

**IMPORTANT**

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**AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive**

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<b>Collection title:</b>	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
<b>Ref. no:</b>	RV259

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Schaufeld
<b>Forename:</b>	Vera
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Female
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	29 January 1930
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Prague, Czechoslovakia

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	26 October 2021
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	3 hours 49 minutes

### Interview Transcript Title Page



**REFUGEE VOICES**

**Interview No.**        **RV259**  
**NAME:**                **Vera Schaufeld**  
**DATE:**                **26<sup>th</sup> October 2021**  
**LOCATION:**            **London, UK**  
**INTERVIEWER:**    **Dr Bea Lewkowicz**

**[Part One]**

**[0:00:00]**

*Today is the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2021. We are conducting an interview with Mrs Vera Schaufeld and my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.*

*Can you tell us your name please?*

*My name is Vera Schaufeld.*

*And where and when were you born, Vera?*

*I was born in 1930 in Prague.*

*Vera, thank you so much for having agreed to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive.*

*It's a pleasure.*

*Please tell us a little bit about your family background.*

My father was born in Czechoslovakia, now in the Czech Republic, in a town called Klatovy which is south of Pilsen. And he grew up there, in- his uncle had come to Klatovy to be a teacher in the synagogue, in the Hebrew school that was part of the synagogue. And his father and he and his brother and his three sisters - sorry - and his two sisters, lived- grew up in the courtyard of the synagogue. And then, they went to the school that grandfather's brother was the teacher of. But, when his sister went to the synagogue school, something went wrong, and she wasn't sent home when she was ill and she died. And grandfather put his children into the Jewish- into the state school. And if they hadn't gone to the state school, my father would never had been able to be a lawyer, and their lives would have been very different.

**[0:02:19]**

My mother grew up in a town called Iserlohn in Westphalia in Germany. And her brother had gone to Heidelberg University to study medicine. But my Uncle Rudolf was a prankster and he had a big funeral for a dog. And the authorities in Heidelberg found out, and my Uncle Rudolf was expelled from Heidelberg University. And my mother who was much younger than him, said to her parents, "Don't worry. When I grow up I'm going to be a doctor." So my mother became a doctor. And one day my mother went for a tour of Frankfurt am Main - day tour - and my father came from Czechoslovakia to be on the same tour. And my father offered the window seat to my mother. And in the course of the day they discovered that they were both Jewish. And then, my father asked to correspond with my mother and he did, and he visited her, and he came when she wasn't well. And he actually said, "I'm Doctor Löwy." Didn't say he was a Doctor of Law. So put on- he was given a gown and he went to visit my mother. That's one of the family stories. And eventually, he persuaded her to marry him, but only on condition that she could finish her studies. So, she then enrolled in the German part of the University of Prague where she could study medicine and at the same time learn Czech. Which she did. And I had a nurse. And my father and I used to visit her in Prague, and other times she would come to Klatovy. And then, when she finished her studies, she then went to Paris and studied to become a paediatrician. She visited Great Ormond Hospital in London. And I have all- both my parents' certificates still. That's another story, how they came to me. And that's my background.

*And when did the- your parents get married?*

**[0:04:54]**

My parents got married in 1929, and my mother was still a medical student. And the family story is that the Professor of Obstetrics said one day, "Where is Mrs Löwyova?" And the students said, "She's having her baby." And that was when my mother had me, in Prague, and then went on with her studies. And eventually my nurse became her receptionist. And she took some of my toys, which I wasn't so pleased with, and set up above my father's office, in the town square of Klatovy where he had his law offices. And she had her paediatric practice and my nurse became her receptionist. And I had a very normal, happy childhood. I was delighted when my grandmother, who was in her late seventies, left Germany and came to live with us in Klatovy. But I had no idea of why she had come. I was just happy. And though our household was- was a kosher household, it became far more strict when my very Orthodox grandmother came. And my normal happy childhood continued until the day when I came downstairs in the morning, and I saw my family – my mother, my father, my grandmother, my nurse - all sitting listening to the radio. And there was such an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. And I said, "What's happening?" And I think my father said, "England has let us down. The German troops are marching into Czechoslovakia, and nobody is stopping them coming." And within, I think it was two days, my father was arrested. And my mother and my grandmother kept me home from school. My nurse had to go back to her village because she wasn't allowed to work for us anymore. My cook had- the cook had to leave. And my mother and my grandmother were alone. And they kept me home from school. But, within a very few days, my father was released. I think the local jail or something, in Klatovy, didn't have room for him, and he came home. And the first thing he said is, "Why isn't Vera in school today?" My mother said, "Look, we didn't know what was happening. We kept her home." And my father said, "No, she has to go back to school." And I went to school, and my friend said to me, "When there's trouble, the Jews are first to run away." That's what our teacher said! And I was devastated! I'd liked my teacher. I just never felt the same again. And my school friends still walked to school with me. Didn't make any difference to them. But I felt different; I wasn't Vera anymore. I'd become 'the Jews'. [Shall I stop a minute?]

**[0:08:40]**

*Just-let me just go back a little bit. What did your mother's parents- what did they think of her moving to Czechoslovakia?*

Pardon?

*What did your mother's parents at that time-?*

Her father had been dead a long time, and she only had one brother who was Uncle Rudolf, the prankster. And he was married to my Aunt Elsa, and they had no children. And I have a poem- I've lots of poems of when I laid their *Stolpersteine*, because Uncle Rudolf had so many friends who were Nazis. And he thought that they could protect him. That's another story for- the true story of my Kindertransport. What did you ask me? What did you want to-  
?

*What did the parents think of her moving to Czechoslovakia? Her mother. Was she supportive?*

She stayed with Uncle Rudolf and Auntie Elsa. And I know that they visited us, and so on. And again, I wrote about that.

*Where- where did they live, Rudolf?*

**[0:10:01]**

And Elsa? They lived in Berlin. And later I went with my mother and - sorry - later I went with my daughter, my daughter's in-laws, and one- my granddaughter. And we laid *Stolpersteine* outside their house in Berlin. Not house- their flat, in the house, in Berlin.

*So that's where you grandmother lived before she joined you in Klatovy?*

Before she joined them. And I can remember visiting them, because it was the first time I'd ever been in a lift. And they lived on a high up flat, so I can remember as a child going there, and going up in the lift.

*And Vera what are your- your first memories? What- what are the things you remember?*

Oh! I can remember when we had a holiday in the Tatra Mountains. My nurse was with us and we were on holiday. And- I can remember it was Christmas and there were lights on and a Christmas tree in the hotel. So they weren't so – 'good'. And I can remember going out of the hotel door and jumping, and saying, "Now I'm in Czechoslovakia." And there were two other countries that this hotel bordered in the Tatra Mountains. And I'm not sure which, but I can remember jumping, and saying, "Now I'm in this country, now I'm in that country. Now I'm in Czechoslovakia." I can remember doing that. And then, on that holiday, I got very ill and I got scarlet fever. And my mother got an ambulance. And my mother and father and my nurse and me, went by ambulance from the Tatra Mountains to Klatovy. And I remember when I was in England, feeling so guilty, because I can remember that I wanted my nurse. And my mother who was studying to be a paediatrician, was very hurt. And when I thought of all the bad things that I'd done and imagined that that was why I wasn't living at home anymore and was in a strange country. And I knew that these thoughts weren't true because of what my mother had said to me, but I thought, 'Oh, if only I'd been better then, I would still be at home.' But I knew it was rubbish, but that was one of the thoughts that I had when I was a child growing up in England.

*And was that- so was that- when was that Tatra Mountains? In the- n the 30-s?*

It was in the- it was before my mother qualified, but when she was studying. I would imagine that I was about five - four or five. I remember the ambulance.

**[0:13:22]**

*It was unusual, I mean, that your mother managed-*

Could get- to get an ambulance. But my parents were very well off. My father was a very successful lawyer. He represented Czechoslovakia in an international law conference with a friend of his cousin's, who was in Holland and who had a Dutch friend. And they spent a year in Heidelberg University with my mother and they became life-long friends. And we met in Knokke, in Belgium. And I have a photograph riding a donkey with *Janne* who is the daughter of the not Jewish Dutch friend. And when my father was an- on an international law

conference in Holland. And I know that he also was the Honorary Consul in Czechoslovakia, of other languages. And there's a family joke that two men came to the Honorary Consul of Spain, and said, "*We been zwei spanische Grande.*" And my father answered them in Yiddish and said, "You're not getting any money from here, because you're Jews from Spain." So that's another story from home.

*And you said he was also the leader of the Jewish community?*

**[0:15:04]**

For- which I discovered from this Czech, who made this book. And it has pictures of my grandfather, and of my father as the leader of the Jewish community. And my father- and my grandfather also. And all the Jews of Klatovy who were murdered are there, in his book. Are you recording any of this or not?

*Yeah - it's all recorded.*

Oh, goodness.

*And Vera, when you were born, where your parental grandparents - still alive?*

Oh- no. My grandfather was alive in Klatovy. And he had, by then, a brick factory and a match factory. But my grandmother had died many years before. And I remember my Auntie Klaudi saying how- how hard she had to work when they were young. How, you know, she worked so hard, and their life was so difficult. And this Auntie Klaudi actually married- [sound interruption] actually married Bohumil Mahler, who was the cousin of Gustav Mahler, the musician, but that's my Auntie Klaudi. And my father later found Jewish lawyer husbands for his two sisters, which I think was the custom in those days. So they both married Jewish lawyers. And my Auntie Grete married a Jewish lawyer, and my Auntie Klaudi married Bohumil Mahler.

*And stayed in Klatovy or moved to Prague, or-?*

No, they- they both lived in Prague.



*Right.*

And they had been educated in Vienna. And- because my grandfather prospered, but my grandmother died. And my father and his brother, Uncle Edgar, were the only two living in Klatovy. And Uncle Edgar had had polio as a young man, and he stayed in Klatovy. And he, I know, had a large orchard. And I can remember as a child, going in that orchard. And I wrote a poem, saying that I prin- felt, for that day, as a princess in the orchard where all the people were working - gathering strawberries, I think.

*So, Vera tell us a little bit of a Klatovy. What- visually, what do you remember? What- to set the scene, what-?*

**[0:17:56]**

I remember in Klatovy, that my parents wanted me to have a very good education. So, I went to school, and had lots of really nice friends. One was Jewish, and my other best friend lived just down the street from us. And I remember her father was a photographer, and her name was Isrinka. And Isrinka and I always walked to school together. And I remember that my parents sent me to private French lessons after school. And I had private gym lessons, I think it was called the [inaudible], or something, which was, I think, I had gym lessons and dancing lessons. I have all these pictures of doing things out of school, as well as my education. And, yes, but my Uncle Rudolf, and Auntie Elsa visited us and brought me - again, I have a poem - amazing gifts from Germany. One was a doll's house, which had a roof on the top, which was lit in the centre of the doll's house. And on the roof was a tennis court. And in the centre, you could see all the rooms. I was a round doll's house. And when I went to the children's museum, I tried to find any knowledge of a doll's house like this. And they didn't have it. And it was an amazing doll's house where you could look down and see a lighted street and all the rooms around it ,with little toy figures in the rooms. So, they bought- and a rocking horse, a big one with a tail, and- and a mane. I wrote all this. And, yep, they brought amazing gifts from Berlin.

**[0:20:13]**

*And Vera, which language did you speak, growing up?*

Now, as a child, I spoke only Czech. But when my grandmother came, which was after the after anti-Semitism started in Germany. So, I think she came about 1934 to us. And then we all spoke German at home. So, I was completely bilingual, and could write and read in both languages. But when I came to England, I totally forgot every word of Czech. If I can, I know no Czech. And when I visited Czechoslovakia when my husband, who came from Poland, he could speak enough Czech because they're similar Slavonic languages. And the passport office couldn't believe that with a Czech passport, I needed my husband to speak. Because I completely forgot Czech.

*And the German? Did you keep some German, or-?*

Do you know that I can understand, but speak badly. But I can understand a lot of German. And yes, I can- I can speak very basic German, but understand a lot. But not a word of Czech. Or yeah, I can say 'krk', which is 'neck', because I can remember that that was an unusual word, which as a child in England, I made people try and say 'krk', which- so yeah, I can say two or three words.

*And Vera, how many Jews lived there in Klatovy when you were there?*

**[0:22:01]**

Ah. I think there were about 300 Jews and in a population of about 5,000, I think, I- in Klatovy. And I think there were two other Jewish children in school. One was a friend. And I can remember my father being very involved in charities. And I can remember, with this Jewish friend collecting for some Jewish charity.

So, yeah, but I just had a very normal childhood. And I think I was a very naughty child. Because I can remember that when my mother came from Paris to visit us, and I was so pleased to see her. And she showed me a dress that my father had bought, and they were going to some party or something. And I took a pair of scissors, and I cut her dress. And my mother didn't say a cross word. She just said to me, "Oh, dear. Well, I'll have to wear one of my older dresses." And she did. And I can remember going- when I had a detention in school, because I'd been naughty. And I told my grandmother, that next day, I would have a

detention. And she said, “Oh, no, you've got a French lesson after school. I have to explain to the teacher if she could give you the detention another day.” And I taught my grandmother a whole lot of Czech swear words. And she went to the teacher and said this. And the teacher obviously saw this nice old lady trying to speak to her and saying swear words. And I think the teacher could then speak in German. Because after all, Czechoslovakia had been invaded. And so, you know, my grandmother apologised. And I had my detention, the day after. So I was a spoiled, only child. My grandfather had grandchildren who were much older in Prague. My grandmother had no other grandchildren. And my granddaughter, Eleanor, I remember- because there's a children's book called *My Naughty Little Sister*. I can remember Eleanor writing all these stories, and saying, “Oh, I'm going to write a book: *My Naughty Little Grandmother*.” So, I remember my granddaughter Eleanor doing this.

**[0:25:02]**

*And Vera, you said that you didn't feel particularly Jewish in the- in the school, for example-*

I didn't feel different to anybody else. But after this, I felt that I was different. And I don't know, I've forgotten what the other two Jewish children- but they hadn't missed school, I think. So my mother came, a few weeks later- I'm going to lose my voice. My mother came and took me to a little park outside the school, sat me on a bench and said to me, “Look Vera, I'm very sorry, but we can't leave Czechoslovakia. But you understand that it's not safe for us to be here anymore. But you can go to a country called England. And you will go on the train, and you won't know the other children. But they'll all be children whose families feel that it's not safe for their children to be here anymore. And you'll go on the train. And you'll go to a country called England. And we will- we've sent fifty pounds to the English government so that though we want to come to England, if we have a problem with that, what we're going to do is we're going to be able to go to any other country, and we will send for you. Because the money is there with English government and you'll join us. And we'll be together. But you have to be very brave. And until we come.” Do you know? I'm beginning to feel dizzy. I'm sorry.

