, and I was due to sit the O-levels, my school had sent me all my revision books and everything, and I spent a lot of the time revising, whereas probably if I'd been at school I wouldn't have done so much. And I came out two weeks before the O-levels, and when I took the exams mine were the best of this English school, so you know, the revision had done me a lot of good. But you know, I can only say that they were absolutely marvellous, specially the Head Mistress. And for the Chief Constable to put in an application, and I think gradually over the next year they started to release people, the ones that were alright. And I always say it's understandable, because there was this fear that some of the Jewish Refugees might have been Nazi spies so everybody was panicking, so that, you know…

Tape 1: 56 minutes 55 seconds

RL: Were you surprised at being taken, and the rest of your family…

ES: Yes I was, I was. But then again I knew that I hadn't been classified. They wouldn't wait and classify me on my 16th birthday, they just had the order, as an alien I had never been classified but I had to go but in retrospect it was very understandable, very understandable.

RL: Did you have any contact in Leicester at this period with the Jewish community?

ES: Oh yes, oh yes. We did, we had some friends. The only thing was, first of all, they did look down on us because we were recent immigrants you see. And they'd been here for quite a while and a lot of them had come of course from East Europe, and it was quite a different background. And it was actually what happened to my father was that he had all his exams, and he had a licence to practise, and what he did was to put up a plate and practise you know. There was a panel at the time, but he practised as a private doctor, and it was quite legal, and

the local Jewish doctors resented that. And they sent a deputation. They came to the house and said that they were going to complain about him, that what he was doing was illegal, and that he would be in a lot of trouble if he continued to practise. And thank goodness we took legal advice, and everything was above board, but they resented him. You see he'd been a, he wasn't just a GP but he had to work as a GP, but he had been you know, professor of medicine and he did have private patients you see, and they didn't have to be referred to him by a consultant, he did by private practice, private general practice. It was very upsetting at the time, but by and large, we had Jewish friends, my mother made friends and she played bridge with the other Jewish members, you know.

TAPE 2

[Inaudible.]

Tape 2: 0 minute 35 seconds

RL: Anything else about life in Germany that you wanted to tell me about? You were saying about the law of domestics…

ES: Yes in 1935 I think when they passed the Nuremberg Laws; it was against the law for a non-Jew to have relationships
Tape 2: 1 minute 0 second

with a Jew. And I think that they thought that if you employed a pretty young housemaid the master of the house might have you know, ideas, so you were only allowed to employ women over 35. And I remember we had a very nice woman. She was a very devout Christian, and after the war, she got in touch with me and I kept up quite a correspondence, and of all things, later on, when she was, already well she must have been in her sixties, she married a Jewish man, yes, but then I didn't hear anymore, you know, I wrote but I think she died, you know. I don't really think I can…

RL: You said you used to visit with your grandmother quite a lot in Berlin.

ES: Yes. She lived in a lovely house in a part of Berlin called Grunewald. And next door to her lived a very famous singer called Hildegard. I remember about 20 years ago I saw her on television, or something, I don't know really how that happened. Now opposite this villa she had, later on, the house was taken on by the Nazis, and they were training the young SA, and my cousin lived with her mother, lived with her mother and my grandmother, and I think she was only about 13 at the time but she was quite mature, and these young lads from the Nazi party used to serenade her at night, and I said you know, 'Don't open the window and listen to them, you know you're going to be in terrible trouble, you know, it's not from you', but whether these lads didn't know that she was Jewish or anything, but you know, I myself was terrified.

RL: What happened to your grandmother?

ES: Well my grandmother had quite an interesting story, her, one of her daughters, Edith, the one who was an economist, they went to Denmark, and they were still allowed by the Nazis to go to Denmark and come back to England, and eventually they were in Denmark when war broke out, but they managed to get my grandmother over to Denmark, but shortly after she

arrived there they emigrated to America, and my grandmother lived on her own in Denmark, and then when the Germans marched into Denmark, the Danes organised a rescue of all the Jews and she was taken in a small boat, I think it might have been a rowing boat, to Sweden, where she spent the rest of the war. And then eventually after the war was allowed to come to England and she lived with us. Now her own father, unfortunately, he was 90 in 1937, he had quite a big party then, and she couldn't take him, she couldn't get a visa for Denmark or anything, and he was left behind unfortunately, and in 1942 he was admitted to the Jewish hospital, where died, so he was 95, which was a blessing really, because shortly after that they took all the

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Jews into the camps, you know. So they were quite a long-living family in some respects, you know.

RL: When you came to this country, whereabouts were you living in Leicester?

ES: Well first of all we lived in a little hotel, and then we got a house in a district of Liverpool called Stonegate, and that's where my father practised from the house and also did some research at the University College Hospital, but eventually he gave up the research because at wartime everything… there wasn't much to be done.

RL: How did he manage to get patients?

ES: Well he worked in an ordinary… as an assistant for a year or so, to sort of get the feel of the language and everything and then as I say I think it was after the war, he put the plate up, and I think it was just personal recommendation, you know. It was only a small practise and somehow we got by. And in 1948 when the NHS started, he had NHS patients as well. But you know not for that long because he became ill later, and developed lung cancer and he died in 1951, '52, sorry.

RL: When you were here in '38 how aware were you that war might be coming?

ES: Oh yes, everybody knew because the year before, you know, the Germans marched into Sudetenland, and Chamberlain went to see Hitler, I think everybody realised that sooner or later it would be inevitable.

RL: Was your father interested in politics?

ES: I don't think so. I don't think so. He certainly wasn't active in politics, no.

RL: Did you get newspapers?

ES: Oh yes, we were all very interested in current affairs, yes.

RL: Did you; was there anything about England or the way of life in England that seemed strange to you?

