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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

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<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Fisher
<b>Forename:</b>	Frederick
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	28 July 1909
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Ustriky Dolne, Austria

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	16 November 2006
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Marian Malet
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	1 hour and 46 minutes

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

**TAPE: 139**

**NAME: FREDERICK FISHER**

**DATE: 16 NOVEMBER 2006**

**LOCATION: LONDON**

**INTERVIEWER: MARIAN MALET**

**TAPE 1**

**Tape 1: 0 minute 11 seconds**

MM: Frederick Fisher. 16 November 2006. Interviewer: Marian Malet.

Right. I am with Frederick Fisher; the date is 16 November 2006 we are at his home 5 Allendale Avenue, N3 3PJ. I am Marian Malet.

Could you please tell me your name at birth?

FF: My name actually- you have one name and I had a double name actually Gold-Fisher. So, it's actually is on my birth certificate.

MM: Right. So Frederick?

FF: No, it was not Frederick those days. Actually I was born in Austria-Hungary.

MM: Which town?

FF: A town, a little town. Austria-Hungary, actually we were Austrian nationals. My father actually was conscripted in the Austrian army. Anything further?

MM: Yes, can you tell me the name of the little town?

FF: Yes I can name. Actually in my passport it's only one name because the - it is a double name actually - Ustrzyki Dolne but when I had the passport taken here they said it's too long. Give me just one name, so the name was Dolne - D o l n e.

MM: Thank you. And what is the date of your birth?

FF: The 28<sup>th</sup> July 1909.

MM: Were you called Friedrich then?

FF: Actually- extraordinary. It was a little town – with a lot of Jewish people – they did not like the...calling the English name or German name or whatever it is or Hebrew name so actually they wrote Feivish, you could have chosen whatever you liked. So they have chosen Feivish, and then when I came to Germany they said, ‘Oh, funny name.’ Write Friedrich, extra he said ‘No, tell you something else, we call you Phoebus, that is the god of light.’ I said, ‘You know, my parents wouldn’t like it.’ My father was a very religious man – you know, the old fashioned. I said, ‘Call me the nearest name.’ Now when I came to Germany I was called Fred, I was Feivish...I had actually... as they liked it.

MM: I see...

**Tape 1: 3 minutes 31 seconds**

FF: Yeah. The name should have been Phoebus, actually.

MM: I see. Thank you- that’s very interesting. I didn’t realise...there was such a...

FF: It is yes...As a matter of fact in Hebrew – Shraga – light, god of light. Shraga is light actually, so in the olden days they weren’t as strict as they are today...

MM: indeed...

FF: ...everybody called Chaim you know, whatever they wanted to... This actually is the story of when I came to Germany; they said ‘Look, you have to settle down for something. We call you what you like.’ And I said ‘I like Phoebus.’ My father said ‘What?!’ the mention had caught you up, so they called me what they liked and they called me mainly actually at school Fred.

MM: I see. Right. Good.

FF: Because if I would have told them Phoebus they would have (gestures surprise).

MM: It would have been pretty unusual. ...So what did your father do in Ustrzyki Dolne - in Galicia, we should say?

**Tape 1: 4 minutes 47 seconds**

FF: What he did...my mother actually was very active in business. She was the businesswoman. My father was a very learned man. He went on textile –

MM: Textiles?

FF: They had a textile shop.

MM: Ah yes. Was it a shop in the town?

FF: A shop in town, yes. It was not like Selfridges today here. A small shop.

MM: Yes. Yes.

FF: As far as I remember, it started that way...

MM: I see. Did your... was your father born...did your family come from the town?

FF: No, he was born in Dobromil nearby. My mother actually was born there.

MM: I see.

FF: Actually her parents and my grandfather, my mother's father came to Germany many years before. The financial situation was not very good in those days so...he went to Karlsruhe – to Karlsruhe, I don't know, I think there were some of our family members there.

MM: How old were you?

FF: I was 4 years of age.

MM: I see. Do you have any memories of Galicia?

**Tape 1: 6 minutes 19 seconds**

FF: Yes, I have. I remember when I start learning. I was about 3 years of age...You know they started early age...there's a Hebrew saying girsá deyankuso – 'What you learn when you are very young stays with you'.

MM: Indeed...

FF: I remember the day I started to learn you know...and the...whatever it was connected with reading. But the main thing we learnt were the prayers which was number one.

MM: Was it a Jewish school?

FF: No it wasn't a school; it was a Cheder in those days they started at the age of 3. And I remember going there for the first time and I was holding my father's hand, it was snow, it was full of snow. I had those long boots on. And I remember I was holding on and I tried to play games with the snow and this actually is how I started. The next move actually is when we went to Germany.

MM: Yes.

FF: I remember quite well, we stopped in Breslau.

MM: Aha.

FF: It was before the war.

MM: Before the First World War.

FF: Before the First World War, yes.

FF: We could go anywhere we wanted to. That was Breslau. I remember we stopped there and sat at the station. It was just something new to me you know. And then we went on to Karlsruhe, where I had my family there. My father used to be there in Karlsruhe. He used to come home for the Jewish Holy Days. That's why we were born there.

MM: I see, so you travelled by train...

FF: By train, yes.

MM: ...from... through Breslau to Karlsruhe?

**Tape 1: 8 minutes 24 seconds**

FF: It came to Karlsruhe, yes. And I remember when I started school there - it is very much in my memory still. And I remember even when war broke out, you know it was something extraordinary. And there you are.

MM: Good. May I...

FF: After the war, we had a choice. Either you become German properly, or you stay an Austrian, or you go... become Polish. I asked my father later 'Why did you want to become Polish?' because it was really inconvenient in those days. He said 'Look, Germany lost the war. Austria lost the war. Poland is a new country.'

MM: Ah...

FF: He said, 'That will be the right country. It would be better for all of us.' Of course it was not.

MM: Yes. Well...

FF: So we had to declare what we want to be, and that's what we stayed on.

**Tape 1: 9 minutes 35 seconds**

MM: Yes. Did you have brothers and sisters?

FF: Yes, we were seven children; three boys and four girls.

MM: And did you all go to Karlsruhe?

FF: We all went to Karlsruhe. Yes. We all stayed there. Actually I assume that my parents said 'This is our last place we want to be.' And there was quite a Jewish community and my grandfather lived there, my mother's father. He got in ill in 1911. He died in Frankfurt am Main so I had some connections with Frankfurt am Main which I am going to explain to you when we come to it.

MM: Yes. Where were you... what was your position in these seven?

FF: Pardon?

MM: What was your position? Were you the eldest or the youngest?

FF: No, I was number five.

MM: You were number five in the seven?

FF: I was number five. As a matter of fact there was one more child which my parents never spoke about. We just heard that it died at a very young age and my parents avoided to bring this subject so we never asked but I got to know from the members of our family.

MM: What would you describe the social class of your parents to be?

FF: A very religious family. Very well known. More Hebrew side than the educational side and so we had to make our own way.

**Tape 1: 11 minutes 18 seconds**

MM: Yes, and you went to school in Karlsruhe I imagine?

FF: Yes, in Karlsruhe.

MM: Did you go to a Jewish School?

FF: No there was no Jewish school there. There was only a non-Jewish school. In Frankfurt there was a Jewish school but I never... No there were no Jewish schools in Karlsruhe. They had about 3000 Jews in Karlsruhe in those days.

MM: Yes. Right.

FF: Yes, 3,000 Jews.

MM: And did your mother continue in business in Karlsruhe?

FF: She continued in business. She took after her father who I was told from people who knew from many years from Galicia that he was an extremely clever man and she actually...my mother, I have to praise her, but she actually was extremely clever in business and also she was not small-minded like in the olden days people were small-minded. I learnt a lot from her. Not that I was as clever as her but...I learnt a lot.

MM: And what did you did you do when you weren't at school, did you have hobbies?