*Let's take a-* [Sound break]

**[0:26:58]**

*Vera, you were talking about the park, and the conversation you had with your mother.*

Yeah. Yeah. And so-

*So, how did it-? Was that a complete shock? How did you-? Do you remember how you reacted when she was telling you this?*

I think, of course, I was very surprised. I think I had such mixed feelings, you know? My mother said it wouldn't be for very long. And I thought, well, this might be an interesting adventure, and then I thought it might be scary. And I just, I think I felt rather confused, but excited enough to get a new autograph book, to have my parents sign in it. I went to the village where my nurse now was and she signed it. And then she gave me a little rosary to take with me. And then I- all my friends signed, until we came and we went to Prague Station. And my mother and my father and I went to the station. I still don't know how I managed to get a whole large trunk. I really don't know because I had this trunk for years in my garage. And it had labels of their honeymoon in Egypt because they went to Egypt for their honeymoon. And all the labels- and when I was bored, I used to peel off these labels.

**[0:28:30]**

And I had this trunk. But I still remember the Egyptian one because my mother, when she was a medical student, had had an Egyptian boyfriend. And he told her all about Egypt. And she said, "Oh, I could never really marry him because he wasn't Jewish." But he was just a boyfriend. And she was fascinated. So they went to Egypt on their honeymoon.

*So that trunk was sent beforehand, or-?*

I don't know how I got this trunk. I don't know. But all I know is that my mother and father took me to Prague Station. And I can remember being in a carriage with other children. And our parents had to stand behind barriers. They weren't allowed to come on the platform. And we all looked out of the window. And I can remember my parents waving with white handkerchiefs, and I waved. And I just had no idea that that was the last time I would see my family anymore. And then, I think, I wanted a window seat because when I travelled my

parents - and we had travelled a lot when I was a child - I'd always been given the window seat. And somebody I remember saying, "Oh, you were crying before." And I didn't remember that I was crying, I can hear this child saying to me, "And now you want the window seat." So, I remember that from the train. And I don't think I got the window seat. And I sat down and we went through Czechoslovakia.

**[0:30:22]**

And then, when our passports were required at the end of Czechoslovakia and the beginning of Germany, my Uncle Rudolf and my Auntie Elsa, came on the train and they stood in the corridor. And I can remember they were laughing and joking. And I was with them on the corridor. But then, when we got to the Dutch border, they had to leave the train. They were allowed. And later, I assumed that these German high up Nazis, who had been friends of my Uncle Rudolf, when he was in Heidelberg and who he had such faith in, had given him permission to do this, so that he had a permit from them. But he thought they would save him, and they couldn't. And he and Auntie Elsa were murdered. And-

*But they were with you on that train?*

They were with me-

*So was that German-?*

On- throughout Germany. Then they got off, and the train went on. And when we got to the Hook of Holland, there was my mother's aunt, my Auntie Sarah, and with her a Dutch friend, whose husband had been a medical student with my mother's cousin, who was studying medicine in Holland. And he, who I always knew as Uncle Dick, was Dix de Pencier. And this was Mien de Pencier, his wife. And they had been lifelong friends of my parents, so I called- Auntie Mien, gave me a doll- [at] the Hook of Holland, and she and Auntie Sarah saw me on to the boat. But you know, I don't remember any of this. It was after the war when at first my Aunt, my Dutch friends of my parents, Dix de Pencier and Mien, got in touch with me. And they said, "We have a lot of your parents' things, and we keep everything safe for you. But as soon as things are better, you will come and stay with us." And this all happened. And they did have many of my parents' things which I might come to later. But they met me,

and I remember nothing. All I remember is Uncle Rudolf and Auntie Elsa. And then I don't remember the Hook of Holland. I remember- I don't remember getting- arriving at Harwich, going on the train.

**[0:33:30]**

My first memory, really, after Uncle Rudolf and Auntie Elsa left, was sitting on Liverpool Street Station. And I have- there are two memories here. There is my emotional memory and- what really happened, which I was told much later by a relative of my parents who met me at the station at Liverpool Street on the 1st of June 1939. But what I remember is, sitting there, and lots of children all being collected, and hearing notices in a language that I couldn't understand. Feeling so scared, thinking nobody's going to come and get me, and just sitting and waiting, and other children being collected. And then a lady coming called Miss Lee, who I've never met since but never forgotten, and taking me and two other children into her car and driving us. Now, that - and I'll go on with that later - that is my memory. My mother's cousin Gertie was at the station. My father's- a different cousin and a friend of his who had come to England earlier, was also at the station.

**[0:35:17]**

Apparently, I was this busy little girl saying to everybody, "Here's my luggage", which must have been sent and saying, I'm told, "here's my luggage. And here are all my things" and seeing me on to this car with Miss Lee. But I was told that years and years later that I was this busy little girl, organising myself. But I don't remember that. I remember getting into Miss Lee's car, and being very happy that I was sitting in the front and two Czech children sitting behind. And I thought they were brother and sister, and talking to them in Czech. And Miss Lee could speak German. And because there were no motorways, asking her all the time, "Can I get out? I feel sick." And, Miss Lee stopping, and me being sick, until I arrived in a village called Thorpe Morieux, which in my story, I make shorter and say I went to my guardians. And there was a vicarage there. And my guardians, every year, went on holiday in June. And they were in a place called Tenby in Wales, and they were coming back in two weeks' time. So for two weeks, I stayed in this vicarage in the village. And my father telephoned and he could speak English, and he telephoned. And they told him that I was with them for two weeks, and then going to Bury St Edmunds.

*And who was taking care of you that- in that vicarage?*

Pardon?

**[0:37:22]**

*Who was taking care of you in the vicarage?*

In the vicarage was a very nice vicar's wife, and a horrible vicar and three children, who were very nice. Pamela was one of them, Michael was another, and another daughter who I'd never met, actually, who was studying drama in England- in London. Pamela and Michael were very nice. I think they showed me where they had ducks, and what duck eggs looked like. I remember that. And then, I remember that- we'd had a cat at home and I was fond of cats. And I picked up the cat. And the vicar picked me up and held me up by a leg and said, "That'll teach you how to pick up a cat more gently." And I was frightened. And then- the vicar's wife could speak a little bit of German so- and with the children, I just made gestures, and they were very nice, Pamela and Michael. And then the vicar's- the vicar said to me, "Oh, your guardians who are going to have you are coming." And I remember saying to him, "Oh, I hope I will like them." And he said, "That's not important. What matters is if they're going to like you." And - I remember in the vicarage that the Wall's ice cream came once a week. And Pamela and Michael and I were allowed to buy a Wall's ice cream, and they had two wafers and a- and a vanilla ice cream in the middle. And that the vicarage hadn't got hot water, they had a pump, and the water was pumped into their kitchen sink. So I remember those things from the vicarage. And then Mr and Mrs Faires came with their car, and they picked me up, and they took me to their home in Bury St Edmunds, where they had the daughter called Betty, who was three years older than me. And her mother said - she was an only child, Betty - "This is Vera, and you will share your pocket money with her." Poor Betty had to share her pocket money. And I remember that she was never nasty and we were lifelong friends. And I can remember walking with her. We were very different. Betty was much better at sport than me. She loved horses, and later got a horse. And I like books and my parents sent me Czech books, I remember. And my mother, who'd never knitted anything in her life, made a little blue scarf - one for Betty and one for me. And my father, managed once more, just once more, to ring. And he rang and his English was good. And he rang the

Faires. And he said to them, that- Oh, Mr Faires said to my father, that they would go to church every Sunday and if I couldn't go with them, a member of the family would have to stay with them. Would he allow me to go to church with them? And my father said he understood their dilemma. And yes, he would allow me, but would they please never try to change my religion. And they kept to this. I think I'll have a break.

**[0:41:38]**

*I wanted to ask you Vera, how was- how was the vicarage connected to the couple? How-?*

Oh, they just offered to have me; there were no connections. I never saw them again. I never met them. And I read- Oh, no, I think I was told by Gertie, this is this relative that he was disbarred or something at some point. And Michael, their nice son, died. And I, the two children were really nice to me, and Mrs Brown, but he was a revolting man.

*But you remember the names just from that- from those times? From the short time you stayed there?*

Yes, Mr and Mrs Brown. And the vicarage was in Thorpe Morieux. Have I said that?

**[0:42:33]**

*Yeah. You've said- you've said- And the couple who fostered you, who took you in, why- how did they- do you know about how the arrangements were made and why they took you?*

They- I don't know if you want this on tape, you can have it- and no. They saw the Winton photograph, and they saw Nicholas Winton advertise this with photographs. And they saw the photograph. And they saw that my father was a lawyer, my mother a doctor, and they thought I must be a nice little girl. And I remember- are you [] video?

*Yeah.*

I remember Mrs Faires saying to me once, "I thought you were a well brought up little girl, and you don't know how to put your knife and fork together properly." Which of course on



the continent isn't done the same. And Mrs Faires wasn't an unkind woman, but she was a difficult woman. And I didn't understand that, as a child. But Betty was far more fond of her father than of her mother. And Mrs Faires was never unkind, but she was somebody who didn't like visitors in the house. I think she was a bit neurotic. But as a child, I didn't know any of this. I just knew that Betty, their daughter, was really kind to me and we were very different. Have I said this? Okay. And I can remember one day walking with Betty who was going to a gymkhana, cause she was fond of horses. And I kept stopping. And Betty said, "Come on, Vera! Hurry up!" And I said, "I can't because I'm sinking." And I meant 'I'm thinking.' But at that time, I couldn't say that. And I couldn't think and walk at the same time. So that's one of my memories of living with the Faires in the very early time.

**[0:45:05]**

*And Vera, speaking of sinking and thinking, how- how did you manage with English? Did you have any English when you came?*

I had not one word of English. In Liverpool Street Station was the first time I heard English spoken. And – yeah! So, really, I just had to make sign languages. I had been able to speak a bit, but Mrs Brown spoke German. So, really, I didn't know any English. And I can remember just making signs. And at first, our school was still in Bury St Edmunds. It was the school that Betty went to, and it was called the East Anglian School for Girls. And it was in Bury. And I can remember that Betty cycled to school, and Betty's family had a very, very nice maid called Joyce. And Joyce taught me on their lawn to cycle, so that I could cycle with Betty to school. And Joyce, their maid, was the person that I felt closest to in the house. And Joyce's family lived in a very, very humble house, with one room downstairs and one room upstairs. And when, in later life, I visited Bury, I always went to their house, because Joyce had to stop working for the Faires when she was called up to work in munitions. But her boyfriend who had she come- she'd come to Bury for, was employed by Mrs Faires's brother, and this is another story. I refused- Mrs Faires said to me, "Would you like to call us Auntie and Uncle?" And I said, "No. I've got aunts and uncles", and I called them Mr and Mrs Faires all their life. But Betty's grandma, I called Granny, which is strange because I had a grandma. And her aunts and uncles I called- her aunt was Auntie Florence. And her uncle was Uncle Harvey. And Auntie Florence and Uncle Harvey had- they were- had an enormous building business. And Uncle Harvey was invited by Churchill to dinner in London, because he had

had the first business apprentices. And Auntie Florence and Uncle Harvey had an amazing house, which you went in a car, or when we went up a long drive, and there were woods on either side. And Betty and I would go and collect chestnuts in their woods, and they had a big tennis court. And they used to have the local fair in their grounds. And Mrs Faires was always cross, because Uncle Harvey built their house first and didn't give it central heating. And two years later, he built their house and it had central heating. That- I can remember that. But Mrs Faires and Mr Faires were very busy in those days because Mrs Faires was the local golf champion. And she spent her time on the golf course. And she was important in the local church. And Betty and I saw more of Joyce. And it was Joyce, as I said, who taught me to ride a bicycle, who was the person that I found very kind in the household.

**[00:50:08]**

And Betty and I were evacuated at the beginning of the war to the Cotswolds. And we lived- we stayed there. And I remember I have a picture of Gertrud Oppenheimer, who was my mother's cousin and had met me at the station, visiting me in the Cotswolds. I have a picture of that, though I don't remember it happening. And there in the Cotswolds I can remember Betty going to a riding school there, and me going with her. But the memory that I have is a very sad one. Of another couple coming with us called the Gerrards. And Mr and Mrs- Mr Gerrard didn't come, only Mrs Gerrard came. And one of her children came. She was Pamela I think, I'm not sure of her name. But I can remember sitting at the table, and Mrs Gerrard getting a telegram that her son had been killed at the beginning of the war. And I never forget Mrs Gerrard when she read that telegram. And I'm feeling dizzy. Sorry. [brief break] So-

*Yeah, what was the place called in the Cotswolds?*

Ah, it was Stow-on-the-Wold. And I've visited it since. And it had lovely stone walling.

*And you were staying with the-?*

I was staying- we were evacuated with another family. And we- I think we rented this house where we were staying. And then when they felt that no bombs were dropping near Bury St Edmunds that it was just a false beginning of the war. Then we went back to Bury, and Betty and I went to the local school, which was the East Anglian School for Girls. And we cycled

there. And I can remember in school, that we were reading a book called *Dr Doolittle's Zoo*. It wouldn't be used in schools today.

**[00:52:45]**

And I can remember that being the form reader. And by the time we got to the end of the book, I could speak enough English and I could read and join in. But I learned a lot of English in- when we had school assembly, and we had prayers. And I can remember that the hymns had words, that sounded like German. And I began to- I can remember understanding from the German hymns, words that I understood that were like German words. So I began to understand English, first through my knowledge of German. And then- I've never realised this. This is the moment at which I realised this! And that was how I began to learn English.

*Like what do you remember? Like some- some sort of Latin words or-?*

From German words-

*Yeah-*

Because I could speak German. And the hymns had words that sounded, they were in English and they were English hymns with words that sounded like German. And I could begin to understand the English. And by the end of this book, it was fine. But because I once told my friends that my mother came from Germany, they played a game that I was a German spy. And I understood it was a game and they understood, but I felt very unhappy. And then, I can also remember being told if I would speak some words of Czech- and I can remember going on the podium in school, and saying Czech swear words. Because again, I was still this nine year old, naughty child. And I can remember that by the time I was speaking good English, I had lost my Czech. I had lost my English accent. And I began to make friends in school. And I can remember just having a normal wartime childhood in a boarding school that was no longer in Bury St Edmunds, but was evacuated with a joint boys' school in a beautiful place called Culford, which was a village which had belonged to a very noble English family, the Culford family. And this had been sold and we were now in Culford.

**[00:55:53]**

And there was the boys' school and the girls' school. And Culford House was a house that was made into dormitories for the girls. The boys lived in the main house of the Culfords'. Their house had a very nice swimming pool, which the girls were allowed to use. But our lessons were in what had been the courtyard and the stables. That was converted so their centre was still a courtyard, and around it, were classrooms for the girls. It had been made so that the girls could have a girls' school with Cul- with what we called Culford House, where we had our dormitories and our dining room. And then we had our lessons in what had been the stables and now had classrooms upstairs, and a big courtyard in the centre.