ES: Oh yes, it was very, very difficult, because we'd been spoilt, you know, on the continent, most people had central heating. And we came here, and there was just a little fire, in the morning, and the bedrooms were freezing and I found it

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very, very difficult to get used to that. I think people don't realise it now, because most people have central heating. But when you've been spoilt with central heating and you come to a place which is so cold, it was terribly hard. But I was young, you get used to it you know. I think it must have been a lot more difficult for older people, you know.

RL: Did your mother have help in the home?

ES: Yes we had a young German girl, and she came over on a domestic permit and she helped, you know, she was only 19 years old but she helped my mother, and that's how she got out. And we had her, we had a cleaner and I still remember that when she had elevenses, she wanted 'bloaters paste' I'd never heard of it, you don't get it now, it was some kind of fish paste, but she had to have that, you know.

RL: Was there anything else about life here?

ES: Well, Yes you know, everything, food, and everything, but you know I had always been a lover of England and I liked the language, and as I say I had private lessons from the age of six, and then later on I learned it at school. But yes, life was very difficult, very different. By and large, you know you always thought the English had excellent manners, were very reserved, and fair play, but I mean things have changed so much I think the English character is very different from what it was sixty years ago, more than sixty years ago.

RL: Sixty years ago did you find those characteristics?

ES: Oh yes, yes.

RL: Did you have contact with any other refugees?

ES: Yes, in Leicester, yes, there were quite a lot of refugees, and we mixed more with the people who had been there for a long time, you know.

RL: What sort of refugees were there?

ES: Well, like doctors, and lawyers, and I mean one couple the husband was a lawyer and came as a domestic help, and later on, you know, I don't know what kind of job he got. And then later on we had a friend, he came from Czechoslovakia, he was a doctor, and he became… he worked in the public health sector, there were quite a few… I think we mixed more you know with the Jewish refugees. I remember we became friendly with a couple, they were British Jews, and they had a son who was

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invalided out, no. Yes, they had a son; I used to play tennis at their house. They had their own tennis courts. And then when the war broke out he became a British Officer. And I still remember, she rang up my mother, and said 'My son, is a British Officer, and he can no longer associate with you'. It was quite peculiar. And then a few years later, he was invalided out of the army. I think, I don't know whether he had a nervous breakdown, and he rang my mother, and she begged and pleaded, she said: 'Can your daughter come and play tennis with him? He needs cheering up and this that and the other. She was only too glad to welcome me

back to play tennis with him, because he had to be, you know, be kept busy. But that was the attitude which, I don't know…

RL: How big was the refugee community in Leicester? How many people would you say it was?

ES: Oh I don't know, 200, 300 I don't know.

RL: Did they form their own clubs, or societies?

ES: No. They only had the one then synagogue. Now I believe they've got an orthodox and a progressive one. But no, no, there were no other associations or anything… What they did then, that, for the younger generation, there was a thing called 'Freie Deutsche Jugend', and I remember that a lot of my acquaintances wanted me to join it, but then I found out, although they didn't publicise it, it was a communist organisation, so I really didn't want to have anything to do with them. But I remember one girl, she joined it and she met her future husband there, and then after the war they went back to communist Germany, and I believe she played quite a prominent role you know, in the party there, but I'm very glad that… they didn't publicise it was a communist organisation, I'm very glad that I didn't join it.

RL: Who did you mix with, who did you befriend and play with?

ES: At the time it wasn't so much a question of 'play', you know I was a teenager, you know. Well there were some girls who had come on the Kindertransport, you know, I was quite friendly with them. And actually one of them, I had a letter from her a few years ago out of the blue and she found my address, and she wrote me a letter and she was happily married in America, you know. But yes, I think girls were mainly from other refugees, you know. I had one friend who, a very good school friend. She wasn't Jewish, she was British and she was very nice, very kind, and I was very friendly with her. She took me under her wing from the day I started school. And we

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kept up the friendship, you know. But others, you know they were very friendly at first because I think it was a novelty, being a refugee child, but then you know, afterwards they were not so interested. And a lot of them left school at 16 and I stayed on till I was 18, you know. But when I was studying I made some good friends yes, they were not Jewish.

RL: Did you join any youth groups?

ES: I didn't join any youth groups, no.

RL: Or clubs?

ES: No.

RL: What about, you mentioned the synagogue there, what kind of synagogue was it in Leicester?

ES: Oh it was an orthodox one, yea, yea, it was only small.

RL: And how regularly did you go to that?

ES: Oh only on the Holy Days. No I didn't do it any other time.

RL: And then do you remember the outbreak of war?

ES: Oh yes, yes.

RL: What were you doing?

ES: Oh I just remember, I still remember listening to the radio and you had Chamberlain, I'm sure you've seen the scenes on television, and war was declared, you know, and we thought well, we can get rid of Hitler, the sooner the better, you know. I don't think anybody thought it would last that long. But and I mean at one stage it looked very bad for this country.

RL: You mentioned being interned. How big a camp was it, the camp that you were in?

ES: I don't really know how many, but I mean they'd taken over all the boarding houses in Port Erin. It must have a few thousand, you know.

RL: Were there other internees of your age?

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ES: Yes, there were quite a few, well perhaps not sixteen, but quite a few sort of round 18, you know, 17, 18,19, yes but we as I say we went to the beach and it was nice weather and we swam, and the internees themselves arranged for many activities, they had a lot of University lecturers or Professors, and they gave lectures, and educated, and then they had a, we had, they, the very famous Quartet, no duo, Warschauer, Landau or something, and the Amadeus Quartet, they all started on the Isle of Man you know and they had cinemas, and we went to the cinema, and we had the run of it, it wasn't, you know, except we couldn't go home. And no, it wasn't at all bad. We thought 'God it will be like a concentration camp' but no. And I remember some of the women, they brought their children, the boys, as long as they were under 16 they went with their mother. And there were some big strapping boys of 15 and you know the women went for them, and then on their 16th birthday they went to the men's side.

RL: So were there little children?

