

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	194

Interviewee Surname:	Beigel
Forename:	Renate
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	21 February 1933
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

Date of Interview:	2 November 2016
Location of Interview:	Willersey
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV194
NAME: Renate Beigel
DATE: 2 November 2016
LOCATION: Gloucestershire, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 2nd of November 2016. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Renate Beigel and we are in the Willersey, Gloucestershire. And my name is Lewkowicz. Can you please tell me your name?

Renate Beigel.

And when we were born?

21st of February 1933

And where were you born please?

Vienna.

Mrs. Beigel thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Project. Can you please tell me a little bit about your family background?

I was- we were just a normal family in Vienna... with a quite a lot of relations. A very close family. And... my father worked as a hat maker. My mother stayed at home and looked after my sister and I. And... life was very pleasant until things started happening. I suppose

virtually from the day I was born, because I was born in 1933. And Austria was going downhill, from a fascist point of view, from that date. So life became slowly very difficult until in 1938, when rather a lot of dreadful things were happening around us... which I do remember some of them. The Jews being badly treated. We were asked to wear the Star of David and all those sort of things. My father lost his job. We were dependent on the... kindness of relations really, who were better off at the time than us, and who weren't being persecuted to the same extent. Because my father- my father's brothers included a doctor and a dentist and those professions seemed to escape for a while. I don't know why. And so they were able to help us out. But eventually we just had to get out. And... I remember a moonlight flit relly. We just left with one suitcase each and departed for the station. And found ourselves in Zagreb.

[00:03:09]

Just before we get to Zagreb, let's go back a little bit. Can you tell us a little bit about your grandparents, and where your parents had come from and how they met?

Right. My- my grandparents on my mother's side I never knew, or met. My grandparents on my father's side, because they were Swiss. And my father had come from Switzerland when he was about seventeen to Austria. I'm not sure what that- what the reason for that was. And he had been either- he either joined or was conscripted into the Austrian army. So, in the First World War my father was on the wrong side, so to speak. And it was- I don't know exactly when my parents met. My grandparents on my mother's side were very close to us. My grandfather worked in the printing industry. And... they were really lovely, and we used to spend a lot of time with them. And my mother only had one brother, who was married to a lovely aunt, who did survive the war, actually. And who- well that's another story really. I don't know whether you want to know it at this stage. Do you?

Well, you might as well because it's...

[00:04:52]

Well my- my- my uncle Alex - that's my father- my mother's brother - was married to my Aunt Hilde who was actually not Jewish. And when- after we left- Vienna they were still

there. We learned that the German- the... Gestapo or whoever, came for my uncle. And my aunt at that time was pregnant. And they said to him that she could either go with him or she could divorce him. And so that's what they decided to do, to get divorced, in order to save the child. And so my father was, was, my - sorry - my uncle was taken away with his parents - my grandparents. And they were sent to the Warsaw ghetto. And my aunt survived. And she had a son, Peter, who is now the only relation that I know in Austria and who became quite successful... yes.

And what were your- what are the names, please, of your grandparents?

They were Eduard and Marie Herlischek

And where did they live and where did you live in Vienna?

[00:07:15]

I'm, I'm not going to remember the exact places. I know that we moved around a lot. And when in recent years I took my niece to Vienna on a sentimental journey and really to show her the background of you know, her- her mum and, and myself. And my cousin Peter took us around because he's lived in Vienna- I mean- for most of his life. And he had found out- because in Vienna it's very easy to find out where you have lived because you always have to register the address and so on, when you move. So they had done quite a lot of research. And so we were able to go to all the various addresses that we had lived at. And... the last one I did remember, because it happens to be- it's quite notable because I think it is... council- what you'd call council property here, but of a fairly high standard. And you went through this huge arch into a whole series of apartments and- and nice areas- grassy areas and so on. And I actually remembered the, the apartment that we lived in. Now, in the grassy area in front of it there was a kindergarten when we went back. But that really did take me back.

And do you know which Bezirk it was? Which Bezirk of Vienna?

No. No. I have it. I have it written down somewhere.