*And- and Vera were you happy to be in this communal situation away from the family? I mean-*

Oh yes! I had begun- you see, we- I- the school was evacuated only when later, there- it was dangerous in Bury because Mildenhall Aerodrome was near. And Culford felt safer. So, when we were in Culford, and we were only allowed to mix with the boys' school very little. But-

**[00:57:50]**

*Vera, just before- before we got on, I wanted to ask you when you arrived first, with- with the foster family, what felt strangest to you in com- in comparison to the, you know, your household? Or what were the things you noticed most in terms of difference?*

Oh, well the bread was white. I mean, the bread- I had never eaten white bread before. And the food was very different. And we had had a kosher household and - everything, sort of- and Mrs Faires's comment about my table manners. They were different. And, yes, I can remember, everything was very different.

*On the kosher front, did your parents tell you what to do about it-*

No.

*- before you left? What did you do about it?*

They accepted that I would not be eating kosher food and though my father was leader of the community, I do remember that they did go to restaurants. And I can remember from my childhood that when my grandfather died, my father had a black armband. And that my mother took me - this is a childhood memory - my mother took me to see *The Bartered Bride*, because in the Prague Opera House, because they'd had tickets with very good seats to go and see *The Bartered Bride*. And my father wouldn't go to the opera after his father died so my mother took me. And I can remember being so interested because the stage moved. It had a moving- and that was what interested me most, that it had a moving stage. And I can remember being taken to see the opera with my mother as a child. And also I can remember my mother taking to the cinema, to see *Snow White, and the Seven Dwarfs*. And I was very, very scared of the Wicked Witch. And I can remember my mother forbidding my grandmother telling me fairy tales which frightened me, because I was scared with the wolf in Red Riding Hood. And my mother telling my grandmother not to tell me frightening fairy tales. And I can remember getting in my grandmother's bed, and that she wore green, long green knickers. And I got into her bed, and she told me fairy tales.

[01:00:47]

*So you have- you have a lot of memories.*

Yeah. Those are my memories of home.

*Yeah.*

What's the time?

*Yeah, we still have ten, fifteen minutes.*

Okay. So, where do you want me to go on?

*No, so I just- so-*

My boarding school.

*Yeah.*

Now, my boarding school life was very different. I made friends. I was even the class captain at one point. And my friends have stayed - some of them - lifelong friends. And they were really important to me. And, but I had a normal wartime childhood. I remember that when there was an air raid, we had to go from the dormitory and we went down to the dining room, and we sat playing cards under the dining room table, until the 'All Clear' sounded. And I can remember one day when Coventry was bare- was bombed. And one of the pupils, not in my class, but one of the children being very worried until she had news that her parents were safe in Coventry. And I can remember the tuck shop, where we were allowed to get our sweet rations because of the ration cards. And I had just a normal English childhood. And-

*And were you with Betty? Was Betty also there?*

**[01:02:35]**

Betty was in a much higher class than me. And Betty was much better at sport. And there was a school joke, "Does Vera know which end of the hockey stick to hit with?" And I preferred lacrosse; that was easier. But in the holidays, when we went home, we- the Faires' lawn was turned into a tennis court, and I used to umpire because I wasn't a very good player. And then, in winter, it was turned into a putting green. And I can remember their air raid shelter which, if we were there in the holidays and they were bombing, going down to the air raid shelter. And I can remember there was a big pond and Betty stepping in the dark into the pond on our way to the air raid shelter. So I can remember war time holidays in the Faires' house, and my school friends would invite me to their homes because Mrs Faires didn't like visitors. And so my friends asked me. And I can remember being in the house of my friend Jane, who had- her brother came to visit in the holidays, and her brother brought a friend. And his friend later married my friend Jane, and her- her brother and this lifelong friend, were at school together. And the friend, Jane's husband first was a lawyer and Avram and I visited them. I can remember when they had a flat that was over the cricket ground in St. John's Wood. And I can remember, Pag, Jane's husband who became a lawyer, leaning out the window and saying that was a great asset, the cricket ground. And the first meal that they

cooked for us I can remember my husband saying, "Forgive me, but I can't eat the liver." Jane was such a bad cook. That liver was so awful, it was blood in the liver.

**[01:05:35]**

And later, when Jane entertained, and Pag was a judge, and she had people and entertained, and I can remember she had menus, so that she had different menus for different people. And Jane[’s] husband became - this is why the story’s here - Jane's husband became QC at one time. And when Avram couldn't- my husband couldn't get permission to come to Britain, he had two guarantors. One was Uncle Harvey, who'd had the dinner with Churchill, and was a very- a member of the County Council in Suffolk. And the other was Patrick Garland, who I think by that time- no, I think he was only a Queen's Councillor [sic. Counsel] but became a High Court Judge, and was Sir Patrick Garland. And very sadly, Jane died just before my husband died. And Patrick, Sir Patrick Garland - who I always call Pag, because at school he was called Pag - still came to Avram’s funeral. And I had been to- Avram and I had been to their daughter's wedding. Because their eldest daughter was the same age as my daughter, Rachel. And they went to each other's birthday parties. And Philippa, their daughter, was married in the Middle Temple. So Avram and I went there for her wedding. And the next time we went to the Middle Temple was for Jane and Pag’s 50th wedding anniversary.

**[01:07:45]**

And sadly, I went to the Middle Temple for Pag’s 90th birthday, and sat with his friends who were lawyers and judges. And Pag came to my 90th birthday, which I had with my friends, in Fortnum and Mason's. We had tea, and Pag was one of the guests, because he was a lifelong friend. So through my school, I had lifelong friends. Marian was another lifelong friend, who used to come to all the horse shows that were here and stay with us, and go and see the horse shows. And she married a husband who was an Irish vet. And he became alcoholic. And Marian was terrified that he would do something awful with his animal patients, but he never did! She said, he stopped for- he would stop being drunk the minute he saw an animal. And, but she couldn't stand it any longer. And when she left him, she came and stayed with us before going back to her family. So my friends, were my lifelong friends. And Mary Baker, who was one of my closest school friends, later discovered that her mother had been Jewish, and that she had only discovered this much later. And I can remember her telling me that if

her husband and children ever knew that their mother had had a Jewish mother, who had had an affair with an airman and had given her up for adoption. And that she was adopted by an English family who had the biggest shop, I think, in Colchester. And then came to the East Anglian School for Girls, and was one of my closest friends, they would have been horrified. And after Jane died, she had remarried, and so on, one of her sons contacted me and asked if I had any memories of Jane. And I didn't tell him this story because Jane would have hated her children to know it. And I sent him a school photograph of myself with Jane on it, and told him something of his mother.

*Vera, in all- in all that time, did you have any contact with any Jewish organisations or anything?*

**[01:11:04]**

Now- it wasn't until I was the school representative of the East Anglian School for Girls. Because I was their school representative for- .... I'm having a total blank moment. The school union, what was it? I was also the college representative. Because I was their representative of the National Union of Students. And my school didn't like unions. But I was the school representative of the School- of the Union of Students. And when I was there at the conference, and- we stayed there, and I met the first Jewish person I had seen. And his name was Kurt Gingold. And his aunt was a very famous actress. And when he'd gone to stay with her, she had said- I had- Hermione Gingold, her name was- and she was a very famous actress. And she told Kurt, "When I came to England, I had no money. You make your way." And Kurt managed to study. But later, he went to relatives in America.

**[01:12:57]**

But Kurt told me about Habonim. And somebody from Habonim came to Bury St Edmunds. This is after the war. And Mr Faires was most hospitable to him, and said, "A Jewish friend has come to visit you." And was most kind. And I then found out about how Habonim.

[pause] Is it twelve?

*We have to finish - so, just to- just to finish that. So in all that time, from '39 to '40 to after the war, there was absolutely-?*



I had no- I met no Jewish people. I had no Jewish connections. Kurt Gingold was the first person that I had met and I'll go on. And Kurt was the first person who started telling me what England was doing during the war, and that they were sending back the people who had been in the camps. And I knew nothing about the camps. I knew nothing about the ships that were being sent back. And I learned all this from Kurt. And I can remember a friend that I made there. And I said, "What are you planning to be when you grow up?" I, at that time, had decided I was going to be a social worker, and I wanted to be a hospital almoner. That- were my plans for my future at that time. And this friend said, "Oh, I'm going to be a minister, a Methodist minister, because that's the best job that I can take." I don't know whether he ever became one.

*But did you- and I think that's the last question then we- we have a break.*

Don't worry.

*Did you- did you think of yourself as Jewish?*

**[01:15:07]**

Always! Always. In school I was very naughty. I once went to- we went to church. And I once put on my white long nightdress in an act of defiance, and- and went to church. And I, I felt my Jewish identity. I didn't want it to go. And all my friends knew I was Jewish. And Jane said I had beautiful things from home. And I once gave her a little ceramic donkey. And she was terribly upset later when it got broken by- a maid in their house had dropped it.

*Because- to me, that's quite extraordinary because you were only, you know, nine years old when you came that in that time you had, you know, despite not being in touch with anything Jewish that you had such strong-*

I had very strong feelings. Of course, I had letters from my parents. But they stopped, and we'll come to that in the story. I think I should have come to that earlier.

*Well, I think let's have a break. And we start with the letters after the break. Okay?*

Yeah.

*Okay. Thank you.*

Oh, can I just one- one [inaudible] [sound break]

*Vera, we were talking about your parents' letters.*

Yes.

*So tell us a little bit about their letters.*

Well, at first, I had letters from my parents almost every day. They wrote so often. And later, I couldn't face these letters because I felt that they would be full of reproaches telling me, "Why haven't you written more often?" or, "Why - this?" And at the reunion of the Kindertransport, I put up a notice saying, "Was anybody with-" - have I said this?

*No.*

**[01:17:11]**

"Was anybody with me when I went to Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk?" and Kurt Stern said that he was in the car with me. And he had come from Israel. And his- I thought was his sister in the back of the car was his cousin, who later married that famous infamous man. Her name became Kagan. Because it was the raincoat story. You don't know the raincoat-? Oh, this man, to- let's forget the raincoat story. Okay.

*Okay.*

He became a Lord and then he was disgraced. But this is- I met at the reunion of the Kindertransport. Now get me back to where I-

*The letters - the letters. What did they say when you-?*

When-

*Read them?*

After this reunion, I could face my parents' letters. And they were so loving, and so nice. And I have them because, I had- when I was living with the Faires family before our school was evacuated, I had- there was a garden shed in their garden. And in it, I put my autograph book and treasures that I had brought from Czechoslovakia. And those treasures- fortunately, I didn't put in my parents' letters because I didn't see them as the treasures. And one day Mrs Faires said to me, "The shed's been burgled and all the things in it have been taken." And I really believed it. Because no- nothing had gone from the house, and there was nothing of any value whatsoever in that shed. And a friend of mine, who I met through the reunion of the Kindertransport, was a psychiatrist. And she said to me, "She did that because she wanted you to feel more English, and to stop brooding there." And I had all those years imagined there'd been burglars. And she explained it to me, and of course, it was true. Nothing else was stolen, nothing of value. And she had done it with good will. But I lost my autograph book. And I lost- and I -

*But not the letters?*

Not the letters, fortunately.

*So at the time, did you not read the letters? Did you want to know what-?*

I didn't look at them. I couldn't. Mrs Faires kept them when I went to England, and I got them back from her. Now that is surprising.

*When you went to boarding-?*

**[01:20:02]**

To Israel.

*To Israel?*

When I- so, I was at an English boarding school and I was quite a rebellious little girl. But one day, it was in March 1945, when an English teacher walked into the classroom, and she said, "Girls, the war in Europe is over." And I yelled, "Hoorray!" And she said, "Vera Löwy! Get out of the classroom!" Or maybe it was "Vera Löwyova", I can't remember. "Get out of the classroom and stop making such a disturbance!" And you know, I stood in the corridor, and I thought, I'm going to go back home, I'm going to see my parents. And in bad days, I had imagined that my parents maybe really had gone to the countries that they mentioned in their letters. I remembered they'd talked about friends, who were getting permission to go to Mexico, and permission to go to Shanghai, and to go to Argentina. And I kept thinking, they're going to go to those countries. And when I thought about it, I thought, maybe they've started a new family. Maybe if I was a better child, I could have gone there with them. And then I remembered what my mother said in the park. And I knew it wasn't true. But those were the things that were going in my head. But that day, when I heard that the war was over, I just felt so sure that I was going back to Czechoslovakia, I would have to stay down a class because my Czech was gone. But I would learn it again. And - I'd be fine. And then, got a letter from the Red Cross, saying that my parents had been murdered, my grandmother had been murdered, my aunt and uncle. Everybody from my family had gone. And there was nothing left to go back to. And I knew that I just had to get on with my life. And that's what I did.

**[01:22:23]**

*When did- when did you receive that letter or- in relation to the end of the war? Was it soon after, or?*

It was fairly soon. And then I went to the cinema. I went to the cinema and I saw these terrible pictures of Bergen Belsen being liberated by the British. And you know, for years, I thought this is what had happened to my family. And it wasn't until I visited Beth Shalom, the Holocaust education place that - now the Holocaust Museum - that I could see that, that wasn't where my parents died. And I could get the correct information. And I could learn that

my mother and father were murdered in a camp called Trawniki as- a side- a subcamp of Majdanek, and that everybody there was killed in one day. I think I have it written.

*Yes, it was in 1942.*

In 1942, they were all killed. And they were not gassed. I think they had to make their own ditch and they were shot in the ditch in 1942. And I don't think anybody that I ever heard of escaped from Trawniki. And my grandmother, because she was German, and old, was kept in Theresienstadt and met her sister from Germany there, in Theresienstadt. And together, they died of starvation. And my aunt and uncle from Germany, who had so believed in their Nazi friends that they would be saved, died in Auschwitz.

*And Vera, what was- I mean, it's so unimaginable. What was your reaction when you- when you received this information?*

**[01:24:27]**

I just, I was absolutely devastated. I mean, I had really believed that I would be with my parents again. And I thought, you know, all those thoughts: they had other children in Mexico. All that, I knew was rubbish, was just that I felt so bad that I hadn't been a better child and kept thinking, you know, if only I could have stayed with them, and not been alone in England. And my guardians treated me very well. But, when I first went there, I was in the guest bedroom. But when the- Joyce the maid had to do war work, I moved into her room, which was the only room that didn't face the beautiful garden. And was the room which didn't have a wardrobe. But it just had a rack with a- a covering over it. And I have never discussed this with their children or grandchildren, who I'm very happy to meet now in London. And I think this is the first time I've ever said this in public. And I would never like their family to know that. But I felt so indignant, I think, that I, who once was, you know, in the guest room, now that I couldn't go back home, to Mrs Faires had lost something, but never to Mr Faires, her husband, who always said wonderful things about the Jews to me. He heard Vic Oliver playing the violin and he said, "What a brilliant violinist to fool about on the violin like he can. And he's married our Prime Minister's daughter, Vera." And he would say wonderful things. Now, Mr and Mrs Faires were very different. Mr Faires came from a very poor family with, I think, twelve children, and he was the youngest. And he started his life as a messenger

boy, for a very important- let me think of it. It was... it was called Burlinghams, and it was the biggest seed factory in Suffolk. And he started as their messenger boy. And by the time I went there, he was the Managing Director of the family. And he sometimes would take me where he went. And I remember that he was asked - from, I don't know, I've forgotten the country - about clover seed. And he was a world expert on- on seeds, on clover seeds. From this boy who'd been the messenger boy, to become that.