ES: Oh yes, yes, they went with their mother, you know, oh yes, yes.

RL: Was the camp divided into sections, the women's section and the men's section?

ES: The men, yes, I don't know, I think the men were somewhere else, quite a way away. You know, I don't know whether there was really any contact.

RL: And what about the food. How was it served?

ES: Well they served it like the boarding houses do, there was not much of it, and when you were under 18 you know, couldn't blame them, they didn't give you all that much, but you could go to the shops and buy things, you didn't have to starve, you know.

RL: Were you given money?

ES: No, my parents sent money, you know. I could buy a few extras. But the landladies weren't very happy because for them it lost all their revenue you know, I mean they just got a pittance from the government, really, you know.

RL: How were they towards you?

ES: Well they were alright I remember vaguely she was very grumpy, a very grumpy lady, but they didn't ill-treat us or
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anything. They were just not very happy with the situation you know, but what could they do?

RL: Tell me about your education.

ES: Well, I took school certificate at 16, and then I did the Higher School Certificate, and I couldn't get into the medical school at the time until I went to University College school in Leicester and took what they called an intermediate BSC. And I took the course for the intermediate BSC and I applied to Birmingham University to sit their first MB as an external student. And I did part of the first MB but they didn't accept me. I went to, I applied to Sheffield and they would have taken me and I was classed as an enemy alien. There, I think Sheffield was a sort of special area where enemy aliens weren't allowed, so that didn't work. So eventually I found this, we found this place in Edinburgh, it wasn't actually Edinburgh University, but it was the medical school of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Edinburgh and Glasgow, and you couldn't take a University Degree, but you could become a… but it was more like a diploma, it wasn't reckoned as good as a University Degree but at least they agreed to take me, that's when I then started my medical studies in 1943. And I qualified in 1948.

RL: How did you find Edinburgh?

ES: Oh it was really very… I liked it there, it was really good. I mean its difficult finding suitable digs, but I made a lot of friends and I thoroughly enjoyed my time there, you know. It was a very old fashioned place, and the college had this history, there were these body-snatching Burke and Hare in this sort of seventeenth century, that used to open graves and snatch the bodies and send them to the medical schools for the students to dissect you know and that was part of their history that they had been involved in. But you know I really liked it, as I say I met a lot of friends.

RL: Did you come across any anti-Semitism?

ES: I can't think of any. No, no, no. I remember, it's nothing to do with anti-Semitism now, but I was approached near the end of my studies, I was approached by the BBC to broadcast to medical students in Germany. But I said no. I just didn't want to be involved in this, you know.

RL: Did you join any societies at the University?

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ES: No, I didn't, really. I found I had to work terribly hard you know, it didn't come that easy to me. I really was a swat. I had to sit on my bottom and study, otherwise I wouldn't have got through, I know that. But… they had all sorts of students, I remember when we were in the dissecting room, and you know, four students share, that one of them was the son of a tribal chief from somewhere in Africa, and you know, we came from all over the world. And there were also some Jewish refugees there.

RL: Did you also come into contact with the Edinburgh Jewish community?

ES: Yes, yes. They were very nice, you know. I met them, and they had a Jewish Students Society, and you know I was asked to people's house.

RL: What were there other Jewish students on your course?

ES: A few, not many. Not many. But that was the only society I joined. The Jewish Students' Society.

RL: What did they do?

ES: Well they had meetings and lectures and social events, you know, I think we used to have meetings once a month on a Sunday, and that's where I met my husband, at the Jewish Students Society.

RL: And where was he from?

ES: Well he was born in Liverpool, and he'd started the dental school in Liverpool, and I think when war broke out his results were not very good so he had to go into the army. And after the war, he came back to Liverpool, and he wanted, they said he could go and do the first year exam, but he didn't want to do dentistry, he'd decided he wanted to do medicine. And he actually got a promise from the secretary that if he could find a place to do his studies up to the clinical work they would take him back in Liverpool for medical studies, and he actually got into Edinburgh, the same school, for his pre-clinical studies, and that's where we met. And of course he was starting at the beginning, and he thought I was just in the second year, and was quite surprised that I was already in the final year. And eventually you know we got married in '49, and when he finished his preclinical studies and came back to Liverpool, the Dean of the Medical School, there was quite a hoo-ha, denied that he'd ever said, you know, that he would

Tape 2: 29 minutes 0 second

take him back, but he had the word of the secretary and it was eventually sorted out, and they took him back. And then he started his preclinical studies when we got married.

RL: What was his name?

ES: Ken.

RL: And was he born in Liverpool?

ES: He was born in Liverpool, and his parents were born in Liverpool, but the… his grandfather came from Russia, his paternal grandfather came from Russia… and I think his… Sorry I got it wrong, his maternal grandfather came from Russia and his paternal grandfather came from Germany or Austria.

RL: Did you find Edinburgh or Scotland different to England?

ES: Yes. Yes it was different you know. I liked the Scottish accent, and yes they were different, and you know I liked them, you know.

RL: Can you put your finger on what was different about them?

ES: Well I think the diet was different, you know, at least the digs, you know, perhaps it was wartime, they had high tea, there was no sort of what I'd call a proper evening meal. We used to have a very good breakfast but that was about all, but that was wartime and it was difficult with the food.

RL: Did you experience any bombing raids during the war?

ES: Well there was one bombing raid in Leicester, and we had take shelter, but our area wasn't bombed. There was a park about two miles away from where we lived and they bombed the cricket pavilion and nobody was hurt, but that was about all in Leicester. But we had quite a few relatives in London, and they came and stayed with us for a while until they found accommodation. I know you know my mother bought beds and we put them all up, but that was the only experience we had. I mean we went into our shelter quite a few times, but that was the only time Leicester was bombed.

RL: And what did your brother do during the war?