FF: Yes, first of all, we had to go to Hebrew classes. That was compulsory actually from the state. We had to go twice a week. I remember even the name. Fräulein Hirsch her name was. We had to go there. Yes I had hobbies. I explained to you I

liked to draw and to paint and I liked to eat very much so. Although I had, I knew the Hebrew side as well, but I must admit the other side gripped me more, was much more to know... much more to know, and there you are, that is the way I continued.

MM: Did you got to synagogue every week?

FF: No, we went yes, not only - even weekdays.

MM: Weekdays as well?

**Tape 1: 13 minutes 47 seconds**

FF: Yeah, mornings and evenings, that was actually the trend in those days, if you want to be regarded as a religious Jew that was it. I mean it was not a matter to be forced, everyone went there. And what I actually complained those days, the teaching staff of the Hebrew side was very poor. Very poor. I understood it. There was physical contact, you know, if you didn't learn whatever the case was. But I was very much interested in literature. History – history - I was as a matter of fact, the boys used to ask me in school, 'Tell me, you know history so very well, is this part of your religion?' I said. 'No, it's part of the general knowledge.' And yes history I liked very much and reading. As a matter of fact, in later years I became a member of a book club before the new issues came into the public, six weeks before I got a book to read before to make myself sort of acquainted with what actually the book meant or what it wanted to say. And also I must say I was fascinated by the theatre and music.

MM: Yes. So you had a chance to go to the theatre when you were in Karlsruhe?

FF: Yes, in Karlsruhe to the opera, yes. As a matter of fact I had sometimes...my parents weren't allowed to know that I went to the opera but I loved it so much, so I had some body took me and I had to use some excuses, sometime: 'Where have you been so late at night?' Yes.

MM: They objected for you to be out so late, or they objected to you going to the opera?

**Tape 1: 16 minutes 1 second**

FF: No, not so late, they knew that I had to learn whatever. No, they didn't object at all, not at all. They have been in certain way intellectuals in the way we knew in those days.

MM: But would they have frowned on your going to the opera?

FF: They wouldn't have liked it. As a matter of fact I mentioned to you before I said, 'I would like to become a conductor.'

MM: Yes.

FF: The answer was when I said it, 'Did you say it?' I says 'Yes I did.' They said, 'What, do you want to be a goy?' That means that in Germany the main happenings



were on Shabbos, or Sunday or Yomtov so it was impossible. You couldn't be a religious Jew and be an opera conductor.

MM: Of course not. Yes, I understand.

FF: That's why ...always said it was no parnossa, you know, 'How many conductors are there? How many theatres are there? Not many.' he said. So you go into business.

MM: Tell me, what language was spoken in the family?

FF: The family actually funnily enough, they spoke Yiddish and German.

MM: Both?

FF: The Yiddish was better than the German.

MM: Yes?

FF: But this was an extraordinary sort of way of speaking a language. They very often spoke in Yiddish. And we never spoke Yiddish, the youngsters, we answered in German.

MM: I see.

FF: So actually I can speak Yiddish. I'm not perfect. Where did I learn it? Here in London. I came here, and I lived with a landlady she came from Russia G-d knows how many years ago and she could not speak English, or very badly so she spoke to me in Yiddish. So actually my Yiddish was on a higher grade in London than at home.

MM: I see, I see.

FF: And my brothers and sisters all were German.

MM: Now...you were...When did you move to Frankfurt am Main?

**Tape 1: 18 minutes 34 seconds**

FF: Frankfurt...I was first in Heidelberg – In Heidelberg there was a Jüdische Knabenschule they called it, and this gave you a way for higher things, and I always thought to myself, 'If all my other professions which I'd love to follow up won't do much good I would like to be a solicitor.'

MM: Solicitor?

FF: Yes, you know Rechtsanwalt in German. Of course then Hitler came and so on, and I went back to Karlsruhe and then I went to Frankfurt.

MM: Yes. And how old were you when you left school?

FF: I was about 15 – but - I went to evening classes. Actually my main education was in evening classes. I went regularly there. I had a beautiful handwriting, I liked it. And we had history, whatever goes with it which I thought my parents would rather like it better to be in a private sort of school than with the riff and raff... so that is...

MM: Yes, yes. So when you left...

FF: I went to Heidelberg and there was...Hitler came into power or pre-Hitler and it was an impossible task.

MM: Right.

FF: Can I...? Extraordinary we didn't become Germans. I told you why. We didn't become Austrians: Polish. At school I was chosen to read in front of the classes. I was the real German. I was actually [one of] 2 Jews in the class. One of them didn't speak to me because he didn't want people to know that he is Jewish, so he shunned me and I was always chosen to read in front of class, there were 40 children in those days. So I was proud of myself because just me...they were Germans for hundreds of years and so...

**Tape 1: 21 minutes 10 seconds**

MM: Marvellous.

FF: This is actually automatically the teacher called on me to read and I read very fluently. And I liked it. Also we spoke – there is in Karlsruhe the Badische dialect, you know.

MM: Ah ha...

FF: I spoke 2 dialects. First of all the Badische dialect that I grew up with and then Hochdeutsch – the proper German.

MM: Yes.

FF: And they always asked me, 'Which part of Germany do you come from? You speak two languages.' when they... I used to like the power of the word. Do you know?

MM: Yes.

FF: And I know for instance Schiller - I know it by heart. Sometime ago a woman spoke to me in London. German -she married a Jew then here – so I started to recite Schiller. She said, 'How do you know it?!' She couldn't understand you know - you're better than her. She said 'How do you know this? It is so many years!' You know Wilhelm Tell (recites part of this)...Old dreams.

MM: Marvellous. So you left school at 15 and did you go into...work with your mother?

FF: No, I went then to the Handelsschule [commercial college].

MM: Oh you went to the Handelsschule, yes, yes...? Trade school.

FF: Schule you know for...and also I like textile and I learnt...I was an expert then in textile, I liked it so much. So at this age...I remember I was with a firm and they were in textiles, you know in a big way. And I was all young and they came Christian Dieringer was a firm in Germany they made various textiles. So the boss called me out. The boss from the textile firm came once a year to speak to the customers. So he called me and said, 'What do you think of that and that and that?' I looked at it and I knew he couldn't understand it so...this is what I liked and I was an expert in the Handelsschule. I knew the books very well. I could...I used to write the books up. I liked it.

MM: Yes, yes. Did you...What sort of textiles were you working with?

**Tape 1: 24 minutes 17 seconds**

FF: With all sorts of textiles, but mainly the linen side of textiles. I knew who did that, who did that, and I could analyse the textile, which they liked very much. I could understand...you know, big firm. The boss asked me 'Here are 5 samples. What is your opinion?' He looked at me as if I were a little boy and I knew it, so...he shook his head. I knew the substance of the linen.

MM: Yes, I understand.

FF: He shook his head. I knew the substance of the linen and the whole thing came from nothing how you build it up into an article.

MM: Of course, of course.

FF: Not that I was a genius but I was just ordinary and I liked to...

MM: You were interested - very interested - of course.

FF: I liked it because I knew one thing: If you want to get on in life, you have to be better than the other one. And of course there was a lot of jealousy then. And I wanted to know, How does it start...how does the cotton start? What is the strength of the cotton? You know, it's an art.

MM: Of course. Do you...? When you were young did you go on holiday ever?

FF: No. No. Look, life was very hard in Germany. You know there were the old established firms which... we had no part in it and so on. I remember I went...the school sent me for a holiday to a Jewish family. Not only me - a lot of Jewish boys - it was a small place but I didn't...My first holiday was in 1937 or '36 I went to Blankenberghe in Belgium... but I didn't have much of a holiday. Not at all.

**Tape 1: 26 minutes 40 seconds**

MM: Right. Do you recall any anti-Semitic experiences in Germany?