But you don't remember the streets at all?

I don't- I don't remember streets, no... no.

And did your grandparents live nearby, or...?

Yes, they did live nearby. And... again I- I sort of remember the courtyard. When we- we went into one of these gates. And as so often happens in Vienna, you go in through a fairly unassuming wooden door and- or metal door. And when you get inside there's a big courtyard and all the- And I remembered that. And there- there were verandas around. And they would be on the veranda waiting to greet us and so on. I remember those sort of things, yes...

So, in an apartment building?

In an apartment building, yes.

And what other- you left Vienna when you were very young...

Mnn...

What other memories have you got of growing up or what- what sticks in your mind?

I remember visiting... I think they were relations, who had... I think you'd call it a- a wine- a *Weinstube* or whatever you call these places, in the- near the Vienna Woods. And we used to go out there at the weekends. I do remember that. But - and I remember a lot of music... in- in one of the apartments we lived in, there was an opera singer from the Vienna State Opera. And... my mother was a fantastic cook. And he was living on his own. And he would come in... and he would sing an aria for us, in return for my mother's cooking.

[00:10:28]

And what did he sing? Do you remember?

Oh, all sorts- all sorts. It could be Tauber, or it could be Mozart. We were quite a musical family and my father had a fantastic voice as well and would sometimes join in. ...Yes. I do

remember going to see concerts and... yeah. And I- the only other thing I distinctly remember is seeing Shirley Temple films - in German of course. [laughs]

Even as young as you were... you can remember that?

Mnn. I can remember it. Yes.

Yeah...

...Because I definitely didn't see them here. And so when I see the old ones, I distinctly remember.

As you said your father was a hat maker.

Yes.

Did he have a shop, or where did he work?

I honestly don't know. I just know that's what he was. ...I don't think at my age I was really very interested in...

No...

... exactly where...

And you had a sister?

Yes. My sister's five years older than me. And she did go to school, of course. She was eleven when we left. And... I've- she- she told me that her school was chosen to be visited by Hitler. And they all lined up. And she tells me that... she shook his hand. Not that she was very proud of that. No. I do remember, incidentally, the Anschluss. And I do remember the Germans marching into Vienna... and many of the huge - I can't remember what they're called...

Rallies?

Rallies, yes. The- the- we- we we did see some of the rallies, yes.

[00:12:42]

Tell us a little bit about the Anschluss. What- what did you see, or what do you remember?

We- I- I remember columns of German soldiers goose-stepping through the Ringstraße and to- towards one of the rallies, presumably. I don't think we stayed to watch. The thing that really gets to me, because I- I absolutely love classical music, and I know that like me many other Jews won't listen to Wagner because of what happened. But I- I do... sometimes listen to Wagner. There are certain pieces I can't, because these vans would be driving around prior to the rally with great big... loudspeakers on the top. And they would always be playing Wagner - Tannhäuser or one- one of these... rather, you know, emotional - type pieces. And every time I hear it now, after all these years, it still upsets me.

We'll come- come back to that at the end of the interview. What you saw, the Anschluss. You saw the people...?

Yes.

And... What about Kristallnacht? Were you still in Vienna...?

I don't actually remember Kristallnacht, but I have a feeling that we probably left immediately afterwards. ...And happily, we were not personally affected. ...But I believe that we- I know it was at the end of 1938 that we left. And of course Kristallnacht was in November, wasn't it?

Yeah.

So I think it was very near to that. Cause I- I have a feeling we were nearly six months in Zagreb... before we were able to get out.

[00:15:08]

And can you tell me a little bit about the...sort of Jewish aspects? How did you identify? Did you go to synagogue at all, or did you not...?

Never.

Never?

Never. I- I really, until all of this happened to us, I was totally unaware I think, that I was Jewish. [phone rings] Oh!

[sound break]

You said you were not aware of being Jewish.

No, not in the slightest.

So when did you become aware of being Jewish?