**[01:28:03]**

And he was so humble. He was so brilliant. He had taught himself French. He always said, "I'm sorry, Vera, it wasn't German." And he was a wonderful pianist, and an organist in the church choir. And he and Mrs Faires- Mrs Faires had been a piano teacher and music teacher. And she used to play the organ when the early cinemas were there, and the organ was raised with the- with the black and white films where people didn't speak. So she would play organ music suitable to the films. And they met because her sister had married in Bury St. Edmunds, and her sister had gone- Auntie Florence had gone to university as- very early as a woman, and had met Harvey Frost, who was in Bury St. Edmunds. And her- I've mentioned earlier. And Uncle Harvey and Auntie Florence had musical evenings in the Faires household. So, the Faires house had two grand pianos. And music was a very important part of their lives. And I completely don't enjoy music. I don't go to concerts. I have this emp- I can't understand it. And my husband was musical. And in one of these letters, I now read that when my mother was studying, my father's lullabies- used to sing me songs from Operas. And I, only through my husband, who enjoyed music, began to listen to music. And when my children enjoyed music, I could listen to some music. But I don't know why the important part in their lives was music. And somehow, I couldn't bear to listen. And I've never enjoyed concerts. But we did go hear- to hear Joan Baez sing, because my daughter, and all of us, liked her early songs. And my husband took me occasionally to musical things. But it was he who made me enjoy songs, and we have lots of records, and so on all from my husband.

**[01:30:59]**

*Vera, you said before that they saw an ad by Nicholas Winton.*

Yes, and chose me.

*What was it? Did they want? Do you think they only had one daughter? Did they want somebody to- a second child? Or what was their motivation?*

Oh, there was no bad motivation at all. Their motivation was that their daughter was an only child and it would do her good to learn to share and to be with a child who needed a temporary home. They took me thinking that my parents were coming for me. They'd spoken to my father. They felt that these were people who temporarily- needed a shelter for their daughter in England. And then as time went on, they were stuck with me.

*And where was this advertised? You said there was this photo of you. Where? Tell us.*

Oh, Nicholas Winton advertised pictures of children. And people saw these pictures and agreed to take children. And rabbis weren't at all pleased because they couldn't find Jewish homes for them. And Nicholas Winton said, "What do you want? Is it better for people to- for people's children to die or to go to non-Jewish homes?"

**[01:32:30]**

*So where was it advertised? In The Times, or-?*

In the- in- I don't know, but you can research. I have a book by Barbara Winton, Nicholas's daughter where she says all this.

*Yes. But also, to be fair, you probably didn't know anything about Nicholas Winton at that point.*

I knew about Nicholas Winton, when Esther Rantzen put something on the BBC and my husband heard it. And it was my husband who said, "Vera, you must- you must go. There's this meeting of Czech refugees." And I said- from somebody who [were] brought over by Nicholas Winton. I said, "Well, that's not me. I've never heard of Nicholas Winton." And my husband made me ring the BBC. And I went to that reunion. And there I met somebody who became my very close friend Malenka, who, who had also gone to a non-Jewish family, who was an only child from Czechoslovakia. And we, when she came to London, to the first

reunion she stayed with me. And I stayed with her in Eastbourne. She had been with a Christian family. She'd become a nurse and married a doctor. And- her youngest daughter, when she came to London to study medicine, Malenka asked her to visit my daughter, and they have become friends for life. That daughter is now advising medicine, I think in- in Dubai or somewhere. And she's also married to a doctor but- her name is Lisa. And she is a friend of my daughter's because her mother asked her- Malenka asked her whether she would- could visit her when she came to London to study medicine.

*So, was that- so were you present at that first Esther Rantzen-?*

Yes, of course. I'm sitting there, just in the second row back. And I made a lot of friends.

*Sorry to interrupt- when was this, Vera? When was the Esther Rantzen? Was it in the-?*

It was before the first reunion. It was- I can't remember the date of the programme.

*In the 80s, I would say, in the 80s wasn't it?*

**[01:35:07]**

Well, the first reunion was fifty years after the Kindertransport. So it was in 1988?

'89 – '88 or '89.

It was in '88.

'88. Yeah.

And I've been to every reunion since of the Kindertransport. And Kurt Stern used to come from Israel, with Elisa his wife, and see us. And sadly, Avram's died and Elisa also died. And he is now- but he was a, a guide in Israel for tourists. So when we went there, we got a very nice tour with Kurt.

*And Vera, what was it like then to be there with other Winton children in this room?*



We sat- we sat at a table, and I stayed friends with several of the other people who had been there. I was in touch with somebody, with a friend of mine now, whose sister in Israel was a secretary of somebody who was a professor in Israel, and who was studying water for- something about water. And so my friend's sister was his receptionist. And he was one of the friends that I made at that Kindertransport. He was a professor. Another friend I made that Kindertransport was somebody who was a doctor in Scotland, and I know his story and the professor's story, but they have their own stories. But they were friends I made at that first reunion at the Czech table.

*And Vera, what was it like? Was it important for you to meet Nicholas Winton at all? Was that important for you?*

**[01:37:25]**

Oh, that was really important. And I'm trying to remember the person who I have on a picture with me and Nicholas Winton. She was the person who was wonderful and a- such a wonderful friend to Nicholas Winton. She had a sister who went- to I think Australia or Canada. And she really was the person who used to make wonderful meals and bring them to Nicholas and his wife Greta, who was a lovely woman, and Barbara Winton, who is a founder member with Alf Dubs. And of course, I met Alf at the reunions, and have known him, now Lord Dubs, and followed his career with great interest.

*And it was at the time it was a surprise, wasn't it, to Nicholas Winton? He didn't know anything about it.*

I had not heard of him.

*You hadn't heard of him.*

And why I really got to know Greta was we had a reunion of the Kindertransport. And I have a second cousin who also came to England on the Kindertransport. Her name was Trudy Bandler. And she was one of the children who didn't- who came earlier to England than me from Czechoslovakia, and who is now Trudy Scaramuzzi and lives in Italy. And she had an

uncle called Paul [inaudible], who was again, one of these people who met me at the station in Liverpool Street. And Paul Di also visited me and had me. So, there were people in my family who tried to keep in touch with me. For my parents' sake.

*So, to go back, Vera, to 1945 when you- when you received this telegram, so what did you- how did your life develop?*

Well-

*After that?*

Do you want the story about how I became a teacher?

*Just let's go back to '45, or, you know.*

Well, in 1945, I just felt terrible, and I went back to school. And then I just began to completely feel that I had nowhere to go to. And it was really, a- a really difficult time for me. But I stayed in school until I was in sixth form. And then, oh, from school, I went to a student conference. And this was after 1945. And I was the representative of the Students' Union. And I went to this conference. And at this conference, I met my first Jewish person and his name was Kurt Gingold. And his aunt was a very famous actress. I've forgotten her first name now, some-

**[01:41:02]**

*You told us about that. I've forgotten now as well.*

Yeah. Something Gingold.

*Don't worry, it's- it's on tape. You've- you've told us before.*

You've got it on tape?

*Yes, it's on tape.*

Then I won't repeat the whole story.

*No. So, that's fine. So, you've- you've met him. So that was important because he introduced you to-*

To Habonim.

*Yes.*

Who came to visit us. And have I told you the story?

*No.*

And somebody from Habonim came to the Faires household. And Mr Faires greeted him so nicely. And he said, "There's somebody Jewish Vera, who's come to visit you. And he wants to tell you about a Jewish club that he belongs to." And I was very interested and late- and stayed friends with Kurt. And later when I went to college, he was my first boyfriend. I can remember him helping me over the college wall because I'd been out late. But it was very platonic in those days, and he was just a boyfriend. And-

*And did you start going to Habonim, to some meetings?*

**[01:42:14]**

I started going to Habonim. And I was very lucky because at that time, I didn't have money. And I was in college and I didn't want any more to accept any money from my guardians. And so, in- when I went to a Habonim, for- to one of their Hakhsharah places, I met somebody who was one of the important people in Marks and Spencer's who had been visiting. And he said, "Do you want a job?" when I was in college. And I said, "Yes, but we're not allowed to work. I can't do that," - because in college, we weren't allowed. And he said, "I can get you a weekend- a Saturday job in a branch of Marks and Spencer's. This is not near your college. Where would be a good thing?" And I said, "Well, on the train line, so I can go from college." So he got me a job in Hammersmith branch of M & S and I was there

on Saturdays, on the gentleman's underwear counter while I was at college, earning money. And later, the friends who'd been friends of my parents told me how they had belongings of my parents'. They had gone on a rally to Monte Carlo, on a car rally, and it was- Czechoslovakia was already invaded. I was in England, but my parents were still living in Klatovy. So their Dutch friends came and when they left Monte Carlo they stopped in Klatovy. And they took a lot of my parents' belongings. And when they heard I was in college, they said, "Would you like us to sell your mother's necklace?" So they sold my mother's pearls and sent me the money. And later when things were better in Holland after they'd had a terrible time. And Dix de Pencier, the friend who'd studied with my mother, he had been working in the underground in Holland. He had had my parents' Persian carpet, among other things. He had my parents' pictures, two of which are by Czech artists. And one which I have here on the wall is a reproduction, unfortunately, of Picasso and his blue period. Those three pictures I got from Holland, and a Persian carpet, which I took with me to Israel before I knew that I would be coming back to England. We managed to sell, and that paid my husband's and my fare back, when we left the kibbutz and had no money.

**[01:45:47]**

*How did they find you, this couple? How did they find you?*

Oh, the Dutch people?

*Yeah.*

Oh, I think that they were in touch with my parents when I was in England, because they had visited my parents, and they stayed in touch with them. And did I tell you how I knew Jana, from when they were at a conference? I told you that story.

*Yes - Yeah.*

Yeah. Well, they were in touch with my parents until letters stopped between me and my parents and between them. And, yeah, and they were in the Dutch underground. And when- and they had German soldiers billeted and so they felt it was unsafe, they could keep the possessions, but they couldn't keep my parents' certificates, because they would be identified.

So, they sent them to- Dix de Pencier's sister, had married an Indonesian doctor. And- because Dix de Pencier grew up in Indonesia, where his father was a vet. And, so his sister had married an Indonesian doctor. And they had a surgery that was in a part of Holland which was almost completely underwater, and they had to visit patients by boat. And no Germans were likely to be in that area. And years and years later my friend Diana, who was my age who had written on a donkey with me, had a letter from a doctor who had bought this surgery from her Chinese uncle. And when they renovated the surgery, under the floorboards they found my parents' certificates. And they had- I don't know- they knew the de Penciers still, and because they'd got the practice from Dix's sister- his sister, so they contacted the de Penciers and of course, I got the letter sent. The, the- I got the documents sent, not letters. Their documents. What do you want next?

**[01:48:30]**

*So, you started going to Habonim.*

And I met, I've told you this, okay. And I was in Southlands College. And it was in Southlands College that I became the student representative. And- this is a story I've never told. And went to the students' conference in Bangor. And there, I met another future boyfriend, whose name was Norman Franklin, and whose uncle was Viscount Samuel, who had been in Israel, whose- very importantly, and whose other uncle was Norman Bentwich, who also was very important in Zionist history. And Norman was my first boyfriend. And when I was in college, and there was the graduation ball, if- I'm trying to think of the name- Oh, and Rosalind Franklin who is so well known now as a scientist, was his first cousin. And therefore Norman studied chemistry. I think he did science. He did chemistry, but his family were publishers, and Routledge and Kegan Paul publishers. And so Norman became part of that publishing firm. And when he was my boyfriend, I remember that he had to go to Switzerland to interview - what's his name, the famous psychiatrist, who was not on the same- different to Freud, in Switzerland. Tell me the name of the psychiatrist. Who started- who- all the dream-

*Jung – Jung. Jung, or Piaget. Jung? Carl Jung?*

**[01:51:05]**

Was it? There were- was it? No. Yes, there's- there was Adler, Jung. I think it was Jung in Switzerland. So, I know Norman telling me that he's had to go to interview Jung in Switzerland. And then, through Habonim, I wanted to go to Israel. But I didn't want to do a Hakhsharah. I'd been in college and- but I did want to be in touch with Jewish people. And so, as my first job, I asked to go to a Jewish school. And I went to Stepney Jewish School as my first teaching job in Stepney. And then, from there, when the first *Shnat charut* the group who were going to Israel to work there on a kibbutz for a year were going to Israel, I joined the first *Shnat charut* group. And three of the people - there were six women, and six men - were in that group. And I'm in touch with three of those people, still. My closest friend, Naomi, who came back to England, and who we used to spend, who felt that I wasn't giving my children a Jewish enough education, had us there for Friday night. And since she had a kosher household, it was quite difficult for me to give her a suitable presents for having us there every Friday night. And therefore, my children also could join Habonim and Naomi who was one of those people. And another one is, oh, I'm trying to think of his name, Bernard, whose granddaughter now works for the Holocaust education trust. Leslie Barnard, who was also one of the group, and who I had a phone call from lately. And Helen, who was the youngest of that group, and is now in England. And-

**[01:53:44]**

*And which kibbutz? Where did you go in-?*

We went to Kibbutz Nitzanim, which had had a terrible time during the last war, because I think the troops got as far as Nitzanim. And we- it had had a very bad time during Israeli war. And so-

*And what was it like to get-t was Israel at the time? Yes, it was already.*

It was- I went to Israel in 1951. And there, I went on the Erev Pesach. And I sat down next to somebody who could speak some English. And the reason he spoke English is this: he was a camp survivor. And I would like to tell you more about his history later. But, Avram had also been in displaced persons' camp, and he had been there for three years. But I will tell you one story of Avram now, at this point.