FF: Very much so. Very much so.

MM: Can you tell us about that?

FF: I would like to tell you a fair bit. You see, the Germans... there were two Jews in my class. One Jew, their parents had a Jewish hotel and every six months you had to give your name, address, what religion. I said Israelite. He said, 'Frei religiös' - 'No religion.' So the other boys who were mostly anti-Semites... You know we had to go Shabbos to school - we were exempt from writing. He wrote so to show he's not a Jew. And they said, 'You are not allowed to write on the Sabbath.' And he said, 'I didn't.' There was a lot of anti-Semitism - born anti-Semitism. And I remember there was a boy and I remember his name, he was about 12, Losche - I remember his name. He was a terrible anti-Semite. I had also quite a few friends amongst the boys.

**Tape 1: 28 minutes 4 seconds**

And he always tried to pick a fight with me although I'm not a fighting type. One day, and I remember it quite well, I was 12 or 13, at the morning break you know 10 o'clock coffee break... Suddenly I saw a circle of boys so he must have told them he's going to attack me. You see he wanted... a hero. And I was playing with the other boys and suddenly he looked like he came in like a hero - walked straight direct on to me. I knew he wanted to show that how strong he is and that he's beating up a Jew. But I was quicker than him; I knew there was only one way. He didn't realise that I was going to attack him and I attacked him in such a way that I threw him to the floor. Most of the boys became friends.

MM: Ah.

FF: It's extraordinary you know. I was in the Handelsschule. Next to me was a boy - he was very dim. I knew him 3 years. One day, Hitler was not in power yet but he was sort of coming on, there was a Dr. Goldmann, he was a teacher at the Handelsschule. After he finished school he was hitting the boy terribly. I didn't know why. When the war finished ... or maybe before... Yes, my son brought me a book. Lord Russell of Liverpool wrote a book and I looked through and suddenly I stopped and saw a picture; it was him. He was classified as a war criminal. He never spoke to me actually, he never attacked me and they hanged him. He was a minor official. And it was very unpleasant thing to know.

**Tape 1: 30 minutes 31 seconds**

But once actually he saved me. Before we left Germany there was a Jewish café in Frankfurt am Main - Falke. After Shabbos was out all the Jews assembled there. One day, the door closed - Razzia. That meant the SS came, checked the passport and asked questions, 'What are you doing here?' - And so on. And if they'd been searched they said we can stay or go, so I left. By the door, stood one, not in uniform. And he gave a stamp on the hand, you are free to go. When he saw me he turned around he didn't want to know and I walked out. If he wanted to there were outside lorries, you know, packing Jews in and so on and he let me go. That was another case and another

one which was rather worse. The Jewish café, the Falke, you know we all assembled there, Where are you going and so on...Where are you moving? So I go, it was summer, July, it was about 10 o'clock at night. A girl, I knew her parents, she said, 'You know you live nearby would you please accompany home? I don't like to go by myself.' Ok. Came to her door, shook hands like in Germany - Good night good night. Suddenly I noticed cyclists following me, and I looked again and I didn't like the idea. There were 6 of them, about 18 or 19. So I stopped. So they jumped down from their bicycles. And one had a bag of tar bang in my face but I just turned my head, so otherwise I wouldn't have - couldn't have - seen anything. And they came on to me. Put their bicycles in the road. I knew there was some trouble.

They wanted to blind me; I didn't know what they wanted to do. In any case I had a new suit on - all that was a mess. And then while they put the bicycles down onto the road, I said 'There's only one thing, I must run for it.' I was a very good runner at school. And I lived near a police station. And I ran there. They followed me up. There was a policeman not in uniform outside and he whispered to the other one 'Take them in, the whole lot.' - To the police station. Then I wanted to show that I'm a hero and I started to have a go... So one of the policemen said to me, 'If I were you I'd keep quiet. They're young SS men. Being a foreign national you could go to your...office, and make a complaint.' So he said I should go there and made a long report. So then he said, 'Look you got away with it. Forget about it.' It was one of those happenings.

MM: Yes.

**Tape 1: 34 minutes 29 seconds**

FF: You know having a paper bag full of black tar for the wheels. Bang, by luck I just turned my head so it came on the side. But there were a lot of happenings of that sort.

MM: Yes. Now I'd like to move on to your decision to go into exile, to leave Germany.

FF: I had to, because everybody...Look, I was very much interested in politics. I knew the end won't be a good one for us. In the end I predicted I said to some people, 'Hitler will last 10 years.' Actually he lasted 12. And so everybody left. I couldn't get anywhere into because no one accepted Jews so I had friends who went to America. They found 2 young ladies who were solicitors, American citizens. And they sent me papers. Of course you couldn't just take the papers and go because you had to register and they had a certain quota. And my quota was not on. So I knew someone here in London and who I asked, who allowed me to stay until my quota is ready to go. And it was a very difficult struggle. Then they gave me permission to stay with one condition, 'As soon your number comes up, you have to leave. You can't stay here.' Furthermore you can't go to ask for charity. You know there was Woburn House in those days. So I had to send some money. They told me here I can only stay as long as I got my quota accepted from the Americans. But I was not allowed to earn any money and I was not allowed to go and ask for charity. And that was it so in the meantime I arrived here on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939.

**Tape 1: 37 minutes 7 seconds**

MM: Yes. Could we stop a moment there because I...did you come directly from Frankfurt then or did you go via any other country?

FF: No. Actually my parents from Karlsruhe... I had a married sister in Strasbourg. So they went there. Before I left for London, I went to visit them. In any case, the French police found out –I don't know how. And they came and said 'If you don't leave France at the moment, we are going to deport you.' So I went then to Belgium – there were good friends there and in the morning the war had broken out against Poland. And I didn't know what to do. My friends said, 'Look here, you have to go into the army.' and all that...In any case I decided to continue here. I was on a luxury boat, the only passenger. There was already blackout. So I came here. And then I volunteered for the British Air Force. They wouldn't take me. They said, 'Look here; there is a Polish Air Force here. It's only the right thing to do to ask them' if they would allow me to join the British Air Force. They said they might not allow me. He said, 'Look, you don't speak a word of Polish. We can do with you here.' In any case they interviewed me for 5 or 6 hours and they accepted me.

MM: You still had a Polish passport then?

FF: Yes but I have to tell you something else before. They wanted to cancel my Polish passport while I was still in Germany. They said, you know, they knew that something's going on. And a matter of fact one day it was in November 38, the police came to the Polish citizens 'Pack up and off you go!'

**Tape 1: 39 minutes 40 seconds**

Well I escaped, I didn't... Somehow. And you went to Poland and you wouldn't come back. Any case they had stayed there, and they left an order I should report to the police at once, and they are going to deport me. I was in hiding one or two days and then I went to the police station they said, 'Look here, you can stay.' Those who have gone have gone. You can stay because they wanted to cancel my passport. And I am glad they didn't. I said, 'What happened? What nationality am I going to be?' Staatenlos.

MM: Yes? Stateless.

FF: Yes, they said 'Staatenlos.' and this was no good at all but in any case they allowed me to stay and I stayed till I came here. And as I said then they... I had to join the army here then and joined then they found I had some stomach trouble – abscess or something. I didn't even know about it. They put me into the Home Guard which I ...like any British citizen, but I actually wanted to join the British Air Force. And I wanted to give them back what they gave me.

MM: Of course.

FF: My son always makes the joke, 'You know they're very lucky. If they would have sent you to bomb Berlin you would have landed in New York!' So that is my war time and they allowed me to stay and I became a British subject very quickly actually.

MM: Oh really?

FF: Yes. I think one or two years - very quickly and then they did make much business at all. I had already a business running with somebody and they gave me all the privileges, I don't know why. Maybe it helped that I volunteered you know and so on.

**Tape 1: 42 minutes 10 seconds**

MM: Yes. When you came here, so you came by yourself?