ES: Well my brother he, he took up medical studies. He got into King's College London, and then qualified and went into the army. He went to the Far East, I mean that was already then after the end of the war. He went to the Far East. I

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think he was in the army for about two years, and then he came back and had different jobs, took specialist examinations, and became a medical consultant in Leicester, at Leicester Royal Infirmary, and he stayed there until his retirement. And he still lives in Leicester now.

RL: What was his name?

ES: David.

RL: And did he marry?

ES: Yes he married. He married a nurse. He did marry out. He had, he had girlfriends, nurses, and I think two or three times my mother intervened and stopped him marrying and when he was 40, he said he wanted to marry again, and she said 'nothing I can do'. But she's a very nice lady, very nice. She keeps all the family together. He's got two children, and one of them is a, the girl is a doctor, and the boy runs a club in London.

RL: Going back to you. You married in 1949.

ES: Yes.

RL: Where did you get married?

ES: I got married at the local synagogue, Greenbank Road synagogue. I don't know if that means anything to you.

RL: In Leicester?

ES: In Leicester.

RL: Do you remember the wedding? What did you have for the wedding?

ES: Well I actually left it all to my mother-in-law. I didn't get married from Leicester, there weren't that many people we knew, but Ken's family they played a big part in the community, so we left it actually to Ken's mother. And we had, when you got married in Germany you didn't have as many big weddings as you have here, you know. We had, I consider we had a big wedding. I was terrified. I wasn't used to that. But it was organised very well. There must have been over 100 people which to me is an awful lot.

RL: And where did you go to live?

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ES: Well we then went to live in a very small flat in the Mosley Hill District. It was a big house that had been converted and we had a very small flat. Two room flat, one big lounge and one tiny bedroom and a tiny kitchen. And that was that. And we stayed there for quite a while. And we finally had to move when I was expecting my third child, there was no room in this tiny flat for the third child, and then we moved here in 1956, a week before my youngest child was born, and we've been here ever since, we never moved from here.

RL: Did you work?

ES: Yes I worked, my first job in Liverpool was at a little hospital, it was called the Liverpool Chest Hospital and it was in Mount Pleasant in the middle of town, and is now a, I think, a physical training college, it's no longer a hospital. And I stayed there for a year, and then I went to a children's hospital in Birkenhead, I stayed there for six months. And then a casualty job for three months and then after that I had my first child. And when he was ten months old I got a job in a hospital called Mill Road Maternity hospital which doesn't exist anymore, and I worked in the casualty and outpatient department. And I stayed there for quite a few years, they gave me maternity leave for my second child, and I left about three weeks before the last one was born. And I managed to get you know reliable help for the children, which nowadays is very difficult, but in those days you could get reliable people. And then, by that time my husband had qualified and had done a few house jobs, and in 1956 we applied together for a general practice in Scotland Road, which is largely a Catholic area, and we were surprised, we got this practice, there were quite a few Catholic doctors applying, but we got it. Maybe due to the fact that it was supposed to be a one-man practice and there were two of us applying. Maybe they thought you know, perhaps it was better for the patients, you know more people

there. And after my daughter was born I first went back part-time into this practice but as the children got older eventually I went into full-time. And by that time the practice was growing, and we'd also taken over a branch surgery, and really you know, it was really like a two-man practice. And I must say, the people in Scotland Road we, you know, we got on with them very well with them you know. I mean it's a rough area, but you know, the salt of the earth, you know. There was a funny story, I can't tell you that as well as my husband does. But when we first got there, a woman called on my husband, and they called women in those days, they used to wear black shawls, and they used to have aprons with a sort of money bag and they used to call them Mary Ellens. And she sort of interviewed him, and he said 'I was on

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the previous doctor's list. I want to stay on your list, but can I ask you a personal question? I can't do the Scouse like he does. So he said well what do you want to know? 'Well' she said, 'what I want to know from you is, are you a Catholic Jew, or a Prosy Jew', it means a Protestant Jew. So he said, without blinking: 'I'm a Catholic Jew'. She said that's alright, because if you'd been a Prosy Jew I would have got off your list.' I mean they had no idea what it meant to be Jewish. So they knew we were Jewish, but I don't really think they had any idea, when somebody comes and asks a silly question like that what it really meant. But you know we got on very well with them, and we had quite a few of the priests on the list and we got on very well with them, and later on I actually was offered a post apart from General Practise as clinical assistant in psychiatry. So once a week I used to go in for a few hours to Sefton General, also been pulled down, and to work in the psychiatric wards. In 1987 I retired from the work at Sefton and in '89 I retired from the practise. And since then I've been a lady of leisure.

RL: Did you ever encounter any hostility or anti-Semitism over the years?

ES: No, no, I can't say. Not myself, no. I've heard of instances, but no I can't say, no. At the time I was appointed as a clinical assistant in psychiatry, there were three posts available. And the consultant was Jewish, so three Jewish clinical assistants were appointed, and I often thought you know, people might have objected to that or said something, but nobody did, you know. And I got on well with the nursing staff, the medical staff, you know, so I can't say I did.

RL: In terms of your children, can you take me through who they are, and what their education was.

ES: Well I'll start with my older son David. He was born in 1951. And he went to a little primary school and then he went to a school called Hilford Hay**,** which no longer exists. He wasn't that brilliant at school. He got his O-levels but when he went in for A-levels he only got one A-level. And so it was quite difficult to know what to do with him. He started to study food technology, but he didn't like it, so he gave that up. And then he did some temporary work in the Civil Service. He started in the lower grade and then they gave him a permanent job. And he really worked his way up he took, I think he got a bit more mature, he took the Higher National Certificate evening classes, and he gradually worked his way up. And now he's a Senior Executive Officer in the Civil Service, which is you know fairly high up. And he works in

Tape 2: 44 minutes 15 seconds

Social Security. And he worked in Liverpool first and now he's based in Manchester and I think he's going to be transferred to Ashton. And he has been what they call an Acting Principal, but he's now his, he's one under the Principal, he's really, considering everything, he's done very well, after an inauspicious start, you know. He married a girl from Manchester, Rose, who at the time of his marriage I think she was trained as a secretary. And they have two children. And Rose started to work in the local Jewish Kindergarten. And did all these… they had a, her boss, the Headmistress, sort of bullied her to take this vocational courses and when the headmistress retired, they offered the job of Headmistress to Rose and she said at the time that with two children to bring up it would be too much for her, but she suggested to the committee that the other lady who was at the same level as she was, would they consider taking her as joint-headmistress. She also had children. So they agreed with that and they became joint headmistresses, and they've done very well and last year in the paper, in the Jewish Telegraph, there was a glowing account of Ofsted's report on the Kindergarten.