*OK.*

**[01:55:04]**

When Avram was liberated, he was very, very ill. And he went to a German hospital. And in that hospital, there were Jewish people but also, there were people who had been in the Polish underground and so on. And one day, in that hospital, there was somebody who was feeding- he was giving food to a very, very sick, Jewish concentration camp survivor, who couldn't feed himself. And a Pole said to this man, "Why are you feeding this Jew? Let the Jews feed their own." And this Polish man ignored it completely, and went on feeding this man. And he and Avram became very good friends. He went and he took Avram to some Polish occasion. And then Avram wanted to take him to a Jewish wedding and they wouldn't let them in because- least they wanted to take Avram but not his friend. So, Avram wouldn't go to the wedding. And he became a lifelong friend of ours. And though he'd wanted to be an artist, he became a doctor in Poland. And whenever anybody who was a camp survivor came to him, he would never charge them. And he was a lifelong friend until he died. And because he'd wanted to be an artist, whenever we travelled and went to a country, when we went to Italy we went specially to the Vatican and took some pictures. And we always sent him cards.

*What was his name?*

**[01:57:10]**

You ask me-

*Don't worry.*

And he visited us, because at the time when the Russians were in power in Poland, he was allowed to come with the Sue Ryder organisation, as a doctor. And when he was with that organisation he came here to us. And then because he wanted to be an artist we took him to the Tate Gallery. And then he said, "Oh, I would like to see the Tate Modern." And Avram said, "Well, stay the night and then you can go to the Tate Modern." And he said, "All right" and he spent the night. And then he looked at our bookshelves, and took books by

Solzhenitsyn, he took other books, which were all forbidden in Poland. And Avram said, "You can't take those, you'll be searched." He said, "Not if I put them in my medical bag." And then, he would have got in terrible trouble, but because with this Sue Ryder group, there was an interpreter. But our friend knew much better English than this interpreter. And this interpreter was really the Russian spy sent to go with this Sue Ryder group. So I said, "You're going to get in terrible trouble." He said, "No I won't." He rang up the Polish embassy and somebody who had been in the resistance with him, was now very high up in the- in the Polish embassy, so an embassy car from the embassy came to collect my husband's friend from our house, took him back to the Sue Ryder group. No word was said, because they assumed that he'd been staying in the Polish embassy, and that's why he'd been away. And so that's one story from my husband's life.

*But you met in the kibbutz?*

**[01:59:41]**

We met on my first night in- will you use any of this, or it will all be cut out?

*No, nothing will be cut out.*

Okay. So on my first night with my group I sat next to somebody who, to my amazement, said, "Now I have to go, because I go to feed the sheeps." And I said, "No you don't, you're going to feed the goats." "No," he said- Sorry, start again. "Now I go to milk the sheeps." And I said, "No, you don't. You're going to milk the goats." And he said, "No, I milk the sheeps." And I said, "Anyway, it's sheep, not goats," not- "It's sheep, not sheeps." And so he said, "Come", and I went, and he sat on a little stool. And by hand he was milking the goats because he was a shepherd in the kibbutz and his job was milking the sheep. And the milk was made into cheese in the kibbutz. But I only knew about French goat's cheese, and didn't know that there was such a thing as sheep's cheese. And he could speak some English, because after he was- when he was in the DP camp, he taught himself some English. So when I met him in Israel, he- English wasn't very good. But he had English books that he was reading. And in the DP camps, he also learnt- what is the organisation called, which was teaching young people skills?



ORT. [Russian: *Obchestvo Remeslenogo Truda*]

[02:01:40]

He also from ORT learned to be, to some degrees, something about being an electrician. And when we were married he used to be able to do a few things. And when I said something more complicated, he said, "What? You want me to do this, and the whole street will be without any lighting." So he said, "My knowledge is limited." And yet- so he really tried to get himself educated, because he'd left school in Poland at the age of thirteen. That was when his education had finished. And in Israel, he loved being a shepherd. He, he wrote short stories, and- I've forgotten his first name, Sillitoe, who is a very famous writer, *The Long Distance Runner* –

*Cameraman: Alan Sillitoe.*

[02:02:43]

Alan Sillitoe helped in the writers' group in the survivor centre, and Avram wrote very good stories. And Alan Sillitoe helped with these stories. And he said Avram's were the only stories that not one word had to be changed in them, in order to edit them. And now- and Bet Shalom had those books, but they're now out of- they're not there anymore. Not the first book of stories, but the second one is still available. And I have copies of both the stories with Alan Sillitoe. And his son- did you know that he married a Jewish wife? Did you know that? His wife was Jewish and was a famous poet. And David Sillitoe who is now on the BBC, is their son. And so, Alan Sillitoe's wife, Alan Sillitoe's mother- David Sillitoe's mother is a very famous poet and a book of Jewish poetry - I have some of her poems. And Alan Sillitoe is a very much an English writer. And she, I think, was living in America at that time. I'm not sure.

*Okay. You're going to show us this- the book later, maybe.*

Yeah.

*Vera, and at the time did you think you were going to stay in Israel, or what was the plan?*

[02:04:25]

I- I wanted to stay in Israel. I knew nothing. I didn't know how to do Hebrew writing. When I went to Stepney Jewish School, there was a very nice teacher whose mother was the headmistress of a Jewish school. And I think it's still famous. I can't remember the name. And she taught me the Hebrew letters, because I had to do some Hebrew writing with my class. So I learned it from a set from another teacher. And I was in Stepney Jewish School, I think I was the only person who was so illiterate in Hebrew. But when I married, Avram sent me or the kibbutz sent me to an *ulpan* and I- we were- Oh, let me say first. So, I was on the kibbutz and Avram asked me to marry him at the end of the year. And we had our fares paid to go to Israel and to come back. And Avram said to me, "You mustn't think that you're going to marry me and live on a kibbutz." This was before the *ulpan* or anything, and "You must go back with the group, and stay in England for a year and do your job, you're qualified. And then if you want still to be married, come back and we'll be married. But I make you completely free. Don't feel badly if you decide that you don't want this kibbutz life and you won't marry me. Go back and feel really free to think what you want to do with your life." So, I went back with the group. I visited my mother's cousin in Germany, and learnt, - who was called Ernst Katzenstein, and was working in Germany. And later, it was they who said, "You should let your husband" when we were married, "have a career. You should not go back to Israel till he has some qualifications", but that comes later. So, I came back to England, I visited my relatives. I decided to visit other relatives who were in Switzerland, and had a very Orthodox school in Switzerland, in Bex-les-Bains, which was a school for- it had been started by somebody who was a- a tutor to a *Graf* in Germany. And he- when this *Graf* was old enough not to need a tutor anymore - he was very fond of this tutor and - he said, "What would you like to do?" And he said, "I'd like to have a school of my own." And he financed the starting of this Jewish school in Bex-les-Bains [Institut Ascher] which is just above Montreux, in Switzerland. And another thing I didn't tell you, is that I have a passport, a Czech passport, which I got in 1938 when my mother flew with me to Switzerland, and put me in the school in Bex-les-Bains, which only had girls, and very young children- boys, but a few boys who were very young, not- nowhere near adolescence. And they had all these- American but no- this was later when we went when I went back, sorry, out of sync with the story.

**[02:09:09]**

*So your mother put you there in '38? In that school?*

For- while they went- and in Switzerland, and I remember going to visit the Bären in Bern. And I know that they put me in that school later, because my father put some money in insurance for me and my mother, which later I got from the insurance company. Because he had gone there because he, he felt completely safe in Czechoslovakia. But he just had some thought that it would be good to insure my mother and myself in case anything ever happened to him. So that was why I was there. And-

*And you went back there when you came from Israel.*

When Avram told me. And there in that school, I had my mother's cousin, who had- my grandmother's sister had- was living in Germany, and she married a husband who was Doctor Kallner who came from Russia, a Jew, to study medicine in Germany. Because under the Russians, you couldn't- a Jew wouldn't be able to be a doctor. So, Trude Kallner, who was a- who was the sister of Ernst, who was a cousin of my mother's. So Trude must have been a cousin, a cousin of my mother's had married a doctor and they sent their daughter to this finishing school in Bex-les-Bains in Switzerland. And she married the- the son of the owner, who was- who had been to a *yeshiva* in Gateshead. [mobile phone rings] Is that me on this? Did I-? [rings again] Oh, no. [sound break]

*We were talking about the time when you came back from Israel.*

I came-

*Avram told you to go back and see-*

And- and I went back, and I hitchhiked to Switzerland, and this very Orthodox family who had this extremely Orthodox school. Oh, another moment I remember, when I was there, at the age of eight, we had to go and climb a mountain. And this Jewish relative had to go in the Swiss Army because every citizen had to go. And he was the bob-sled [sic. -sled] champion of Switzerland. While he was in the army, this, this Orthodox Jewish guy who'd been to

Gateshead Yeshiva, was totally- but everybody in that village knew him. He'd been to school with the local children.

*And why, Vera, did you want to visit them?*

**[02:12:54]**

I wanted to visit them because I remembered there, and having been there as a child, and they were in touch with me. Because during the war Trude Kallner, the mother of the person who had come to that school and married the son of the original owner, and was now in that school, her mother had been in England during the war, I think. And then went to live with her daughter in Switzerland. So, I thought I would visit them. And when I visited them, they said, "Oh, where'd- where were you yesterday night?" I said, "In a field. I slept in a field." And this was Friday. This had been on Friday night and I got there on Shabbat. And they were very nice to me. And I had a nice day. And I went back again. And then I just thought, this is ridiculous; of course I want to marry Avram. I visited my relatives in Germany, I visited those in Switzerland, and I went back to Israel. And I didn't stay a year. I think I stayed about four and a half months, and I'd had enough. And we had a Yemenite rabbi who had my passport upside down, and had never read anything in English and who was a sweet man. And whenever we saw him, he used to say, "No children yet?" And we always said, "No, not yet." And Avram made me go on an *ulpan* to learn some *Ivrit*, and I did.

**[02:15:06]**

*You got married on the kibbutz?*

We had a wonderful kibbutz wedding. Tova in the kitchen had read that in America they made a wedding cake, so I had the most enormous wedding cake. And Avram had a very nice relative, who was the grandson of the people in Switzerland, and who had come to Israel, because he wanted to be on these rescue ships that were trying to rescue the illegal- illegal immigrants. And he lived in Kfar Darom, which was an Orthodox kibbutz just up the road from us. And he gave me a work basket for a wedding present. And his daughter, who lives in Israel, tried- managed now to get in touch with me. And I sent her the picture of the work

basket, which I still use, which her father came and gave me as a wedding present before he married her mother.

*What's a work- what is it? What's a work basket?*

It's where you keep all your sewing things at the top of a cupboard. I have it. And it's a woven basket.

*Yeah-*

And I keep all my sewing things in it. And I've had it all those years. So, let me go on- Where am I?

*Yes, Israel, so you- you got married-*

I got married, and then when I was learning Hebrew, then I became pregnant. And I was worried, and I didn't want to have a child and not have them with me, but to have to give it to the *gan* - the nursery - and to only go and be able to feed them there. And then to see them in the evening after work. So, I wanted a child that I would have in my arms when I wanted. So Avram agreed, and we found an English-speaking Hebrew called- and it was near the Lebanon border. And it was called- was it Kfar? I've forgotten.

*Don't worry.*

**[02:17:39]**

And it had people from Canada, people from England, people from India who were English speaking. And I loved it, it was a whole English culture. But Avram would have preferred his kibbutz, which were more his culture. But we had English play readings, but he fitted in wonderfully, when everybody had to make a toy for the children, people made most wonderful elaborate toys. And he made a go-kart with wheels, and that the kids were [inaudible]. And they had to say which was the best toy, and Avram's toy was voted- he said it was so simple to make, because he wasn't a great craftsman. And then I got very ill, and I had a child. And there was nobody there who could do anything during the birth. And that's

the only time I've ever seen my husband cry when nobody could help me. And I think the child died with the cord around his neck. And nobody knew what to do. And it was an early birth. And I became very ill. And so, Avram decided that we should have a holiday in Europe. And I had a Persian carpet that we brought with us, and we took it to a carpet shop. And in that shop, he took it out of the shop to spread it in the grass. And a woman who was in the next house, looks over because she could hear talking in the garden, saw the carpet and said, "I've always wanted a Turk- a, a-

*Persian carpet.*

A Persian carpet." And she said, "Can I buy it?" And we found out what the price of the fare was back to Europe. And she paid the carpet, and we had our fare to go back to Europe. And first we went to our relatives: Ernst, who was working for IRSO, I think, and doing restitution for heirless families. And so we stayed with them. And then we- Avram couldn't get permission to go to England. And I went, and I was very fortunate in the friends I had. Did I mention this before?

**[02:20:32]**

*You did, but Vera, were you British by then? What was your- your passport then?*

Oh, my guard- my guardians had taken me and asked me, "Do you want British Nationality?" And after I knew that my parents had been murdered, I stopped fiddling with this- I heard my parents had been murdered, I had no desire to go back to Czechoslovakia. And my guardians took me to get British nationality.

*Vera, I didn't ask you. Who was it? Were the guardians the same as the foster parents or they were separate?*

I called them my guardians.

*Your guardians. So-*

It's, yeah, they weren't- I didn't feel they were parents. That were my guardians. They weren't instead of my parents.

*Yeah. So, you know, some people had separate guardians and people they stayed with.*

Yeah. And I called them my guardians, though, I suppose they were- but to me, they were never foster parents. But you know, I was amazed when Betty's daughter told me, "Oh, Betty always thought of you as her sister." And I never thought of Betty as a sister. But we were lifelong friends. And, you know, when Betty found it very difficult to have a child and I had Rachel, she said, "Can I come and stay with you, and sort of handle a baby?" And she did that and it didn't help. And then, she did what her parents hadn't done, but they had me, and she adopted a child. And immediately David was born. So she had Joanna and David. And it's Joanna who sends me Christmas cards, and David who comes with his family, to hear about his grandparents, and all the things that he could never know. And when Betty died, we went to her funeral in Devon. And were really sad.

*So- sorry, I interrupted you-*

**[02:22:36]**

And I'll say one more thing about Betty.

*Yeah.*

Whenever I went to Betty's kitchen, I could find everything. Because having been brought up in the same house, we kept our crockery the same way, we kept our knives and forks in the same kind of drawer. We could find our way around each other's kitchens, always, because we'd been brought up. But Betty visited her mother as little as possible. And I visited her mother when she was a widow, and drove to Bury as often as I could, you know? Because I- and they were so nice to Avram. Have I said this? Yeah.

*Later. But we're not there yet with Avram because you were saying Avram couldn't come into Britain.*

Yeah.

*When you were on the kibbutz.*

And then my friends were- one who was then a Queen's Counsel before he became a judge. And the other was a leader of the council, in, I think it was in Suffolk County Council. And they vouched for Avram. And I can remember Avram came and when he wanted citizenship, our bookcase was inspected before he was granted British citizenship. So, that was interesting.

*But when he-*

And he has written a poem, which I would like to show you later, which shows all the different countries and from what he had in Poland to, in the end, his last was the British citizenship. All the different things he had; the citizens he was at different times in his life.

*But did you think that you would be going back to Israel at the time?*

We left our books with- Avram had an aunt in Israel. And her son, Ido is- was here, that he- his last visit before Avram died. And every Rosh Hashanah, Ido rings us up, and we visited him many times in Israel. And we went very often to visit his relatives there, after we made our life in England.