FF: I came by myself yes. I didn't have anybody here. I had a few friends from Germany. I landed in Cazenove Road.

MM: Oh yes, yes. Cazenove Road, yes.

FF: It was full of refugees. Every house was occupied by refugees and ...

MM: Was that where you had the Russian landlady and spoke Yiddish?

FF: Yes, no actually she lived in Derwent Road in Stamford Hill. I bettered myself. I had a nice room I had a good laugh. One day I had been there a few days. A knock on the door and the next door neighbour, also Jewish woman from Russia has been here G-d knows how many years, 'Mrs Waxman!' I said 'Mrs Waxman is out', that was the landlady. I remember the name. 'Oh, what am I going to do?' I said, 'What is the trouble, maybe I can help you?' She said, 'You know I have to make a phone call.' I said, 'So what's wrong with that?' I said 'Give me the number and I will ring.' She said, 'What you're only a few days here and you know how to use the telephone?' So you know it's extraordinary. So there you are?

MM: Did you learn English when you were in Germany?

FF: When I was in Germany...I could speak actually. Yes, I learnt it there, yes. I was the only passenger on a luxury boat as I told you. And I spoke there for the first time English.

MM: Ah.

FF: And...it was great luck. If I would have come a day later they wouldn't have let me in.

MM: No. Indeed, indeed.

FF: Everything is luck in life sometimes.

MM: Indeed. So you moved from Cazenove Road to Stamford Hill...

FF: And then to Derwent Road and then to Woodbury Grove and we got married then.

MM: You met your wife...

FF: Yes, she was a Hungarian but I only got to know her here.

MM: How did you get to know her?

FF: A friend from Germany knew her. He was Hungarian and she was a Hungarian and he knew her. So he introduced me so how things are going.

**Tape 1: 44 minutes 48 seconds**

MM: I see. And she was also from a religious family?

FF: Not as religious as I. Also religious, but not as religious as my home.

MM: Right. And now... You mentioned working, you mentioned that you got working in England. How did that come about?

FF: How it came about. It was a bad thing; you see my money ran out. I didn't know the war will last 5 years or so. So I thought, 'I'm not going to ask for charity. I'm too proud for that.' I wouldn't.

MM: No.

FF: So I met a man, he was a very rich man; I don't want to mention his name. He was in one of the biggest synagogues. Somehow, he teamed up with me and so and he asked me, 'What are you doing?' and I told him. He said, 'Look here, I'm going to help you.' I said, 'I have no money. All my money's gone.' He said, 'Don't worry about it.' He gave me goods to sell and that was that.

MM: Started you off.

FF: He helped me but I said, 'I'm not going to ask for charity. I wouldn't.' I'd rather – I didn't say 'break the law' - I said I'd rather do things I'm not supposed to do than to ask for charity. You know, there was a certain pride.

MM: Of course. When you say he gave you goods to sell was that textiles?

**Tape 1: 46 minutes 28 seconds**

FF: Yes. Yes. I remember he - eiderdowns - he was a specialist. I remember that.

MM: Yes?

FF: Every year the household ..... had my eiderdown. (laughter)

MM: What were your first impressions when you arrived in Britain?

FF: In which way? Which impressions? What are you referring to?

MM: I'm referring to...what did it look like? Was it like you thought or not?



FF: I tell you, I was very disappointed.

MM: Right.

FF: Because the level of education by Jewish people was very low – very low. And I couldn't understand it. Also I found that a lot of working-class people are Jews which didn't happen in Germany at all.

**Tape 1: 47 minutes 22 seconds**

With the odd one, there were 2 butchers, 1 boot maker and Frankfurt had 25,000 Jewish people all professional or business in a higher way, and the level of education was a very poor one. Very, very poor and I couldn't make out. I found out later when I had more contact with English people they were the upper-class people here – tops - 5%.

MM: Yes?

FF: But below was very poor compared to Germany. This was my impression. As you know I don't want to run them down. I'm very grateful to Britain, very much so. But I couldn't understand it, and I expected a higher level. I know for instance in France the level of sophistication was a very high one. In Germany you know it...

MM: Was this...Did you have to have a visa to do this work, to sell the eiderdowns?

FF: Pardon?

MM: Did you have to get a visa or a work permit in order to do that?

FF: No, he said, 'Look here, I give it to you...' - he was my agent, sort of, you know he wanted to legalise it. He said 'Look here, if they ask me I will tell them.' I mean there's nothing to hide, I don't want to come into trouble. But he arranged me behind my back. I don't know...he was very, very nice to me. And I remember one of the people I was dealing with and then I started to deal on my own. I don't want to mention the name, the one who helped me. He said, 'You know I can't understand what does this man see in you?' He said, 'He has a son he treats him very badly.' I said, 'I haven't done anything to buy favours from him but...' There you are. He helped me a great deal.

MM: Indeed. And did you find yourself speaking English all the time when you arrived, or did you still speak some German?

**Tape 1: 49 minutes 45 seconds**

FF: No German. I stopped speaking German from the first day. From the very first day. As a matter of fact my daughter said I should have continued - it would have helped her. She learnt it at school and it's...But I didn't. It was a certain pride you know what I have seen what happened in Germany from the beginning that...No, I didn't.

MM: Did you ever find yourself - Do you dream? Do you dream when you sleep?

FF: Very much so, and I'm not surprised you asking me now. I used to dream like everybody does. But the last year or two or so, the dreams are very exact. I remember the face the next day which I did not, you know when you...

MM: Yes.

FF: And sometimes I'm rather surprised. And I am asked some things which I would not have believed in life, like you speak to me. You know, it was not sort of a dream figure. Real people like you, or you, or you. This is...Why do you ask me about the dreams?

MM: Because sometimes people find that when they come from abroad that first of all they dream in their original language and later there's a crossover to English.

FF: No. No, no. No - I dreamt and I still dream in English but I can see the person...

MM: Yes, very, very vividly...

FF: ...better than I see you.

MM: I understand.

FF: So very exact you know, sometimes I get up and I'm astonished. And also I'm asked questions which I never dreamt of. Politically - like in life. But even more exact than in life. This has happened and I'm rather surprised you asked me this.

MM: I wanted to ask you a little bit about your everyday life in those early years. But first I must ask you, what year did you get married?

FF: 1942.

MM: Right. Ok.

FF: The 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1942.

MM: So, were you interned?

**Tape 1: 52 minutes 10 seconds**

FF: No, I was not interned because that I volunteered for something helped me a great deal. They didn't say it but I think it did. You know I had a friend he came from Poland - he was not in Germany - and he got to know me. One Friday night you know we'd just got married and we invited him for a meal. He said, 'Tonight I'm going to France on a bombing mission.' He never came back. It shook me very much so. And nevertheless if they would have taken me - they wanted to take me - I wanted to serve the country who had saved my life. Which is out of gratitude

MM: Of course. Of course. Did you ever approach any of the refugee organisations? Or did they approach you?

**Tape 1: 53 minutes 12 seconds**

FF: No. I think they did. I never did. I had no time. I was very busy. Then I was... I became a warden for 25 – 24 years in one of the biggest synagogues in London where I was very busy. Also in the English political life, I wasn't a stranger. I don't want to say more.

MM: OK.

FF: As a matter of fact I was very friendly with Margaret Thatcher...

MM: Oh really...

FF: ...personally...

MM: Yes, yes?

FF: And you know so I...I had sort of my priorities and I didn't want to waste my time with just tittle-tattle.

MM: Yes. Yes. And about cultural matters: I believe you are very interested in the opera, you told me?

FF: Very much so, opera and also history. You know I like Jewish history, but I like general history as well. Jewish history is for a certain period you know – general history goes on!

MM: Of course. Of course. And in your leisure time you were doing things like...you were telling me you were a warden at one of the big London synagogues.