RL: Which school was that?

ES: It's the King David. So she and another lady they run the Kindergarten and they've done very well. And they have two children, Emma, aged 18 who is now sitting her A-levels, and Melanie aged 13, she's still at the King David. And that's my eldest son. My second son Ian, he went to a little primary school, he went to King David Jewish School. When David went to the other school they didn't have the senior school yet. Ian is a doctor, he's in General Practise, and he has four children. He has, the eldest is 16 and she goes to a college, it's not a Jewish school but she got a scholarship to it. And then there are twins, age 13, they went to the King David Senior School, the Jewish school, and then they have a boy aged seven, who goes to the King David as well.

RL: Who did he marry?

ES: He married Joanna, who is the daughter of Dr Basil Young. I don't' know if you know any of them. And Joanna had a degree, in… I can't remember, and she works in PR.

RL: What religious education did the boys have?

ES: Well when they were at the primary school they went to Cheder, and then when they went to the… David went to Cheder until after his Barmitzvah, and then they went to the Jewish
Tape 2: 48 minutes 29 seconds

School of course they got all their religious education there. And Emma is actually taking Jewish Studies in her A-levels.

RL: Where were they barmitzvah?

ES: Greenbank Drive Shul, Greenbank Drive Shul.

RL: Have you been members of that Shul all the time?

ES: Well there was a very old Shul called Grove Street. When I first got married we attended that but that was discontinued and doesn't exist anymore and so we went to Greenbank. But the future of the Shuls in this city is you know, they don't quite know what to do. They've got

too many Shuls with too few people. It may very well be that Greenbank will join Childwall Shul we don't quite know something is in the air, you know.

RL: What standard of religious observance is Greenbank?

ES: They're orthodox. And you know, since I got married I've kept a Kosher household, because Ken and his family, you know, they are all very observant and you know, as I say, we weren't that at home, but here, we do all the right things, you know.

RL: Did you find that difficult at first?

ES: Yes, quite. I actually, before I got married, I went to some friends, stayed with them a few days, just to get the hang of things, you know. But I think actually these friends, they had actually three different divisions, they were very very orthodox, they had a milk kitchen and a meat kitchen and a Pesach kitchen, a little room somewhere, you know.

RL: Did you find you had a lot to catch up on?

ES: Yes. But you know my mother in law was very good she helped me. In the early days she did all the Yomtovim you know and everything, and you know, Friday nights, and so on, and it was only as they got older, sort of from the 1970s that I took over Friday nights, and Shabbos lunches I mean I worked on the Shabbos it wasn't easy, but somehow did, and, I now still do every Friday night, and I'm beginning to find it a bit difficult with the years but I still do it, and the Yomtovim, you know. Now shall I come to my daughter?

RL: Yes.

ES: Well my daughter, she went to the King David, and I think she was head girl, and then took a degree in French and
Tape 2: 51 minutes 50 seconds

English at Leeds University. And having spent one year in France, as part of her course, she then went back to France and she went to Strasbourg University where she got a First Class master's degree in French. And she then went to London where she taught at the Girl's public school Godolphin & Latymer. I remember when the AJR wrote to us to say that they had started a… what do they call it? Children of the Jewish Refugees Club, you know, you are familiar with the AJR?

RL: Yes.

ES: So I said to her you must join that, it would be good for you. And as it happened her future husband was also a member, and so they met, and got married in 1987. And John,… so they were both in London. He was teaching at a public school there, and in 89 he was offered the Headship of a Quaker Public School in Sibford, near Banbury. The only Jewish Headmaster of a Quaker School in England and so they moved to Sibford. And the same year the eldest child was born. Matthew. Suzy gave up work and then she had another child, two years later, Naomi, and about five years ago John got another job, again, Headship of a Quaker School, Leighton Park, in Reading. And he's still there. And he manages you know to combine everything, and the Quaker assemblies, they actually, they're quite silent assemblies, and you don't actually mention Jesus Christ, you know, it's all very difficult, I mean different.

And the Quakers specially, they were very good to Jewish Refugee children, you know. So he's still there. And Suzy has returned to teaching. First of all she went back to a Comprehensive School, which was traumatic, and had to teach French to children who had a little bit of a low IQ and were very difficult to control, there was some incident, boys fighting with scissors, and she had to get between them to stop them fighting, and it was really frightening, and after that she decided it was too stressful and she's now got a job, a part-time job in a prep-school. And there we are, they are very involved with the Shul, but I must say, they are members of a Reform Shul, and there's a reason for it. Because when they wanted to get married they could not find the Ketubah of the parents, you know with the war and everything. And they applied to the Beth Din and they said it would take three years to sort it out so the only way to do it was to get married in Reform but Suzy and John both teach in the Cheder there and they're very involved, you know, and that's the position. But Suzie is very observant, she's more observant than I actually, very much so.

Tape 2: 56 minutes 41 seconds

RL: You mentioned the AJR. When did you first become connected with the AJR?

ES: I have a very distant cousin in London who I think played a part in, she was busy in it and she wrote to me about this so I wrote to them and asked them to send me the magazine and that's how it all started.

RL: And when was that?