*But at the beginning, you thought you would be going back. You didn't plan on-?*

**[02:25:12]**

We thought- And it was my relatives in Germany who said, "Look, you've got no children now. You are completely free. This is the time for Avram to get an education." And I went to the local public library, took out the book of careers in the library. Avram said, "I don't want a- a big degree and no job. What can I get to get a job?" And we found physiotherapy, which needed five O-Levels. Now, Avram had - he could do German and Polish - two languages. I could teach him English; I was an English teacher. And he went to a crammers for four months, in which time he managed to get maths and science. When he took his O-Lev- when he took his GCSEs is those days, he took English in three different boards, because he was so



sure he wasn't good enough. He passed in every board, and he got his GCSEs. He went to study physiotherapy, I went back to teaching. And that- later, we managed- I managed to get things back from Holland. We got some insurance, we got other money, and we managed well. And my career blossomed, and Avram's career blossomed. My career changed. Avram's career as a physiotherapist was amazing. He worked so hard. He worked in the hospitals. And then in the evenings, he went to- by train, I wish I could remember the name of the clinic, but it was quite the other side of London. And he worked there in the evenings. And there was a patient there, who was a chef in the Ritz Hotel, and he used to - to the physios - bring some cakes and things. And my children used to wait and say, "Oh, have you got some hospital cakes?"

**[02:27:32]**

So, I think twice a week he did evening clinics there. And they were nearly all women and one of them was Suffragist. That's not a Suffragette. And the suffragists were people who believed in women's suffrage, but not in violent resistance, only in political resistance. And she invited Avram to a meeting in the House of Commons, with all the Suffragists. And he, and that Liberal Member of Parliament who took them round were the only two men among all the Suffragist ladies, because he was so liked in this evening clinic, that she invited him. And among the things that my father got out was a very good Leica camera. And when we went on our honeymoon, Avram tried to use the Leica. And the only thing that came out from our Israeli honeymoon was a picture of a donkey. And Avram got yellow jaundice. And I was so relieved when I found out that his lack of interest in me at that point was because he was really ill with yellow jaundice. And later, why I come to the camera, is that one of these physios who actually we went on holiday with, her husband was, had a photography shop. And Avram exchanged the very good Leica camera, which would be worth a great deal of money now, for a very good up to date at that time, camera. So that's another story.

**[02:29:30]**

*Vera, I want to ask you- so, do you think your decision to leave the kibbutz because you said you wanted to be with your child, do you think it was influenced by your own experience? That you didn't want the idea that, you know, the child is separate?*

I don't know. Maybe unconsciously it was. Consciously I just thought, oh, no, I don't want my child not to be with me. Maybe unconsciously, you're right. And maybe unconsciously that did play a part because other women must have disliked it, but did it. And I just thought, no, I can't. And my aversion to- listening to the kind of music is ridiculous, isn't it? What did I experience that I- music was so important? And I- I don't know, I mean, a psychiatrist could solve that. And actually, we were very good friends with a psychiatrist and I never asked her. Her name was Rita Henry Good. And she actually had a husband who had been a camp survivor. And-

*And do you think, well, do you know, did you like music when you were in Czechoslovakia?*

Yes! Of course! I had a piano in my nursery. Had a very big room for my nursery. And when we visited Klatovy, I saw the rings on my nursery, and the formal dining room where I- where my ropes and my swing hung. And I would swing between the dining room and my nursery. And I saw the stove where my nurse used to sit me and dry my hair in front of the stove. And the nicest thing about Mr Faires to me was that when Betty and I washed our hair, he would sit and dry it for us, because there were no central heating in the house. And there was a big fire in their music room where they had the two pianos. And he would sit us in front of the fire and dry our hair, Betty and mine, when we were young. And this is one of the nice memories of the Faires household.

*So the music stopped for you, or- ?*

It just stopped,

*It just stopped.*

It just stopped. And-

*That's interesting.*

I just, you know – no. A lot of things which I'm sure other survivors have- when I've spoken once to a group of survivors and the person there said to me, “My mother can't remember anything of her journey, either; it's all blocked out.” I've realised then that this wasn't a

unique experience that, you know, there are all sorts of things that other survivors have experienced that we have in common.

**[02:32:48]**

*And Vera, having been married to a camp survivor, do you see yourself as a survivor? Or did you see yourself as a-? Or has it changed?*

No. For many, many years, I couldn't see that my experience was any way to be compared to what Avram had suffered. Because he was on a death march. He was on a- have I?

*No you haven't told us. No. Tell us.*

Oh, he was on a train where people with open carriage where bodies were thrown out of the train when they died, and people were relieved because they could sit down. He was- he was in front of a firing squad because on the death march he had big ulcers on his legs. And a guard said, "You can't walk anymore, can you?" And he said, "No, it's very hard." So he put him on a carriage. And he sat on this carriage, and then he realised that other people were more ill than him. And when the carriage went a long way, he saw there was a carriage behind with a machine gun. And then, they got out and he saw them- they were made to tell- to line up against the wall. And he said instinct just took him and he jumped over this wall. He got over it. And it was snow and it was winter. And he landed in a graveyard and he hid behind one of the tombstones. And he heard all the people screaming and crying as they were being shot. And for years, he wouldn't tell his story. And whenever he told it he asked- he had to drink water. He- at that point, while I sometimes feel dizzy, he felt- and I don't any- I don't when I tell my story normally. But he, just at that point, needed a glass of water and to pause, because he could see that. And he was recaptured in a barn. And he walked- he was taken to a police station when he was captured, because he'd hidden in- he'd hidden in a farmyard under some hay. And the farmer's wife with a pitchfork found him and started screaming. And they got a local policeman. And she said that in that police station, the policeman's wife, gave him a cup of coffee, and said, "Oh, you poor boy," when she looked at him in rags, with nothing on his feet.

**[02:35:38]**

*Where was this, Vera? Where?*

This was somewhere in- I think- this was somewhere in- must have been- I don't know whether it was Germany or Poland. It was on the death march. So would they have been-? I- This was, I think, was it in Germany or Poland? I-

*Where was he liberated at? Where?*

He was liberated in Buchenwald.

*Might have been Germany.*

It was in Germany, and this woman said, "You poor young boy", and gave them a cup of coffee and some- and a piece of bread. And he said, the old policeman handcuffed him to him. And he kept saying, "You know, I have a son in- fighting." Obviously, it was Germany. And he said, "And I don't know what's happened to him." And Avram said to me, "As if I could feel sorry for his son. At that moment, I just thought, I'm marching to my death." And he took him back to where the others were sleeping. And Avram said that he was saved, because there were women there suddenly heard all the commotion when he was brought back that came out. And he said they didn't want to do anything in front of the women. So he was just beaten. And in the camp once he was beaten. And he had marks on his back because he- this is another long story. Do you want it? Oh, I'll tell you quickly.

**[02:37:25]**

*You were talking about Avram and his camp experience.*

Yeah. One point- I'll tell you one more story. When he was in the Polish part, where he was as, just-. He was a slave labourer before he became a- a prisoner. And the place where he was a labourer was very near to where he had come from. And he could speak Polish to the workers. And they said to him one day- he was already captured and in a camp. And he made a list of all the camps that he'd been in for Judy. But this was the first one. And they left at midday on a Saturday. And they said to Avram, "Oh, why don't you stay in this hut until they

come to collect the workers?" And he fell asleep. And they thought that- when they came to collect him, the workers, they couldn't find him. And when they found him asleep in this hut, they told in the camp that he had tried to run away. They thought he'd tried to escape. And in front of the whole camp he was beaten, and he still had marks on his back. And he didn't cry. The only time, I told you he cried, with our baby. And he was beaten and then when he had to go to the doctor in the sick bay, the doctor gave him one of his own potatoes. And he said that was the best medicine he ever had in the years he was in the camp, when the doctor said, "I can't do anything for you, but have a potato."

*And Vera, did he talk about his experiences with you when you met him, or is this only much later?*

**[02:39:36]**

Avram never talked about his camp experience to me or the children. But it was not explicit; it was implicit in every bit of our lives. We would sit at the table, and Avram would say, "How can you leave your food?" and, "I'll eat it." And he would finish it up for them. He couldn't bear to see leftover food, he would never waste a piece of bread. In- in his whole life, that camp experience was there. And he- the children never asked him. But, when my grandchildren asked me, then, you know- I hope I haven't- then I could say about the Kindertransport. But I always felt that this was so nothing compared to the life that he experienced. And it wasn't nothing. And he's- he himself started saying to me, "Don't be silly. You didn't have a good time. It was awful for you." But it took him years to start. Not until I started telling my story. Until then, he always thought, oh, he saw the Faires' house. And you know, we stayed in the guest bedroom then when we went there, not in the old maid's room. And I didn't say it, then. And, you know, he said, "Oh, you're- you were so lucky. You were so lucky." And I didn't feel lucky. And when he heard my story, until I started telling it, then he said, "You weren't so lucky." And then he really understood, but not until then.

*So when did you start telling your story?*

Do you want this whole background if I said to you?

*So, let's go- we can come back to it. We need to find out first about your career a little bit. And then tell us- come back to when you started talking.*

**[02:41:49]**

Okay. Well, I was an ordinary teacher. And my children went to a local primary school in Wembley, and they had friends who lived across the road. They were- they were the children of the Danish First - whatever it was, in the embassy. And they were in school, and they were friends of my children. And they were taken to a language centre with a lot of Indian children. And Judy said to them, "Where do you go? You go every morning." And they said, "We go to a- Dodi and Trine said, "We go to a language centre." And Judy told me, and I asked Dodi and Trine who just lived across- "What do you do there?" And they said, "We're learning English. But the headmaster sent me home after he heard me say *cor blimey*," he said, "but the Indian children are still going there." And- so, I was very interested. And I went to the education officer and I said, "I came as a child of nine to England without knowing any English and I had to learn. I would be very interested in working with children, who've now been expelled by Idi Amin from Uganda, and from Kenya. And I would like to perhaps teach English." And the, the- our Director of Education happened to have a mother who had both been born in Austria and had married somebody in England, and had become a Christian. But he had a Jewish mother. So, he said to me- have I said where I saw- what I first saw?

**[02:43:59]**

*No.*

I haven't begun the story at the right place. Okay, so, I became an English teacher. And then I started to work in the language so- where do I begin? Oh, and one day when I was supervising a teacher- do you want that?

*Yeah.*

I had to visit her in a school. And there I saw in a Brent school, in the corridor, a picture saying, "Ha-ha, we're killing the Jews." And there were these soldiers with Nazi bands that the children had drawn, and she exhibited it in the corridor. And I was supervising a teacher

from the language service, where I was then an advisory teacher, working with teachers who are allocated to schools in Brent to work with teachers in the classroom, teaching them English, as a second language. Well now, speakers to other languages being politically correct. And I couldn't interfere in any way because I was just supervising a teacher there, who was not the class teacher, but was one of our language teachers. But the Director of Education, when I said to him, you know, "Is this what you want to see going on in our schools?" said, "Do something about it." And I didn't know what to do.

**[02:45:45]**

So, I wrote to Martin Gilbert, who sent me maps of all the camps. And I started asking around, who could I ask? And then I heard of somewhere where Trudy Gold, and Shirley Murgraff had an office, and were working. And I went there. And I said, "Can you help me in any way?" And they said, "Would you like to speak? Would you like us to come and speak to teachers?" And I went back to the Director of Education, and he sent a note to every teacher in Brent, every secondary school in Brent, saying would they release their head of history, and somebody who could come for a lecture on the Holocaust to the Brent language service where somebody who had come on a Kindertransport and was married to a survivor would speak to them. And the notices went out. Shirley Murgraff and-

*Trudy Gold.*

Trudy Gold came to speak. And we had twenty teachers in secondary schools, and all of them came, and three teachers came from the borough of Brent, not one of them was a head of English. They were teachers who could be spared because the school had to pay for a supply teacher to take that whole afternoon where these teachers were being released. So, it wasn't important enough in Brent schools, to send anybody to hear about the Holocaust, in the 19- whenever this-

*When was this?*

**[02:47:46]**

I think that it must have been in the late 1970s. And at that time, I had- was working in the Brent language service. And I had been sent by Brent for a year in Ealing College, to learn how to teach English to speakers of other languages. ‘Was a wonderful year, and I had a very, very nice tutor, who encouraged me and was- became a friend. And he was responsible for me later being able to be an examiner of the course that I had taken. So later- later in my career I was working in the Brent Language Service, with helping with the courses that were given. There were other people also in the language service, giving courses for teachers who were working in schools and needed to learn more about being language teachers. Many of them were teachers from Gujarat, where most of the children who were in Brent came from. But we had to- I and the Director of- who was working in that area from the education office, we had to interview teachers. And at that point, we could only accredit teachers from two Indian universities, because the rest didn't have the right qualifications. But that's beside the point. So-

*So you started in a way that- this Holocaust school education in Brent in that- at that time?*

And it died at that point. And very much later, many years later, I was still involved in some degree through Trudy Gold and so on. And I was asked to speak at a conference. And at this conference which was- had many teachers from other countries, there was somebody from Germany. And he said, “Could I speak to your husband?” And, I said, “I don't know.” It was a three day conference. And I was just one of the many speakers. And I said, “I'll ask him.”

**[02:50:28]**

This was day two. And my husband said, “Yes. If he really wants to know, I will speak to him.” And he did. And at the interval of this conference, we saw a young man, and he had a badge on him, that said, ‘Stephen Smith Beth Shalom’. And Avram spoke to him and he said, “Stephen Smith doesn't sound very Jewish.” And he said, “No, we're starting a Holocaust education centre in Nottingham.” And so, he said, “Can I interview you both for the new centre? And we said, “When?”, and he being Stephen said, “Tomorrow.” So, the next day he came with a photographer, and he saw pictures of- that I had got of my family, and a picture of Avram as a miner - because the only way he could get out of the DP camp was to be a coalminer in Cowdenbeath, which is in the north of Scotland - until eventually he could go to Israel. And Stephen said, “Could I have these photos?” And I said, “No, they're too precious.



I don't want them sent back by post.” And Stephen said, “If I guarantee to bring them back, personally, can I have them?” And I said, “Okay.” And then when he brought them back, I said, “Oh, come and have a cup of coffee and biscuit.” And he said, “I can't because my parents are in the car.” And I said, “Well, bring your parents in.” And that's how we got to know the Smith family and were at the very first opening of Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre. Is that-?

**[02:52:36]**

*And that's when both of you started talking?*

No. For a long time I talked, and then Avram heard me, and I think Stephen persuaded him to speak. And when he came to the part where people were shot, and he jumped over the fence, he always needed a drink of water, just to be able to continue.