FF: I was. I was chief warden actually.

MM: At which synagogue may I ask?

FF: Finchley.

MM: Oh Finchley of course - yes?

FF: You will ask me why I stayed there so long. As a matter of fact I was holding the record until a few years after I left. I found that the cultural level when I joined the synagogue was below par. There was a rabbi there - I don't want to run him down – you know when he gives the Shiur, learning on Shabbos afternoon, 3 or 4 people. And one day he said to me 'I would like you to join because if people see you they will come as well.' It was in a very poor level, so I made then my ambition and my wife actually told me off very often. I lost business through it sometimes because I put all my mind to bring up the cultural level of the synagogue. I think I was successful. So people told me. I don't know.

**Tape 1: 55 minutes 45 seconds**

MM: Right. Now...- so did you found... you were buying and selling you told me in the textile business?

FF: Yes, and then...

MM: Did you found a company?

FF: Extraordinary. You know in the war my wife had to work as well you know like everybody.

MM: Yes.

FF: She joined a chap who did handbags.

MM: Yes? Was that a refugee as well?

FF: He was not – an English-born Jew but...He was not a genius. One day he said to me, 'Look, I need some money.' He couldn't make money. They were very poor. 'Can you help me out? I will give you interest.' Yes, I helped them out. One day he said 'I'm leaving.' He was not a businessman and I used to do all...I had another business, textiles, so suddenly, not to lose what I gave him...I joined him. And I went buying and selling. I knew as much about leather as you know about what's going on in Timbuktu – nothing.

MM: Right.

FF: And so I...then I opened a factory. And I had once upon a time 35 people working for me. But I didn't know anything about it...What helped me was this...I told you I was interested in...in...in the art of it.

MM: Yes?

**Tape 1: 57 minutes 32 seconds**

FF: And how did I learn it? I went to France, to Germany and to Italy to look around. I brought a few samples, and then I made out of 3 or 4 samples – 1 sample. And people...One day they came to me from the trade organisation and they want to interview me where I learnt this...top...because they said they know that royalty has got my goods. I didn't want to tell them that I didn't learn it because they wouldn't have believed it. So in any case I got out of it. Then I had to give it up because in the top class there were no learners, nobody wanted to learn. And the cheap stuff, I didn't want to...there were plenty of people. So I have seen that there is no future and ...so I went into the property business.

MM: Aha. So wait a moment...the factory with the 35 people - that was for handbags or for textiles?

FF: It was for handbags.

MM: Yes I understood correctly. Yes.

FF: Once upon a time I had 35 – not all the time – but when I was on top.

MM: So you left both the handbags and the textiles and went to...

FF: I had to because there were no workers. There were only in Italy they did the top class. There were no workers and this is an art, this is an art you know. And...so I left it.

### **Tape 1: 59 minutes 20 seconds**

MM: So you left...And also the textiles you left?

FF: I made a mistake. I shouldn't have left it because a lot of people, who knew much less than I did, made a lot of money.

MM: Yes.

FF: And somebody wanted to take me then as a partner, you know a woman who lost her husband – she's a big textile...I said 'I don't want to start every 5 minutes something else.' I gave up the whole hog...should have stayed with it

MM: Yes. So roughly when did you stop...when did you give up the handbags and the textiles?

### **End of Tape One**

### **TAPE 2**

#### **Tape 2: 0 minute 7 seconds**

MM: Yes? Right.

FF: '67. The beginning of '67.

MM: You left the handbags and textiles?

FF: I hardly got any money for it because people couldn't do the high class stuff. So, I almost gave it away. But there was no future in this thing and also the...The other side gave me some interest you know you had to use your (gestures to head) and I didn't know anything about it.

MM: Yes?

FF: About property... I didn't know anything, so it's nice to explore your own...with all the mistakes one makes.

MM: Yes? But it's fun as well as you say...

FF: Pardon?

MM: As you say, it's fun to do something new as well.

FF: No, it's interesting you know...It's a different field. You deal with different people - small big and so on.

MM: Right. Good. Can I now ask you...take you back a bit before 1967? You got married in 1942 and then...

FF: Yes the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1942.

MM: And then, where did you first live when you were married?

FF: I lived in Woodbury Grove, Manor House. I had a sort of little house, it wasn't mine – belonged to the council or whatever it is. Then I moved from there to Connaught Drive. You know Connaught Drive?

MM: No.

FF: Hampstead Garden Suburb.

MM: Oh yes, I do know.

FF: It's the Suburb. Then as you know I actually built this...

MM: You built this house. Right...And you had...some children came along, I believe.

FF: Two children – a daughter first and a son. And my parents moved then eventually to Israel. They wanted to have their last days in Israel and...

MM: Where had they been in the Second World War? – Your parents?

**Tape 2: 2 minutes 16 seconds**

FF: That is a different story...My... They lived in Strasbourg. I had a married sister in Strasbourg. Now when war broke out they had to quit Strasbourg because it was Kehl, you know, the other side was...And so they went to Vichy... In any case they found people who had been very nice to them and some not so, they had a hard time and I remember my mother told me there was a knock at the door and she had a bad feeling – Bang – Bang. There was no one at home – my father was out somewhere so she was hiding behind the door and when they left she looked – They were the French police who wanted to deport them to Germany. And they had a hard time...Very hard time.

MM: So they went then to Israel after the war, did they?

FF: They actually – I took them to London.

MM: Right.

FF: I wanted to – I bought a little house for them...what's the name... near Connaught Drive...but they didn't like it. They wanted to...You know the last days they said 'We want to...' You know how for religious people they want to be buried there.

MM: Of course.

FF: And I would have wanted them to stay, you know I prepared everything for them. And they left. I took them to Israel, then they went into a home and I had to pay for it. And there you are.

MM: Yes. Yes.

FF: I have quite a number of relatives in Israel and then I had a married sister – they were Romanians and in the war they were deported to Russia you know and so...all... Unpleasant things.

MM: Indeed. Indeed... So you are in London, you are married; your children are coming along...

FF: I have great children and great, great children.

**Tape 2: 4 minutes 45 seconds**

MM: Yes, you...what sort of contacts did you have to English institutions?

FF: Pardon?

MM: What sort of contacts did you have to English institutions?

FF: Institutions? Politically actually I was very active – very much so. And then the Zionist organisation and I don't mind telling you I believed in Likud and I gave my reasons why. Still actually my feelings are there. And I ...no the English also – I gave my time to English political institutions and I knew quite a number of people in France, not that they wanted it...you know – worthwhile knowing. And I never forget I had a discussion once with an MP and then I said, you know, lies which come from certain sides. He said to me 'The best lie is truth.' The MP. And I liked it. Actually he said that the best lie ...I said, you know, I complained – they get away with murders. He said the best lie is the truth, remember them. You get further. A matter of fact I was much known in the English political world.

MM: Were you a member of a party? Were you a member of a political party?

FF: Yes, yes.

MM: Do you wish to tell me which one?

FF: Conservatives. Actually I was brought up with the socialistic idea – I was a socialist by nature. But I came to the conclusion it...was wrong thing...what they say they don't mean and what they mean they don't say. And I found the other side - maybe I was wrong, I don't know. A matter of fact I was a member till the last few days. I used to go to their meetings but unfortunately it came to an end.

MM: But a lot of life must have revolved around the synagogue, as you explained to me.

**Tape 2: 7 minutes 16 seconds**

FF: I have explained to you why. I liked the Jewish cultural life and I felt a lot of things can be done - improved - and that was my aim and my ambition to bring it to a certain level. It does not always pay. You make yourself a lot of enemies, a lot of jealousy and... there you are.

MM: I see. Right...

FF: I used to belong actually when I lived at Manor House - Frumkins, you know the wine merchants Frumkins. He is... the Chief Rabbi is the grandson of one of the Frumkins. I remember when he was a little boy, the Chief Rabbi. Yes, he knows me very well. I remember him very well. Actually he went to school with my son to Christ College, so...we are not strangers.