ES: I think about 8, 9 years ago you know.

RL: Did you have any connection with any other refugee groups or activities before that?

ES: No, no. I actually I had sort of apart from relatives in London, no, I had no contact, I sort of got completely absorbed in my new life, I mean as you know now they have a group in Liverpool and I go to their meetings, but it seems very strange it takes me back all those years and I didn't have any contact with any refugee groups apart from the relatives I had. And I think they do a very good job, you know.

RL: How did you settle into life in Liverpool as a young married couple?

ES: Well, it took me time, you know, really, because everybody was from a different background, really, you know, but you know, I've been very happy here, and I'm fully absorbed into British Jewry now, you know.

RL: Did you find it difficult at first?

ES: Yes it was difficult at first, you know, I mean, getting used to, you asked me about keeping a Kosher household and everything, you know, but I had a wonderful mother in law, she was very supportive you know, I was very lucky.

RL: What about the wider Jewish community, how did you manage to find your niche within that?

ES: Well I must confess I've not really been involved in the sort of activities that a lot of the other Jewish women do, the fundraising and all that, because when I was working I was really very stretched, almost two jobs and young children so I must say I didn't really do anything, so when I retired it was really a bit late. But I belong to a Jewish Golf Club, and so you know a lot of my social life revolves around that you

Tape 2: 60 minutes 10 seconds

know, and when I retired I took up bridge and play bridge with other Jewish women. I must say really absorbed in the Jewish community, I can't say that, no, I think we have a few Jewish friends dating back from the time when we were studying, but otherwise no.

RL: We'll change tapes now.

TAPE 3

Tape 3: 0 minute 47 seconds

RL: OK could you tell me what happened to your parents in this country, and what happened when your father died?

ES: I think I mentioned all about my father that he died in 1952. At that time my mother was looking after her own mother, who died in 1956. But when, after she died she decided she wanted to do something else with her life, and she went on a course, and worked in different geriatric wards and in different homes, and eventually was offered the post of matron at one of the homes, which the AJR had in London, and it was the Otto Hirsch house, which I don't think exists anymore, and she worked there for quite a while until she became ill and died… well she had an operation, and although she wasn't well enough after that she insisted on going back to the Otto Hirsch House, and really the people in charge phoned me and said she's not really fit, and we told her she should retire but she won't. And so I was called in and she really had an inoperable cancer and we finally persuaded her that the time to retire had come, and she died in 1969.

RL: Was she living in London all this time?

ES: She was living in London, but then she came, she spent some weeks with my brother and then she came to me, and she died here in my house in 1969 we looked after her.

RL: Where were your parents living when your father died?

ES: They were still living in Leicester.

RL: When did your mother move to London?

ES: It must have been about '57-'58. She had quite a few years there and she really liked it, she loved it you know.

RL: Did she have any family in London?

Tape 3: 3 minutes 23 seconds

ES: Yes she had cousins there, you know, she had a cousin, and another lady I think whose family had arranged the marriage between my mother and father, and I don't know… Rachwalski was the name, and they later called themselves Rockwell. And she had a lot of friends and people, and she was very happy there. We used to visit quite a few times, when the children were little she had enough room to put us up you know.

RL: Coming back to clubs and what you belonged to over the years, is their any society or organisation you were a member of?

ES: Well medical, medical organisations I belonged to. One is called the Medical Institute in Liverpool, and then the Jewish Medical Society, I actually went to a lecture there yesterday. And that's about all.

RL: Are you interested in Zionism at all?

ES: Well you know we contribute, you know, charities and so on, but well I think one has to be actually interested in Zionism now. When I was very young it was just this sort of thought of I think we belong to this school that we always thought we could stay in Germany and we weren't therefore interested but you know, I've got relatives you know, in Israel. And I would say yes I'm more interested now and I think it's the only solution now that we've got to have a country there you know, it's just very difficult at the moment, isn't it?

RL: Have you visited the country?

ES: Yes I've been there a few times, yes. I must say we haven't been back since the Intifada, but my eldest has been, the eldest, and another grandchild is going this summer. My son's been several times, yes. As a matter of fact the first time he went to Israel, when he was 18 he came back and said 'I'm only back to pack my bags because I'm going there permanently'; but we persuaded him that he had to finish his studies first, and by that time this feeling had evaporated.

RL: How did you feel when you visited for the first time?

ES: Well I can't say that I felt I'd come home. I didn't. And I think the Israelis are so different, I mean everybody says they're a bit arrogant, but I suppose they've got right to be because they've got their own country, and that's a big thing, isn't it? But they are so different, you know. But every time

Tape 3: 6 minutes 56 seconds

we've been I've enjoyed my stay. It's really a wonderful country, wonderful.

RL: How do you feel towards Germany?

ES: Well that's very interesting I mean we didn't go there for a long time and the first time I went back was '87, and I've come to think that the people who are there now are not the people who were so terrible to us. I mean they are their children or their grandchildren, and the thought is at the back of my mind 'What did their parents or grandparents do?' But you know I've had contact with lawyers and they are all much younger, and I must say in all honesty, it's nothing to do with what happened there. I can't say that all Germans are bad. I, when I see very old Germans I don't feel very comfortable, and you know after the war when