The minute... all of this happened. From- from the day really we arrived in Zagreb, I- I knew- I was told exactly why we were there. What had happened to our family. Why it had happened, and so on. And it was during our stay in Zagreb that my mother decided - because she was having such difficulty in getting visas or anything to get out - to anywhere. She decided that it might be a good idea for us to be baptised as 'Old Catholics' which is what they have in Yugoslavia. ...And one of my horror moments was going to this church, putting on this weird white... long... piece of material, going down what looked just like a cattle dip, down the steps into water which covered my head. I screamed the place down. I always hated having my head underwater. And all of us went through this. And then we apparently received these certificates, which I suppose- I- I don't think we were the only ones who were doing this at the time. Otherwise I don't know where she got the idea from. But I suppose she felt that perhaps this might help... when going to organisations to try to get out. We could say, "Oh-" - you know - "We're Old Catholics." ...It didn't help at all. I don't know where the certificates are, because all these things were with my mother - all disappeared.

[00:17:56]

But for example your grandparents, did they do anything Jewish? Was there anything...?

Not that I...

Not that you can remember?

Not that I can remember. No. No... I don't ever remember being inside a synagogue during- and neither does my sister.

Right. And you said that you left towards the end of '38. Do you remember your leaving Vienna, or is that a haze, or...?

It is a haze, but I do vaguely remember I- that it was towards evening. Because I know that we arrived in Zagreb, that it was still dark. I don't know why we had to leave at that time. It may have been to do with trains or whatever.

And how old were you when you [were] left?

I was six.

So, very young.

Yes.

And do you know why your parents chose or went to Zagreb?

I've no idea... No idea. We didn't know anyone there. No...no. And when we arrived in Zagreb... we had nowhere to stay. And I don't think they had realised that Zagreb would- would be so full of refugees. We were not the only ones... traipsing off to Zagreb. And it was impossible to find anywhere. We had very little money at the time... because we didn't have property to sell in- in Vienna. We couldn't have sold it anyway. And we had left everything

behind. And all we probably had, was just bits of jewellery or whatever that you could carry. And so... my father hadn't been able to work for... a long time. I- he used to do piecework at home, which meant assembling little bits and pieces of... like lighters and other small bits. And because we had small fingers, he used to get us to help him to assemble these pieces. I mean that's all he was doing... before we left. So obviously, money was pretty short. But even if we could have afforded the large hotels or any hotel, they were full. Everything was full.

[00:20:27]

So where did you stay?

We ...My sister tells me this, because I don't remember too much about the actual finding of a place. But she says we- we went- we walked through the market... and my parents were asking if anyone knew of any place - a room - anything where we could stay. And eventually we found someone apparently who had a warehouse. He was a market worker and he had a warehouse. And he said he had already... housed one or two people and he still had some room. But I mean it was a...a... It was a warehouse... on several floors. And I seem to remember we were either- either on the first or second floor. This is huge room. And somehow or other bits of furniture were found. There was an old bed, which constantly collapsed. There was a- a dirty old chaise longue type thing which my sister slept on. And a few chairs were lashed together - dining chairs - that I could sleep on. My overriding memory of living in that place was the dirt, which must've upset my mother terribly because that- she was so much the opposite. ...The cockroaches were unbelievable. Every morning when the lights went on, the noise of hundreds of cockroaches scuttling across the floor. I can hear that now. There was a basin in a corridor and- and a lavatory somewhere. And lots of people shared it. And... I think we had a- in the corner of the room- I can see the room. In a corner of the room there was some sort of cooking thing. Well, a ring of some kind. And that's where my mother used to cook.

[00:22:53]

So, difficult... so...

It was very difficult. Very.

And what did the...?

We spent most of the time out of doors.

And what did they try? What was their aim? They tried to...?

As- as I understand it, from my sister, because I really... didn't know the details at that age.

No...no.