MM: I see.

FF: Not that I...I told you I've written a letter to the Jewish Chronicle... you will see between the lines that I was not quiet as regards the Chief Rabbi because I thought much more could be done for Israel through certain organisations and they don't do it.

MM: Right...right. So did you always...Did you feel comfortable living in England right from the start? How did you feel vis-à-vis living in England?

**Tape 2: 9 minutes 10 seconds**

FF: Look, I felt a bit strange. I didn't know anybody here. Only friends from Germany who came like me as refugees. No, I didn't, and I also found a certain jealousy which actually I resent. One day I met in town a man – he was a tailor or whatever – he was born here. 'When are you going back into your own country?'

MM: Was he Jewish or not?

FF: Jewish! Tailor, remember. Was in the middle of the war. I said, 'My own country? When are you going back to your own country?' He said 'I'm British!' I said, 'Stop a moment. The next English man who is going to pass here I will stop, and ask him and he will say you are such and such a Jew!' He ran off and I felt it was a certain jealousy. He saw me getting on in life – I don't know. And he was still a tailor in his stinking...So I found a lot of jealousy.



MM: I see.

FF: Not all. Not all. And actually what I was also upset - the level of the Jewish education was very, very low. I remember I lived with Mrs Waxman in Derwent Road. A man used to come in. He had a market stall – you know the market ... And he had a son, and you know I had lots of nice belongings and I put it on the table and he was stealing right, left and centre. One day he was boasting - the day of his bar mitzvah – he absconded. That was something which I was not used to. He was boasting he was absconding the day of his Bar Mitzvah. Didn't go to shul. Maybe I am too old fashioned, I don't know. But I believe in history, and if there's nothing behind – there's nothing to fight for.

MM: Indeed. I want to take you back in politics for a moment. You said you were very involved in politics.

FF: I was involved, yes.

MM: What sort of things did you do? What form did that take?

FF: Well I was a member of the party. And I went to meetings and charity – you know. After all I knew I'm not a British-born Englishman so I did not want to push myself. You know you have to keep it to a certain...because they might take it the wrong way.

MM: Yes.

FF: I had a good laugh once, he didn't mean it. One member said one day to me 'You and Mrs Thatcher, you would make a world pair.' I know he made a joke but you know, I believe if you do something, do it or don't; there's no half measures. You have to give yourself and if you have no time or inclination - leave it alone.

Tape 2: 12 minutes 44

MM: Right. Yes. So when did you really feel integrated in English life do you think? Can you...

FF: As time went on I got used to the way of life and also the financial aspect improved, you know. It had a lot to do with finances as well. I bettered myself, let me say. I didn't say I'm a billionaire or whatever. I bettered myself. I was grateful that they gave me a chance to do so. You don't get it in every country. I know France was a very hard country to get on with. And other things – it was mainly out of gratitude and not only gratitude – you want to show people that you're not just an animal - you are interested in Mr Smith or Mr Jones or whatever.

MM: Indeed. What made you choose this particular place to build a house?

FF: Here?

MM: Yes. You told me...you told me...

FF: I tell you. I always used to read the financial paper and I was interested in how you know when people made a lot of money. Not only a lot of money, there were some clever people, you know. And I liked that you could use your brains. Of course you had to have luck as well. Nothing comes without ...and – but I must say it again, whatever you choose to do, do it with all your...with your full heart, otherwise you don't succeed, and I was a very hard worker. I used to have the factory, to save money, I was all day long there, and as a matter of fact worked at such a pitch that I didn't need any more travellers – they came to me. But sometimes I came home from the factory at 8, 9 o'clock at night, did the books at home till 11, 12, 1 o'clock in the morning. You know...I like to work.

MM: What did your wife think of that?

**Tape 2: 15 minutes 7 seconds**

FF: She didn't think it. She had to say to everybody 'That they told me that you are the first out in the morning for business and the last to come home'. I said, 'It's their choice.' And that's what I did. I remember, you know, before Christmas we were very busy and, you know, I didn't go Shabbos to work. So I had...one day the doorbell rings in the City by the factory there. Two policemen – they were shouting up, 'What are you doing up there?' I told them. He said, 'You know you are the only firm who has the lights on in the middle of the night, three o'clock in the morning.' Believe me I didn't like it. I was afraid – you couldn't see a person there in the City.

MM: Yes, completely quiet.

FF: Very quiet. The only people asked me, 'How are you successful?' 'Use your brain and use your strength and don't be lazy.' Yes, if you are a gambler and you put it on a horse - a million pounds and you happen to win it, you are clever? You are not.

MM: So, in 1967 you gave all that up and you went into property?

FF: No, I prepared before already. I had the factory and I felt my way through. What's going on there...it didn't come all in one go. What's going on - actually the right thing. I didn't give one up and start another one. It was sort of a gradual - a gradual sort of switching over. I, while I had the factory and I did what I did, I did already a bit on the other side which was very helpful. I needn't wait till I earn a certain amount, you know, the life is very expensive. And so actually I prepared slowly for it and one day closed up and...You know, my wife said to me once 'I can't understand you' –I used to go and look at the shop windows. She said, 'You're not interested. Don't you want to look at the shop windows, the handbags?' No, finished. I don't want to know.

MM: Did you start an estate agents firm or how did you do it?

**Tape 2: 18 minutes 4 seconds**

FF: No. No, I got to know people who had sort of been in the trade. You know and then I spoke to agents – conversations and so on. So it didn't come from one minute till the other. Not at all.

MM: Did you buy and sell houses or...commercial properties?

FF: No, no. No, no. I did not buy and sell, I bought and developed.

MM: I see, right.

FF: You see, I don't give any secrets away, it's nothing secret. Today things have changed now. What was good 30 years ago...I found out a lot of things which I didn't realise. The amount of work involved. The outgoings – horrendous. No it's...it was not just from one minute to the other.

MM: Of course not. Of course not. Did you have any later connections with Germany or with Galicia?

FF: No. I did not. I actually went once or twice after the war to Germany because while I was active in the textile business, you know, I wanted to see what was going on there. Because it was bombed and all new there and because the cities were all flattened and so on. And – you ask me this - I went to Frankfurt or Berlin I don't remember, into a nice little hotel. A brand new one. So I put my British passport on the counter and I spoke to the secretary in German. She said, 'You know we have got a lot of English people but no one spoke as well as du – as you do.' She said, 'Where did you learn it?' Well I didn't now what to say. I said I was actually in the Besatzungs Committee – you know the...

MM: Yes.

FF: She said, 'Please do come again.' She couldn't understand and she was a very intelligent, clever...I don't know what they are. But no one ever spoke...Then she wanted to know whether I had a secret. I don't know what she thought – I'm a spy. I said no. Then I didn't go there any more.

## **Tape 2: 20 minutes 46 seconds**

MM: What did you feel when you went back to Germany then? Did you have any feelings for...?

FF: I felt...I felt, yes. I'll tell you what I felt. I crossed...My parents went back to Strasbourg and the Germans said to leave Strasbourg and only the French came back. Kehl was the German part, Strasbourg the French part. You could either stay in the...in the train or you could walk out. The bridge was quicker. As I decided to walk through and that was the French side of the thing....and I put my passport there. You know what he did? Took my passport and threw it away! He must have been a Nazi: a French one. I felt very bad about it.

MM: When was that?

FF: Pardon? - After the war.

MM: That was after the war, right.

FF: After the war. I felt very bad about it. And another thing...when I came to...when I left Germany, I decided to stay in the train. You could stay in the train. The German guards stayed in the train, although it was France...or you walked over. And before Kehl the Germans were building fortifications and so on. There was a young chap in uniform...Arbeits...thing. Before they went in the proper German Army they had to do roadwork but they had the uniform. So he sat there, it was a young chap in uniform with bayonet. He offered me a sandwich – Schinken you know –

MM: Ham.