we started to go abroad again and in the sixties, and saw the Germans there, I wasn't very comfortable. And, I must tell you an incident, we went to Corfu in the 1970s, and I was reading a book about the Holocaust, with a big Magen Dovid on it and as I was reading the book, this big figure came, you know, and a shadow fell on the book, and this figure said 'What are you reading there?!' I thought my God. Blonde hair, blue eyes, this man is and ex-Gestapo man. So I said well you can see what I'm reading, it's a book about the Holocaust. So I said 'What is it to you?' He said 'May I present myself, I'm Dr so-and-so, paediatrician from Tel Aviv.' And he was such a fine specimen, and he was from Yugoslavia and he had fought with the partisans in the war. But it just shows, I was so, you know, frightened. And that was in those years, I always used to say to Ken: 'Keep away from this man, he must have been in the Gestapo', you know, but the younger ones I have no animosity towards. And the first time we went back in '87 we went to Hamburg, Berlin and Frankfurt. And when we passed, part of East Germany and they locked all the doors in the train and you weren't allowed to go out, and the people in the compartment they started to talk to me, they didn't ask me where I was from or anything, but they could, they knew that I could speak fluent German, and my daughter was with us, and I think they must have put two and two together and they were very helpful with the luggage and but with the Germans, we go on holiday to Portugal, we go to play golf, but very often, you are put together with other people, and there used to be a lot of Germans. When they spoke to me in English I spoke to them in German, and they sometimes said 'How could you speak German? And I said 'I was born in Germany' and there was a long pause, and I said 'I emigrated from Germany to England before the war'. They never asked any questions, they didn't want to know.

Tape 3: 11 minutes 22 seconds

And the only person who ever asked was a German doctor, and his wife and he asked me questions, and he sort of more or less said oh, and apologised, and this that and the other. But the others don't want to get involved, and I can't blame them, and I don't want to get into anything unless they pursue it. And…

RL: What made you return to Germany?

ES: Well, we had, first of all, I think I told you, they found some property after unification so we had to get German solicitors and so on and so forth, and statements here, and I had to go and see the solicitors, and it took, it took a long time and there are still a few things pending, you know.

RL: What was the property that they found?

ES: I think I had it here somewhere. It was my grandfather's bank. I'm just looking now. That was it. You know you had to supply you know all sorts of documents, and they found, it was very lucky, they found it in the land registry, you know, it was registered because in a lot of cases, the Nazis had got at the Land Register and eliminated, you know crossed out all the Jewish names. And that was that but you know and the solicitors were all younger people, I can't blame them for that you know.

RL: Did you return to the places that you had lived in?

ES: Yes we went back to Hamburg once and in a way I don't know why I felt like that. I didn't feel as if I'd gone home, but in a way I was quite emotional about it. It took me a long

time, I didn't know if I wanted to go back. But while I was there you know I didn't have the trauma that so many people had, I had a very happy childhood you know. Where we lived in Hamburg, you know, it was really only in the last few years that people were forced into joining the Nazi party and doing things you know. I can't say, honestly say that I had that much trauma.

RL: How would you describe yourself in terms of Nationality?

ES: Oh well, I think British, Continental Briton. No I, there was talk about some money matters, that I should ask for German nationality again, and I said never again, never again, I don't care about money or anything, I'm not going to acquire German nationality, never.

Tape 3: 14 minutes 55 seconds

RL: When you say Continental Briton.

ES: Well it's the title of this book. And I haven't seen the exhibition, and I think it's a very apt description. It's better than 'refugee'. And you know nowadays with this topical question of asylum seekers, and I mean I remember getting in conversation with… we were on holiday and we met a couple from Liverpool, we knew them vaguely and the wife was telling me how terrible it is, you know with the Asians, I think she actually had a little to do with the Asians, and this that and the other and she said to me 'What do you think, what's your opinion?' And I said well, I must tell you that I was like an asylum seeker, and I wouldn't be alive if I hadn't been allowed in. And I couldn't possibly comment. And that's the truth you know. We were allowed in. But I mean in those days this country wasn't swamped, and I realise that they couldn't take everybody now.

RL: What about the Continental Britons, could you tell me what that means to you?

ES: Well, I think it's what's supposed to mean, that people were born on the Continent and they became British, you know. I mean I don't think we'll ever be like people who were born in this country. I mean I don't know how much of an accent I have. Some people say that I haven't, and other people, even to this day, when I get into conversations with them they say 'Where do you come from?' And I think you know after all these years you know, it's not the same as if we were born here really. I don't think it ever could be. You know, I think sort of being brought up in two countries… You see people used to say 'It can never happen here', but now when you see the younger generation growing up, and some of them, you know, the youngsters, are really what you call 'yobs' and that's how it started with the thugs in Germany. And in a way sometimes you understand it, I gave you the example of this maid we had. I'm sure she wasn't originally anti-Semitic, but it's happened to a lot of Germans. They had to, and then gradually, gradually, they were forced to do things perhaps they didn't want to do. It's very insidious, you know.

RL: Do you feel at home in Britain?

ES: I feel at home, yes, yes. I would never feel at home in Germany now. I don't think I'd feel at home in Israel. Lovely for holidays, but I don't know. There again you know, you've got your family here, you know, that's where you feel at home.

RL: Who do you feel most comfortable mixing with?

Tape 3: 18 minutes 56 seconds

ES: Being refugees, people from Germany, or British Jews or what do you mean?

RL: Yes, I mean the whole cross-section, who do you feel most comfortable with?

ES: I certainly feel more comfortable with Jewish people. I mean I feel very comfortable with Jewish friends I made when I was young. But making new friends, we don't know them so well, you know, just don't know, you see I myself feel that the population they've gone to Sunday School and that's what they were taught about the Jews. And what you're taught as a child, it sticks. I mean people are taught in Sunday School that the Jews killed Christ. And nobody sort of said: Well this was thousands and thousands of years ago, it doesn't apply to the present day. That's why I made those distinctions with the Germans, that what happened is not the fault of the present-day Germans you know.

RL: Do you think your refugee experience has affected you in any way, either psychologically, or…?