*Yeah.*

So, yeah. And we were very fortunate. We had two daughters. And when our youngest daughter got married, she said, the nicest part of being married is that Philip has a family. Because our children grew up with no parent- grandparents, no aunts and uncles, no cousins, and no family. Only Avram and myself. And a family meant a lot to Judy. And now I have four grandchildren. And I had two daughters. I have four grandchildren. And I have my first great-grandson, who has been named Leo Avram. I think that's my entire story. Is there anything you would like to ask before we finish?

*I have a few more questions. First of all, I wanted to ask you how- did you talk- you said Avram didn't talk. In the family was it at all a topic? I mean, you said the children were affected because there was no family, but-*

It wasn't spoken about. They knew that I had come to England and then lived with the Faires.

*Did they meet the Faires at all, the children?*

Rachel went once when she was little before Mr. Faires died. And then Mr. Faires died and Mrs. Faires was a widow and we- I didn't, you know, the children didn't – no. I- did I? I think I did take Rachel, before he died. I did. I took Rachel. That is correct. So she was the only one that met the Faires family. And then later as a widow, Mrs. Faires moved, and I visited her often.

*But you didn't speak. It wasn't spoken, I mean, explicitly spoken about, with the children, or?*

**[02:55:36]**

With our- with my children it was always there their whole life. Because Avram would say, “Oh, you haven't finished your food. Eat.” And then they would say, “Oh, now I've had enough.” And Avram would say, “Well, I'll finish it.” And if they said, “Oh, it's cold”, Avram would say something like- No, he wouldn't talk about the camp experience. He would say, “Oh, in Poland, the snow was so deep. And going to school, I was going in deep snow.” He would speak about life in Poland, but not about his camp experience - ever. Because he didn't want to- he said it would upset the children. And he never did.

*And what sort of identity that you want to give your children, your daughters?*

Oh, British! And Jewish. I mean to- to me, I felt that after what my parents had suffered, I could never marry anybody who was not Jewish. So though I had a totally English upbringing, I still felt I was Jewish. This- this was my identity. But I did feel English Jewish. I- a child once asked me in a school, “Who did you support when,” - because my mother was German, “Who did you support when the football match was in Brent?” I got asked this lately on Zoom. And I said, “Of course, I supported England.” “Did you see the match when England won?” And I said, “Yes, we walked down the hill and heard the cheering.” You know? These are the ask- the children ask when I speak to schools, or organisations who want to hear the story.

**[02:57:36]**

*Yeah. And you've done that a lot. You've spoken to- you must have spoken to hundreds of-*

I've spoken to a lot of schools. I've spoken to organisations like in- in the civil service. I've spoken to the- yeah. I- I spoke in a very interesting school, which is the Westminster Academy. And that was very interesting. And I spoke with the Chief Rabbi because somebody who very much wanted to speak there for HET, for the education, Holocaust Education-

*Trust.*

Trust, fell ill. And at the last minute, I lived near and they said would I do it. And so I did with the Chief Rabbi. And I've spoken to different departments in the Civil Service. I've spoken in the Home Office and in their- or what is it called? The department for- Oh, the Board of Trade. And I have spoken in interesting organisations, and places, and schools. And this academy was amazing. This was the Westminster Academy.

*Why? Why was it amazing?*

Because it had a Jewish and a Muslim founder. And I sat at the table and had you know, a meal with them after speaking and the chief rabbi who listened, and that was Rabbi Mirvis, listened to my story. And later, when I got my honorary graduation, the rabbi from Roehampton University came to that graduation. And I can show the pictures to children which show me with – was the name Wilson? Oh, with-

*The Duchess?*

No, no. With- I can tell you in one minute.

*Let's look at- don't move, don't move-*

Do you know who wrote the Tracy Beaker stories? So, what's her name Wilson?

*Yeah. [sound break, Bea concerned about microphone disconnection] Not yet, not yet. Don't move yet. We will- we will check it a bit later.*

**[03:00:16]**

Her, and Benjamin Zephaniah, who is a black poet, who the children hear his poems in school. And I have a picture of Jacqueline Wilson.

*Jacqueline-*

Wilson. Wilson, who wrote the Tracy Beaker stories, and who was the person who gave me my Honorary Degree, when I had to speak in the Royal Festival Hall. And Benjamin Zephaniah was also there. And when we had lunch in the same room with Benjamin Zephaniah and Jacqueline Wilson, they took- were kind enough to take a photo with me which I could keep and which would interest children in their education.

*And Vera, you've spoken to so many schools, so I have two questions. First of all, what motivates you to do it? And secondly, what is the message, your main message you- you want to impress or give?*

What motivates me is the world today. And I have supported of Alf Dubs in his work and Barbara Wils- Barbara Winton in setting up Safe Passage, which is to help children who are stuck without their families somewhere in Europe. And Alf was going to get a Bill through Parliament, and then it was blocked. And I have lobbied poor Lord Pickles where- on four occasions wherever I meet him. In the Wiener Library I lobbied him, where he was there with, oh, the MP from the Labour Party. Alf [sic] Pickles speaks, and beginning with B - Ed Balls. They were there. And I always corner Ed Balls and, and to say- "Can't you-?" And they speak together very often as the Jewish representatives in Parliament. And I think that Safe Passage was doing something for children who today are facing the same awful situation, even much worse, than I faced. And I was rescued by England. And I keep saying that England should do something that they did for me, for other children, who are suffering more than I suffered, and who are somewhere in Europe, where they have families in England who are willing to welcome them, and to take responsibility for them.

**[03:03:16]**

So, I feel very strongly about that. And also, I think that Holocaust education was- is so important. Because the Holocaust was unique. Terrible, terrible things are happening in the

world, different groups have turned against each other, dreadful things where people are murdered and suffer, and we should know, and give refuge. And now it's been Afghanistan. And we haven't done enough. And I feel myself completely English if we, who haven't been able to do enough. And I think that education is so important. That children know that in their classes there will be refugee children, and that they need their friendship, how I had friendship as a child, which made a huge difference to me. And that they could see that there were children who didn't know much English, and that I once hadn't much English. And also to encourage children to speak their mother tongues in their homes, so that they don't forget their language. And I say, "Do as I say, and unfortunately not as I did. You'll be different and grow up speaking two languages. So that, that's much more helpful, helps your brain to develop better, and it's much more useful to know more than one language, and be proud of your own home language, as well as the language that we now speak." And I think Holocaust education is immensely important. And I'm so grateful to HET and to the Holocaust Memorial Trust which keep the Holocaust alive. And JW3, where people who are not Jewish as well as Jewish people come for lectures. And what we are trying to do to show that not all Jews are millionaires, not all the false information that goes round, that there are poor Jews, and rich Jews and ordinary Jews. And that we're no different to any other people, and how awful it is to victimise any group. And when that teacher saw me no longer as Vera, but as 'the Jews', to see any group of people as 'the something', according to their colour, or their race, or their nationality and not to see them as fellow human beings is so important.

**[03:06:25]**

*Vera, what do you think of the- the Holocaust Memorial?*

I have mixed feelings. I really have mixed feelings. I think that the Holocaust is being shown in the Imperial War Museum, where schools are being taken. And there's a new gallery open there. And there's also going around the country, an exhibition of survivors and their pictures. And there is education work going. I don't know whether that's the right place, and whether it's even that necessary at this moment. But I'm not saying that it's wrong. I don't know. But I'm ambivalent, and that's my answer.

*Ok. Vera, I know-*

Off the record-

*When- we're not- don't tell me anything off the record because we are on record.*

Okay.

**[03:07:30]**

*But on record, I was going to ask you something else about whether you feel that for both you and Avram, getting older and talking about the- whether it became more difficult or, for Avram, you know-*

Avram-

*We should say that-*

Avram actually spoke because a Holocaust survivor had been asked to speak in as- in a synagogue. And that was the last time that Avram spoke, and he got such a lovely letter from the minister, who had brought a group of children there from a public school I remember. And, oh, this was organised by a group who, every year do Holocaust education. And they do it in- it started- Oh, God. Bernice Krantz and – oh, the other person who- both people that have become my friends. And it was they that asked Avram to speak to a school. And every year they do this in- it started in Northwood Synagogue, and it's now in- done all- in many other places in the country, for schools. And that was the last time that my husband spoke. And I only find it more difficult, because I can make mistakes because I get older, and can make mistakes. I can remember what I want to say. But never did I used to make mistakes in speaking when I was younger. And now I can. For instance, when I'm asked what was the population of the Jews in Klatovy. And now, at this moment, I can remember there were 300. I might forget. And I would forget that the Jews were in Klatovy for over 200 years. And that sort of thing I could get wrong. But my- not my personal story,

*No.*

- but actual facts. And that's a worry.

*Yeah.*

But I will go on doing it as long as I'm asked. And I was very pleased. The last email I've had was Rebecca from the Holocaust Education Trust, who said, would I speak to a primary school where her sister is a teacher. So I felt that was a compliment. And that's one to come.

*So you're- you're continuing the work.*

**[03:10:25]**

As long as I feel that I'm coherent enough, and don't make many more mistakes. But I always say to the children, "Look, you know, I'm old, and you have to expect that I can make a mistake."

*Yeah.*

And I say that.

*Vera, just- just one more thing is, you said about 'we' and identity. How would you define yourself today in terms of your identity?*

English Jewish. No doubt.

*And home? Where would you- where is your home?*

Sixteen East Hill, this is my home. My husband and I lived here for sixty-one years. My youngest daughter was born in this house. This is where at some point I will have to leave. Because I only have help for one and a half hours at the moment in the morning, to help me get dressed, and to have a shower. And today, nobody came. And I rang up and said, "I've already dressed. And this is very important to me. I still need some help." And I was given somebody at the last minute, who did come and who you met, but wasn't here when I had to wash and dress myself, and make my own breakfast, and wash up. And then I wanted to prepare for you. And I asked her to arrange the flowers, which you've seen behind me,

because they were brought to me yesterday. And I felt that with my arthritic hand I couldn't arrange them and I'd left them in water to be arranged. So that's why I very much wanted some help. And for half an hour before you got here, and found me ready and dressed, I needed my flowers arranging.

*Yeah. Vera is there anything you would like to add which we haven't discussed or, which I haven't asked you?*

**[03:12:28]**

No, I think that you've been very patient, have spent a long time. And I thank you for interviewing me so kindly.

*Well, thank you very much. But I- wait, wait, wait, wait- one, one more thing I was going to say. Whether you have- I asked about the message for the children. Have you got a message for us today? Vera, have you got a message for anyone who might watch this interview?*

Yes. Only to think about what is happening in the world, and to feel for people who have been persecuted. The way that the Jews have been persecuted, our persecution's been for centuries. Others may be more recent. It doesn't make it feel any the less for them. And to not- when I went to visit Nicholas Winton, I went for the BBC with Natasha Kaplinsky to visit Nicholas Winton, he asked me, "Why are you here?" And I said, "Because I'm speaking about the Holocaust education." And he said, "History is something that children don't learn from. None of us learn from history. If you teach them to have empathy with other people, that's what children need to learn." And I've never forgotten that. It was for his 105th birthday that I went to visit him at home.

*He's a- he's also an example of a- a difference one person can make.*

Pardon?

*Nicholas Winton is also an example of the difference a person-*

One person can make. Definitely.



*Okay, Vera, thank you so much for this interview. And for giving us the time. Just one second.*

Okay. [Shall I put my feet up again? That will be on the tape.]

**[End of interview]**

**[03:14:55]**

**[03:15:07]**

**[Start of photographs and documents]**

*Bea: Today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November [2021] and we're looking at Vera Schaufeld's photos.*

*Vera, please to tell us about your- the two photos we see.*

**Photos 1 and 2**

Well, these are the two photos of my two grandfathers. The one on the right is my mother's father, who was born in Germany in the town of Iserlohn, where I think he was a very religious man, and very connected to the synagogue in Iserlohn, and had some kind of shop. And that's where my mother came from. He died unfortunately when she was very young.

*And his name?*

Pardon?

*His name?*

Ah-

*Don't worry, we'll look it up. It's at the back. Not- not now. Okay. Who is on the left?*

On the left? Is my father's father, Adolf Löwy, who was born in Klatovy in the courtyard of the synagogue, where his brother was the teacher, and later prospered and had a match factory and a brick factory in Klatovy. My father grew up in Klatovy and he had a brother

and three sisters. They were in the Hebrew school. But unfortunately, there was some problem and his older sister, his older sister died. And therefore, my father, his brother Edgar, and his two sisters, then went to state schools. And my father says he could never have been a lawyer if he hadn't been educated in a Czech school, within the Czech education system.

*Thank you, Vera. Thank you.*

**[03:17:15]**

### **Photos 3 and 4**

These two pictures are of my parents. My father, Eugen Löwy, in the Austrian Army. He was an officer in the First World War. The second picture is of my mother as a medical student in the University of Heidelberg.

*Yes, please, Vera.*

### **Photo 5**

This picture shows my mother as a medical student in Heidelberg, with her cousin on the left Julius [inaudible] and Julius's best friend Dix de Pencier who came from Holland to join her in Heidelberg. And I don't know who the other lady medical student is.

*And who was Dix de Pencier?*

Dix de Pencier was the best friend of my mother's cousin, Julius. And when Julius couldn't give Zionist lectures, Dix de Pencier, not a Jew, would give the Zionist lecture in his place. And he and his wife came on a rally to- on a car rally to Monte Carlo at the time where Czechoslovakia had been invaded. And they stopped on their way to Klatovy, which had been invaded when Holland was still a free country. And they packed into their car a lot of the precious things that I have belonging to my parents. And Julius was a doctor in Holland, who made the medical dictionary in collaboration, I think, with his friend. So when Queen Juliana of Holland came to Israel, where he went after the war, and had worked in that hospital, I think in Jerusalem, and had retired, she went to his house in Jerusalem and visited him.

*And where is your mother on this picture?*

My mother is on the left. And the friend is on the right.

*Thank you, Vera.*

**Photo 6**

This is a picture of my parents' wedding, April 1929. And it shows their entire family.

*And where was it? It says here, Berlin.*

Ah, okay.

*Possible?*

Oh, yes.

**[03:20:08]**

*Yes, Vera.*

**Photo 7**

This is my favourite wedding picture of my parents, and I like it very much.

*Thank you. Yes, Vera.*

[Checking the date: Two years old ?]

*Thirty-two]*

**Photo 8**

This is a picture of me in 1932.

*And where?*

In Klatovy, in now the Czech Republic, in Czechoslovakia, the town that's going down from Pilsen towards the Sudetenland.

*Thank you.*

**Photo 9**

This picture is of me in my- sitting in front of my grandfather's house, in Klatovy in 1934.

*Do you remember the address?*

No.

*Yes, please.*

**Photo 10**

This is my short uncle Rudolf, my mother's brother, and his tall wife, my Auntie Else, who visited us in Klatovy many times. And this is them standing in our not so beautiful garden.