FF: Ham. I said, 'No', I said, 'I just ate.' I didn't want to say there were Jews. And in the course of conversation you know what he said to me? 'If I find a Jew...' just before we went over, he had the bayonet, he said 'I'm going to (makes striking motion made by the man with the bayonet). You know I didn't...can you...you understand my feeling?

MM: I do!

FF: And he meant it. I haven't done anything to him.

MM: No, and that was before you...that was in 1939?

FF: Yes, '39.

## **Tape 2: 23 minutes 19 seconds**

MM: When you were leaving?

FF: When I was leaving, was the last...He got out in Kehl.

MM: The last memory...And you got out in Strasbourg across the river.

FF: Yes. Then I was so nervous...I had the train ticket to go by train...then SS came in 'Juden Raus!' Jews out. So...I was so nervous at the encounter with the other boy so instinctively I kept my passport (motions to breast pocket), so I had to go out as well.

MM: Oh, so you went out as well?

FF: Because they saw me...the SS men saw me reaching for my breast pocket.

MM: Yes...instinctive movement.

FF: You know...people don't understand what you go through when you are in danger – they don't. You know, there came out two SS men: 'Juden Raus!' I could have stayed there – he didn't know whether I'm a Jew or not. Maybe I looked Jewish or not, I don't know. And so I just...when he saw me doing it I thought I must walk out because G-d knows what.

MM: Was that on the Kehl side or on the Strasbourg side?

FF: Pardon?

MM: Was that on the Kehl side or on the Strasbourg side?

FF: It was on the Kehl side.

MM: That was still on the Kehl side, after you'd seen the man with the bayonet.

FF: They said 'Juden Raus!' And all the Jews had to go...I don't know...I could have taken...

MM: So you walked across a road?

FF: Road? No. I didn't cross... there was a hut there with the SS people...took us all in.

MM: Yes?

FF: ...took us all in. And...'What have you got?'...I was silly I had – a family Rothschild...they were related to the Rothchilds. I knew them from Frankfurt Battenburg and so the mother said, 'You know my daughter is in London now. Would you be kind enough to give her a gold chain?' you know...because we... And I, silly thing, put it in my pocket. And if he would have examined me –

MM: Yes...?

FF: You know what would have happened. They would have shot me. So you know...It was a terrible life.

**Tape 2: 25 minutes 36 seconds**

MM: But they let you go in the end?

FF: They let me go – they didn't...I don't know, they let me go!

MM: You were very lucky.

FF: Said 'Yes. Show your passport. Where are you going?' (imitates Nazi official handing passport back) I couldn't go fast enough.

MM: I see. Of course. Of course.

FF: and you know the one with the bayonet you know a young...about 18, 19...Can you imagine he's sitting next to me?

MM: Yes...

FF: And with the bayonet. You don't know what they're doing in the next minute.

MM: Exactly. So you must have been quite pleased to see the coast of England.

FF: Ach! And how! And how! I was more pleased when I arrived here. He said, 'You are the last immigrant to Great Britain.' He said - there was no one there, I was the only one - he said, 'If you'd have come tomorrow we would have sent you back.' Which they did here - they wouldn't let them in. So of course I arrived here.

MM: Now what are your... I wanted to ask you finally about, well, almost finally - about your feelings towards Germany - now.

FF: I must say there are two feelings about it. They've been down and out. You know, right after the war when I talked with that French immigration officer who threw the British passport...thing, I felt very, very ill about it. Here, they'd lost the war, Germany and the terrible things they'd done. So I went by train over and I looked out of the window and for the first time I saw Germany. So...a German policeman or whatever - you know - he was checking the things and he was smiling to me. Then I lost my temper; I said 'You are smiling,' I said, 'Don't you...you murderers...!' and I let it go. They didn't do anything. Just to make myself a bit...you know to ease my mind a bit...But later you forget. One thing I must admit. They'd been...I've seen those bombed out towns. Cologne for instance. I went to Cologne. There were everything flat - only the church was standing funnily enough. Münster. And they built themselves up in no time. They're financially... they're top in Europe again. This is what I think you know and another thing... I read in the paper - not in the paper actually I heard it on the wireless - that the most immigrants into Germany are Russian Jews and what happened fifty years ago can happen in fifty years again. Because they are a race you now...'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles...' They lost the war and still...they had such a...a...energy to build themselves up. You know their finances are still better than all of them together here.

## **Tape 2: 29 minutes 28 seconds**

MM: Indeed.

FF: It is...and I hope it won't happen again what happened before. And another thing, you know, if you've got a drum and...and you walk in middle of the road and you beat your drum, you look round and in the next they've got about ten thousand people marching behind you. This is very bad. The thing they liked marching and ...energy and 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles'. This is my...this is my... actually - fear. And the Russian Jews are filtering in like mad... other and the Israeli Jews. Somebody said to me a few years ago, 'There are 5,000 Israelis in Berlin - 5,000' - what did he say - 'robbers' or something. Which I didn't like. What can you do? Anything else?

MM: Yes, my final question really is what sense do you have of your identity?

FF: For instance in which way are you...?

MM: For example, Jewish or British or what? You know, you've lived through so many...

FF: I tell you, in first place Jewish. You know, we are all on our own. And if you don't fight for yourself, there's nothing to fight for. And another thing, if you are attacked verbally, you hit back as hard as you can - harder than you get. I always say, you must even hit harder. The only language people understand. Once you want to be a good boy, you know, and like I will tell you in a minute what a good boy...they take advantage. You know when the Nazis before they came into power; we were called the Ostjuden, by the German Jews. I explained to you before, a boy didn't speak to me - a Jewish boy - he should not, they think he's not a Jew, but he's a Jew. Real German. And if you don't stand up for it and let yourself...oh yes, they used to say the real German Jews - the Ostjuden - and not only the Ostjuden, and if you spoke against the Nazis, 'Don't make a risk!'...I said 'Why not?' He said, 'You know...' I said, 'When Hitler will be properly in power he will like you better than me? Even worse.' Which was the case. So it's no use running yourself down. And those are my feelings.

If you are hit, hit back - Harder.

**Tape 2: 32 minutes 48 seconds**

MM: Where...could you...do you know where your Heimat is?

FF: Heimat?

MM: Yes, where would you call your Heimat? Or can you locate that?

FF: Actually it is in this moment here. I live here. My life is here. My children are here, most of them, and you know...you have certain friends around you. And people come and ask you questions. I know you know I used to be in the synagogue. They used to come and ask me questions, advice which I felt rather...very humble about - I said 'Look here, I know... more...' But I listened to the people and I tried to help; so you build yourself up whether you like it or not. That is what it is. But basically - basically it's Israel. Basically.

MM: Basically, it's Israel. Although you've never...

FF: I'm too old for it, I wouldn't go there. I'm too old. I can't start a life there. You know, my family is here and so on.

MM: Did you visit Israel when your parents were alive? Did you visit Israel?

FF: I, even after I used to go. They called it in Hebrew Kever Ovov - visiting the grave of my parents, yes. And I have got a sister Bertha. I used to go quite often and I used to visit them and I knew they wanted to see me. I was the so-called 'favourite son' - so the people told me. I don't know where...but there you are. I used to go quite often, yes. Short visits.

MM: So...

FF: And I didn't like one thing - that they lived in a home. They have homes which are very, very nice. A brother of mine who passed away lived in a beautiful home in

Jerusalem. But my parents were old fashioned. They wanted to save money so they didn't go into the world's best home, which I really when I think of it, I said, 'How could I stop it?' They went into a second grade...because it's cheaper. They...but... They were in a beautiful house - my brother.

**Tape 2: 35 minutes 5 seconds**

MM: My very last question is: Do you have a message from your life for the people who will see this interview?