ES: I don't think it has caused any psychological damage. Apart from the fact that I'm bit cynical about religion, which is not a good thing, I mean I observe all the traditions and everything, but deep down I don't really know what I believe in, you know. I think it's marvellous if you can believe in something, I think it's wonderful if you've got faith, whatever religion, it's such a wonderful thing. But I think with me it's the case of what has happened all these years ago, you know. You say to yourself: well is there a God or isn't there one if all these things can happen? And they're still happening today, aren't they? Not with the Jews but you know in other countries, you see what goes on. But I mean about trauma to the second generation. I mean I can't really say that I'm a Holocaust survivor, I have not really been through it. This really applies to people who have been through the camps. And they talk about the trauma of the second generation. I don't know how bad it is. But actually it's quite true, I haven't talked too much to my children about what happened. And this was only recently brought home to me when one of my grandchildren said to me 'You did come on the Kindertransport?' And I said no I didn't. And then I thought it would be a very good thing if I had a video, that you know, for their sake. And then my eldest grandchild, she had to write an essay, and I did sit down with her and told her everything and she reported back to me that hers was the best essay. So I think I must have told her plenty, but the other ones, you know… I think she's the only one of the eight

Tape 3: 22 minutes 29 seconds

that really understands what happened you know. So I'm looking forward to showing her this video.

RL: Did you ever talk to your children about your background?

ES: Oh yes, yes. And I think my daughter is the one that's most interested. But yes, I have, and that's why when I first went to Germany I took her with me. She's the one who's most interested you know. And when she was little, when her, my mother was still alive, she taught her German songs, and she actually has quite a good accent, but I never taught her German because I just didn't want to at the time. And I must say when she was living in London teaching, she went to the Goethe Institute and learnt German there and took it for her O-levels in German. And ironically now, though she is a qualified French teacher, she's teaching… the

German teacher left, and the Headmaster said 'You teach German'. And she said 'I've only got O-levels and he said well, you can manage. And so now she's teaching German, and her German is not at all bad. I often feel that I should have spoken to her in German at the time, but I couldn't bring myself at the time.

RL: Did you ever speak German in this country?

ES: Oh yes, I spoke to my parents, and whenever I get the opportunity I, you know, some people here, especially at the AJR, when I go to meetings, one lady always speaks to me in German. And no, I want to keep the language, but you know I learned a lot when I was to Germany, but my German is still fluent, but sometimes you don't know the latest terms, you know with technology as advanced. As somebody told me, 'it's still the German of a girl of 14', but it doesn't matter.

RL: Do you think there's any kind of German Jewish heritage in this country?

ES: I think so, well they're doing a lot about it, I think they've got a chair at Sussex University, oh yes a lot of things are being written about it, you know, I'm quite surprised, and I mean they say there's been a lot of prominent German Jews who've done a lot for this country, and I think it's very good, because they've given us asylum, you know.

RL: What do you think of the future of the German Jewish heritage?

ES: I don't think there's such a marvellous future. The people who have returned to Germany, mainly from Russia, you know, there not many original German Jews. I think in Germany itself

Tape 3: 25 minutes 54 seconds

they try a lot to sort of keep it going, I remember the last time I went there, they had made one of the synagogues into a museum, I think it was called the Oranienburgerstrasse. And I think they're doing a lot you know, to keep it going; there's a lot of interest from the German people, and I've seen these little notices in the AJR, where somebody from Germany is writing a thesis on this that and the other, people get in touch with them you know. But I think it's only the sort of old history that's being maintained, I don't think there's anything from the newer generation, no.

RL: Is there anything else you'd like to add, that we haven't touched upon?

ES: Well all I'd like to say is really, you know, I mean I'm one of the lucky ones. I've got to be thankful that this country took me in. and although in the beginning it was hard going, I mean now I'm in my old age I'm comfortable, I don't have any problems money-wise, I would think the standards we have reached was the same standards we had when we left the country. And that's really a wonderful thing, and I'm very grateful for it.

RL: Thank you very much.

Tape 3: 27 minutes 55 seconds

Wide-shot in room.

PHOTOS.

1. This photo was taken in 1924 in Berlin on the occasion of the Golden Wedding of my Great Grandparents. They are sitting in the first row. On the far right of the picture is my mother, and I am in her arms, a baby of a few months old and next to her are her two sisters, both of whom died recently. One aged 103 and one aged 99. My brother was standing in front of the great grandparents; I think he was aged two. My father is standing behind my great grandmother.
2. This picture was taken in Breslau. It is of my brother and myself. I don't exactly know when it was taken but I think it was probably in 1926 or 1927 when my I was 3 and my brother was 5 years old. My brother's name is David Rosenthal and I am Ellen Shiffman.
3. This picture was taken in 1932 of our house in Hamburg. There were 4 people standing outside there, two women who helped in the house and my brother and myself.
4. This is a block of flats in Heinrichstrasse, Hamburg. We lived there from about 1935 to 1938.

Tape 3: 30 minutes 38 seconds

5. This is the Jewish school in Karolinestrasse Hamburg, where I attended from 1935 to 1938.
6. This is a picture of myself and schoolmates from the Jewish School taken in 1938. I am the girl second from left. The picture was taken at the KarolineStrasse the Jewish School in Hamburg.
7. This picture was taken in Welmington, North Carolina in 1996, showing some of the same women as in the previous photograph. You can see me in the back behind the lady with the white tunic and white hair
8. This is Ellen Rosenthal taken in Edinburgh after graduation from the Edinburgh medical school in December 1948.
9. This is a picture taken in Liverpool on August 28 1949 on the occasion of my wedding. In the back row on the right you see my father, Felix Rosenthal, and my mother Else Rosenthal. Next to them are my mother-in law, Sarah Shiffman, and my father-in-law Saul Shiffman.
10. This picture was taken in about 1998. It was taken near Chester when we had an outing with the family. On the extreme right is my daughter Susan Dunston, next to her is my eldest son David Shiffman, and on the left is my son Ian Shiffman.
11. This picture was taken Primrose Rd Liverpool, in 2001. Starting on the left is: Emma Shiffman, Melanie Shiffman , Sophie Shiffman, Katie Shiffman, Naomi Dunston, second row from the left: Hannah Shiffman, Allan Shiffman, Matthew Dunstan.