*In which year? It says 1934.*

In 1934, taken in 1934.

*Thanks.*

**Document 1**

This is a visiting card that I had made for me as a child, and which I was very proud of.

*Okay, Vera,*

**Photo 11**

This is a photograph I'm very fond of. I think I was about five years old. And this is my mother's mother, my grandmother, Henriette Leseritz, who visited us very often in Klatovy.

**Photo 12**

This is a picture, which I believe was among the many pictures that Nicholas Winton took of Czech children, and which were, I think, sent into the English press, for families to choose a child who they would have to live with them until their parents were able to leave the Czech-Czechoslovakia and come and join their children, or join their children who could be sent to them with the 50 pounds that they'd provided to the English government. And this is the picture that my guardians, Mr And Mrs Leonard Faires of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, saw when they chose me to come and live, for a short time, they thought, till my parents could come, because they also had an only daughter called Betty, who was three years older than me.

*Thank you.*

**[03:23:15]**

### **Photo 13**

This is a picture taken of me in 1939 on my way from Prague to England. And when we disembarked at the Hook of Holland from the train, waiting for me was my mother's sister, Auntie Sarah, and my parents' very good friend Mrs de Pencier who I called Auntie Mien, who was the wife of Uncle Dick - Dix de Pencier who was my mother's student friend. So, here I am and Auntie Mien has given me this doll which I'm taking with me on the boat to England.

### **Photo 14**

This is another picture taken 1st of June 1939 at the Hook of Holland. And I think this picture shows me being given the doll, and the other picture shows me sadly walking away to get onto the boat, clutching my doll.

### **Photo 15**

This is a picture taken shortly after I arrived in England with my extremely kind guardian and very unusual man, Mr. Leonard Faires and his daughter, my lifelong friend, Betty Faires who's holding a horse. And Betty, who was much more sporty than me, and a much, much better rider. And this is one of my first experiences in being in England.

*Thank you.*

[03:25:19]

**Photo 16**

This picture was taken in, I think, the summer of 1939. And I'm with a dog called Patch. And it's taken in front of the Faires' house, which was in Hospital Road, and it was known as 'The White House', Hospital Road. And that's when I was fairly newly arrived.

*Thank you.*

**Photo 17**

This is another picture taken shortly after I came to Bury with Betty sitting on the lawn, which in the summer was turned into a tennis court. And my playing wasn't nearly as good as Betty's. So I was an umpire and Betty and her cousin would be playing tennis on the lawn. Ah. During the summer of 1939 I was evacuated with Mrs Faires and Betty to the Cotswolds. And Gertrude Oppenheimer, my mother's cousin, visited us there. So there's Gertrude in the picture.

*Thank you.*

**Photo 18**

This is a picture taken shortly after the war of my guardians. Mr and Mrs Faires.

*Vera, yes, who is on the picture, please?*

**Photo 19**

Ah, this picture's taken I think in about 1946 at the- at the East Anglian School for Girls. And we were boarders there during the war and these are my friends. I'm on the left of the picture. And those are three of my closest friends. And we're just lying on the lawn in the school grounds.

*Thank you.*

[03:27:36]

**Photo 20**

This is a picture of me in 1947 in the garden-

*With the-?*

Hold- holding the Faires' cat.

**Photo 21**

*Yes.*

This is a picture taken when I went a student representative from my college to a student conference in Bangor, in Wales. And we spent a day in Dublin. So the picture's taken in Dublin. And I'm the fourth on the right next to the tall man.

*Thank you, Vera.*

**Photo 22**

This is a picture taken when I went on Shnat sherut in 1951 to Kibbutz Nitzanim in Israel.

And this is a picture taken of our group when we went on a [inaudible].

What does it say? "*From the sheep and me.*"

*Yes, what does- tell us first who is on the picture?*

But then I want- can I look what it says - afterward?

*I'll tell you what it says.*

**Photo 23**

OK. This is a picture of Avram, as a shepherd, on the kibbutz.

*And on the back side it says?*

And on the back it says:

*“With- with much love from the sheep and me.”*

And Avram has put on the back, “With much love, from the sheep and me.”

**Photo 24**

*Yes, please.*

Is that a wedding picture?

*No, I don't think so.*

This is a picture of Avram and me in the kibbutz in Israel.

**Photo 25**

This is the wedding picture of our wedding in Nitzanim.

*What date?*

I'm trying to think. When did we marry, in 1950? I think 1952, I think.

*Okay. Thank you.*

**Photo 26**

This is a picture of Avram and me on our way back to England from Israel.

*Where was it taken?*

It's taken in Germany, where my mother's cousin Ernst was representing the Israeli government, as a lawyer for Heirless properties with IRSO, and his wife, Hilde took this picture of us on our way from Israel back to England, we stopped in Germany, trying to get Avram permission to enter England.

**[03:30:39]**



**Photo 27**

This is a picture that I'm fond of, of my husband laughing and myself.

*And when was it taken?*

I honestly don't know.

*In London?*

Taken in London, at a happy time in our lives, I think.

**Photo 28**

This is a picture was taken when I got my Honorary Doctorate from Roehampton University, and had to speak to students in the Royal Festival Hall. On the left is the Rabbi from Roehampton University, and on my right is my daughter Judith.

**Photo 29**

This is another picture of my graduation when I got my Honorary Doctorate at Roehampton. And there on my left is my daughter Judith, and her husband, Philip. And on the right is her son Benjamin, and her daughter, Elena.

**Photo 30**

This is a picture taken in 2019. Again, like my Honorary graduation, sadly, after Avram's death. And it shows Prince William giving me an MBE for work in education, and in Holocaust education. And I was really happy to hear him say that he would make sure that his children learned about the Holocaust.

**[03:32:29]**

**Photo 31**

This picture is taken from a dinner held by the Holocaust Education Trust. And I'm sitting in the middle row, third from the right. Is it third from the right?

*Yes.*

**Photo 32**

*Yes, please, Vera.*

This is a picture taken by the Holocaust Memorial Trust. And it was shown outside the Festival Hall. And it has my husband sitting, looking at pictures of his family. And I'm showing pictures of my family.

I want to read the poem.

*I know I haven't forgotten.*

But you don't have to have this light for it, do you?

*No, we need something else anyway- we'll do it next-door.*

**Photo 33**

This is a picture taken in my garden for an exhibition of survivors and their families organised by the Duchess of Cambridge. And I'm standing beside[s] my granddaughter Jackie, and my great-grandson who is called Leo Avram and is just a year old, sitting on her lap. And at the moment this exhibition is one of the pictures in the Imperial War Museum, which will move around the country and maybe later even go abroad, of survivors, again, and their families.

*Thank you, Vera.*

**Photo 34**

This is a family picture of my father's family. Sitting with my grandfather, Adolf Löwy is his wife Eva, who sadly died before I was born. At the back on the right of the photo, is my Auntie Klaudie, who married her husband standing behind her Bohumil Mahler, who is the cousin of Gustav Mahler, the composer. And then there's my father next to him in the centre. Then my Uncle Edgar, his brother, and my father's other sister, Greta. And I think that must be Greta's husband sitting in front of my father's brother. My Uncle Edgar. I think I'm right.

*Where- where and when was it taken?*

In Klatovy - long time before I was born.

*Thank you, Vera.*

**[03:35:39]**

**Document 2**

This is-

*Yes.*

This is the passport that I came to England with. But it was taken the year before when I went with my parents to Switzerland. So the date on it is 1938.

**Document 3**

This is my passport that I came to England with when I came in June- 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1939.

**Document 4**

*Yes, Vera. What do we see there? The stamps? We see the stamps of your arrival in Britain.*

Yeah. I left home on the 1st and I arrived on the 2<sup>nd</sup> [June 1939].

*Thank you.*

**Photo 35**

This is the last picture that I had of my family. It was taken in Prague, just before England declared war, and it shows my mother, father and my grandmother. And underneath is written in my- I can say it in my very bad Czech. “[??]k našemu dalinguu “To our darling.”

*Thank you.*

**Document 5**

*Yeah.*

This is one of the earliest letters that I got from my family. It's written on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1939. And in English, it says first from my mother, *“My deeply beloved [Mädi?], What are you doing? Hopefully you're sleeping well and have sweet dreams. We spent most of the day, because of a holiday, near the water. It was very nice and refreshing. But it would have been much nicer with you also there. I took your dear letters with us and read them all the time. Also, to Dr Holz, and to Dr Arnstein. Did you find the present from the Baden? A lovely bathing bag. Please give Pamela my greetings and I embrace you heartily and kiss you in-the millionth times from your very, very, very loving Mummy.”* Then from my father, *“Beloved [???Dajulinka], for today only a lot of the sweetest kisses, Your Daddy.”* And then, *“My Dear Věruška, I'm glad to hear that it's all well with you. stay healthy. Lots and lots of hearty greetings and kisses from your old friend, Frant Arnstein.”* *“Dear Vera. I hope that you will remember me in spite of being so busy. Kisses. Do have a good time.”*

Thank you, Vera.

**[03:39:18]**

*Yes, Vera. What do we see here? What is in this box?*

**Document 6 [Object 1?]**

This box contains all the letters translated by friends in Czech and in German, and even in English at the end, from my parents as long as they could write to me and my nurse and my grandmother, and I think my aunt and uncle's letters. And that box is full of letters from home, which I had nearly every day until they couldn't write any more to England.

*Vera, thank you - so far. I say thank you so much, but we're going to hear now some of your poems to finish this interview. Thank you.*

*Yes, Vera, please tell us about the poems you're going to read.*

**[03:40:08]**

This poem was written by my husband, Avram Schaufeld, born Alfred Schaufeld in Chorzów Poland in 1926. And went through very many concentration camps before he was finally liberated. And, it was read, to our surprise, by a Member of Parliament in 2018 on Holocaust Memorial Day, so it's now recorded in Hansard.

***Do not ask***

*Do not ask*

*How did you survive?*

*Because this is a question that causes me pain  
and brings back memories...*

*I know you mean well and are sympathetic*

*and would like me to talk to your youth group*

*or to your son who's writing a paper on the Holocaust*

*and I could help him with the subject [which is not-] which is a part of his exams.*

*You add with a smile, no amount of reading is the same  
as talking to a survivor.*

*From your eager expression, I can guess  
what you expect of me.*

*About how our bravery and our faith in God  
helped us to survive.*

*I lie and say that I'm too busy,*

*that I have other commitments,*

*and quickly, take my leave and turn away*

*So that you do not see the hurt in my eyes.*

*Do not ask me why.*

And another poem that he wrote, which is, I think, really relevant. It's a short poem, which he called 'Identity'.

***Identity***

*In my past, I was the holder of a Polish birth certificate.*

*A German Kennkart[e], KZ number 178610,*

*Displaced Person's Identity Document,*

*a Polish passport, an Israeli passport,  
an Alien Registration paper, a British passport.*

*What am I?*

*Please, could someone tell me?*

**[03:42:29]**

*Thank you so much, Vera. And Vera, do you think the first poem in particular reflected how he felt about-?*

At the time. And much later, when he heard me speak, and visited Beth Shalom with me, he decided that he would tell his story. But then, when he came to the part where, from the death march he was taken with other people who they said could no longer walk and he faced the firing squad, he managed to jump over a cemetery wall, lost his wooden shoes in the snow and lay there barefoot hidden by a tombstone, while he had people screaming and crying, and being murdered. And that was one of the many experiences that he went through. Just one of many.

*Thank you.*

*Yes, tell us about these poems now.*

The first poem is a poem that I wrote because we went to lay Stolperstein[e] for my mother's brother, my uncle Rudolf, and his wife Auntie Elsa. And we laid them outside their flat in Berlin. And I went with my- a daughter, her- her daughter Elena, my husband's parents [sic], and very good friends who drove us there and went with us.

### ***Completion***

*A lifetime ago on Klatovy station,  
sitting on a swing, hearing the old joke,  
your [Auntie] Rudolf an [Uncle] Elsa are coming,  
Small uncle, and tau- and tall aunt arriving,  
bringing amazing gifts from distant Berlin,  
a round doll's house with street lights at its centre.*

*A huge rocking horse with thick mane and proud tail,  
a red car to sit on, to pedal and drive.  
Sitting on a sad train full of children  
Parents long [?last] seen shut off by barriers.  
Suddenly in the corridor, Uncle Rudolf, Auntie Elsa  
riding through Germany from border to border  
Magically familiar laughing and joking.  
Their presence here the best gift of all.  
Yesterday, making a long postponed phone call  
giving names, dates of birth, last known address, hearing  
Second of March 1943 Uncle Rudolf, Auntie Elsa deported to Auschwitz  
No one left to remember them.  
Just me,  
finally able to mourn.*

**[03:45:39]**

*Thank you, Vera. When did you write this?*

Quite a long time ago in a writers' group. And I think there are two more. Do you mind?

No.

Three more.

*No, absolutely. We want to hear your poems.*

Okay.

***In Bury St Edmonds, 1941***

*In September, picking raspberries, she spoke to me  
and for a moment, I was whole again.  
Rejected by Matron for my budding spots, blooming with chickenpox  
I was returned to her*

*touching again the days when in my uncle's orchard,  
we picked ripe fruit and I, a princess, held court.*

This was in Bury, picking raspberries with my guardian. And then-

### ***Rationing***

*Waiting in a queue, holding a coupon book,  
looking, wanting, choosing slowly,  
the sweet taste of chocolate,  
comforting, healing,  
images of home far away.  
Distant love  
Almost tasted.*

Last one. This is- poem's written when we came back to England from Israel. And we had lodgings in a single room and- in England's Lane off Haverstock Hill. And we had a German Jewish landlady called Mrs. Brown- Mrs. Brightman.

### ***Off Haverstock Hill, 1954***

*Short, plump, elderly German Jewish woman  
wandering into the shared kitchen  
sniffing at my cooking, saying,  
How can you eat such food Herr Schaufeld?  
Come. Have some of my good chicken.  
Mrs. Brightman marching into our small, rented room,  
changing of the light bulb to a lower wattage,  
turning off the electric fire, shouting,  
I can't afford this waste!  
Leaving me chilled.  
Marking exercise books in semi-darkness.  
Taking a long holiday, trusting us to manage her flat.  
Returning, only to murmur accusingly,  
What have you done with my dressing gown, Herr Schaufeld?  
Before seeing it, through bleary eyes, hanging on its accustomed hook.*



*Playing bridge half the night sustained by endless strong cups of black coffee  
One cigarette left from another  
A lone survivor, planted in England's Lane.*

Enough.

*Vera, thank you so much for these wonderful poems, for giving us the time, for sharing your story and your photographs. And - thank you so much.*

And thank you for listening, and for being so patient. And having such a long visit and a second visit to endure. So, thank you both, you, and very kind photographer.

*Thank you.*

Your name?

*Frank*

And Frank. Very kind photographer.

**[03:49:36]**