FF: Pardon?

MM: Do you have a message from your life for the people who will look at this interview?

FF: Look, do you mean a message to the people?

MM: Yes.

FF: Never forget your identity, stronger than anything else, more so those people. Be proud of what you are doing and be honest. Some people think unfortunately they're very clever if they do things which they shouldn't do, which reflect not only me or you, it reflects the whole community – the Jew. This is what the message is. And they should be proud of their identity. You know, I remember, Einstein was interviewed whilst in Germany. Hitler was already in power. So the interviewer asked him, 'Are you a Jew?' He knew he was a Jew. 'Yes.' he said, 'Yes. And I'm proud of it.' He said, 'If I weren't proud of it I would be a Jew just the same, so I might as well be proud of it.' [Laughter] You see, very clever because he was not such a good Jew. You know, I happen to know, he was not...also you know I used to go to lectures by Martin Buber. Did you know Martin Buber?

MM: I never heard him lecture but yes, I do know who he is.

FF: I didn't like the idea either...pompous...The greatest...he use to be also in the Frankfurt University a lecturer. I used to go there with a friend of mine. Going out I said 'You know I have got the idea that he doesn't know what he is talking about.' Right. Christmas in Germany – Christmas Eve is the holiest day, you know.

MM: Yes?

FF: He was...he lived in the Bergstrasse that means to say a very nice place between Frankfurt...between Frankfurt and Karlsruhe. He was in so...They looked out of the window, it was very cold. A lady was waiting for him, a German lady you know, a real... she was a non-Jewish. And I said to myself, 'How can he preach Judaism?' There are non-Jews very nice and so on. But she looked really sort of a Wagnerian type.

MM: Oh yes.



FF: So I said, 'Show who you are, and what you are.' That is my message more than other things... And also try your very best, and try to make things better because a lot of people need it and they don't know...You know I mentioned this word 'mysterious' life. You know?

MM: Yes?

**Tape 2: 38 minutes 30 seconds**

FF: The older you get the more you think how mysterious...Where do we come from? Where do we go? You know it's not just...you know, I never thought that way but I think now. It comes automatically. Where are we? Who's our master? Is there a master? And you know, so many questions you have to ask, but never deny what you are. Never deny. And as I said, he said, 'I might as well be proud of it because if I weren't proud I would be a Jew just the same.' (Laughter) I hope I have not bored you.

MM: Not in the slightest and I would like to thank you very much for giving us the interview.

FF: No I enjoyed greatly doing it and... this is actually what life is and one gets older, the ideas are different, and I'm rather astonished you asked me about dreams.

MM: Well there you are.

FF: I tell you, a matter of fact, I spoke the other day to my family, I said, 'You know, when you are younger, you've got dreams.' In the morning a bit hasty you forget a name or you forget it altogether. But I remember everything with the dreams just like we're sitting here together.

MM: Yes.

FF: Personally, remember I can't see, but the faces are so real... like you know when you paint...you had...Painting is a great art. You learn to watch faces. You must watch faces because a wrong (indicates drawing)...a wrong direction in the face, makes you a different face. So you learn to...to watch faces. But this with the dreams I am still very much...And sometimes the dreams are so full of life and full of energy and full of questions. I don't know. I can't answer it. Maybe you can.

MM: Thank you so much again. No, I don't think so, but thank you very much.

FF: Don't thank me. It's a pleasure and I'm very pleased you came to... it's nice to have a chat sometimes with people and also as I can't read and write any more...it's very bad. Do you know, people don't realise, you know, I used to...you know, they send you these organisations for the blind and so on. I used to give a little bit you know, never realising how serious this blindness can be. And how it can change lives completely. This is...

MM: But I see you haven't lost your spark.

**Tape 2: 41 minutes 38 seconds****End of Interview****Photographs****Tape 2: 41 minutes 40 seconds**

MM: You were in Karlsruhe. That's right ok, because that photo must have been taken in Karlsruhe.

FF: It was taken in Karlsruhe, yes.

MM: Right. Would you like to speak just briefly about this photo of 1916 in Karlsruhe where your...?

FF: The family?

MM: Yes.

FF: Yeah. Actually I was very pleased. It's something which makes us think who we are, where we are, and it's interesting to see how the past was compared with the future and I'm glad that my parents had it. They were rather modern in this way. I remember to Karlsruhe 1916 there came a Zirkus Hagenbeck from Hamburg and they were so modern they took us all there. And there was just an air raid on ...they cancelled you know the performance.

MM: Now in this photograph you are on the extreme right correct?

FF: Yeah.

MM: And then there's your parents sitting in front and the other children around.

FF: Yes. Yeah...

MM: OK

**Tape 2: 43 minutes 0 second**

FF: And when we were .....

MM: So, tell us about this...

FF: Wilhelm Baeck! (laughter) Wilhelm.

MM: Good. Can you explain?

FF: Yes, he was working for us, but he was in the army you know in the First World War and he was not very nationalist and he was from Württemberg.

MM: Yes, that's right, and here we are with you and him and the other people. And you were...

FF: But the Jewish people were more fair than they were. We knew...actually he came in uniform sometimes to see us then.

MM: And that was in Frankfurt?

FF: Frankfurt, yes.

MM: Good. Thank you very much. Ok. Can you...?

FF: There is a pyramid there in Karlsruhe. You know like the pyramids in Egypt... actually it's only about three or four hundred years old. The builder of Karlsruhe was Karl and 'ruhe' means 'rest' and they made him this pyramid there in the middle of town.

MM: Now in this picture you are standing all dressed up beside the car in Karlsruhe. Was that your car?

FF: It was, yes.

MM: No it wasn't...

FF: It was my parents' ...it was somebody's. Not mine, I was too young I didn't have a car. I think it was my parents'. I don't know - or the business. I don't know, but I used it.

MM: You used it? Ok. Ok. And that's in the 30s.

FF: Yeah.

MM: Second on the right in the front row, there you are in a café in Frankfurt.

FF: Yeah.

MM: Is that the Café Falke?

FF: No, that was the...is it a restaurant or...on the first floor?

MM: It's not clear. It's just a lot people standing there.

FF: This was in Frankfurt I think.

MM: Yes. It was in Frankfurt.

FF: I think so yeah. Rosina. The owner was Rosina.

MM: That's right.

FF: Poor man. You know when... before the war when Hitler came in he emigrated with his family to Israel and he committed suicide there because you know business was bad there. I remember it.

MM: Thank you. Right. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> row from the front in this picture of the Home Guard, 1942-43, you are the 5<sup>th</sup> from the right in the 3<sup>rd</sup> row from the front.

**Tape 2: 45 minutes 52 seconds**

FF: I don't know. I lay there with the rifle next to me, on the ground. I think so, yeah.

MM: And you were very active in the Home Guard?

FF: I was yes, as you know. We used to go to manoeuvres at night and all that. I believe that you do something properly or not at all.

MM: Absolutely. Yes. Thank you very much.

FF: Yes.

MM: Right. This is your wedding photo, Mr Fisher.

FF: Yes.

MM: And where was that taken?

FF: In the studio...

MM: Right?

FF: In... in Whitechapel. They all used to go there, I remember. Very famous couples from the film world. He was very well known.

MM: And what was the name of the photographer?

FF: Pardon?

MM: What was the photographer's name?

FF: His name was Boris. He did the... the boss did the pictures.

MM: Right, right. Good. Thank you very much. Right. Ok... This is a photo of the mid-1950s.

FF: Yeah.

MM: And... when your parents were visiting from Israel.

FF: Yeah, ok.

MM: Yes? And behind your parents are your children, and behind them is your wife and yourself and a niece.

FF: Yeah. So actually you have got what you want. You have got it all.

**Tape 2: 47 minutes 40 seconds**

**End of Photographs.**