She says that they visited just about every embassy and every organisation possible. They tried desperately to get to America. Or Canada. It was impossible for them to get visas. And... it was only in- in May, that we eventually were able to leave. May 1939. And... they couldn't find any outlet for themselves. They just wanted to get us out. And I do remember being taken by my father, because my mother- she couldn't come. She was just in pieces. And so he took us to a station - in Trieste. We travelled to Trieste to get on the train. And we came... via France and Switzerland and... Paris. And I- I haven't told- I've found out from letters- my mother wrote loads of letters to us over the period, when she was still alive. And I gather from those letters that we changed trains in Basel and... we stayed overnight in Paris. And that the Committee which is- she just refers to 'The Committee'. And I think it must have been some sort of Jewish committee perhaps related the Austrian self-aid people who were helping us to get out. I don't know. But she says you know, "I hear..." - in the letter, she says, "I- I hear that you've stayed overnight with..." And then she mentions the name of the people. She said, "I don't know them, but they were very kind."

And did you travel by yourself with your sister?

[00:25:33]

Yes. Yes.

There was nobody else?

No... no. No. That was the amazing thing. She was eleven and I was six. And we were on that train... When my father put us on the train, my sister tells me that he just- there were other people getting out and going roughly in the same direction. And he asked one or two people would they keep an eye on us. And I'm presuming that they did. I don't remember much of the journey, except that at one point, soldiers came on. They looked to me like Nazis but I don't suppose they could have been because we were going through Switzerland and France at that point. But they had guns. And they were emptying out everyone's jewellery and anything. And my mother had not - on purpose, she told us later - given us anything that they could take. So...

And do you think... for your sister who was older, that must have been quite a responsibility.

[00:26:46]

Yes it was. Yes it was. And then we... we arrived. We came to Boulogne. I presume that these same people helped us to find, you know, from the train to the boat and all of that. We landed at Folkestone. I don't know how we got on the train at Folkestone and came to London. And when we arrived at... I think it was Victoria, in London, we were supposed to be met. But there was no one there to meet us. And... so this- this was one of the worst moments, I think. Cause my sister was beginning to lose it at this point, wondering, you know, what on earth are we going to do. We didn't even understand the language. We did have our labels around us with the address that we were going to. And... my sister apparently said to me, "Well Mutti always told us that we should ask a British policeman, because they, unlike the policemen in Austria, would be very kind." And that's what she did. And he looked at the label and saw the address of... in Paddington, of the Austrian Centre - I now know, which I didn't know before. And we arrived there by- he put us in a taxi and... and told the taxi presumably they'd "pay at the other end, I hope." Which they did. I mean, the- the woman who came running down the steps at, at the... in Westbourne Grove, was absolutely beside herself at not having got things right and not having met us. And that same day, we were told that unfortunately their- they had been unable to find two- a family that would take two people - two children. And so that same day Trudi and I were separated. And... [breaks down] ...sorry... [pause]...sorry... [pause] I think it's always the most difficult bit, this one... because we hadn't done a lot of crying up until that point, but... She was the li- link

left... and... She was just taken away.

[00:30:17]

What was upsetting for both of you...

Yes... yes.

And you didn't expect it...

No. We- We didn't know that. Up until that point, we'd expected to be together. At least we had each other. And... Yes, she was taken to... She was taken back to the station and... taken to... Broadstairs where... I don't- I don't know who met her there, but that- there was- she was- her foster- her fosterers were a couple of ladies who ran a preparatory school for girls. A boarding school girls, which was housed in Broadstairs and she went there.

What was the school called?

...I can't remember.

Don't worry.

No...

Yeah?

And... The school later moved, because it wasn't in a very safe place, Broadstairs, in the war. So they later moved to Colwall, which is near Malvern, in this area. I think she was there for about five or six months, something like that. And I was... I was taken by someone called Prudence Perkins. She was a lady who- she took me to a village in Wiltshire, called Dinton. And she was a lady who lived in Dinton and who was in the Women's... Army. She was a Captain in the Women's Army and she spoke fluent German. And so she... drove me down to Dinton. And she took me to an elderly couple.

[00:32:31]

And... it was a horror. I mean, you can imagine. It was a horror. Everybody just came and went. I mean- everybody along the route... just came and went. And, you know, Prudence- It was nice being with someone I could talk to in German. And then all of a sudden I'm with an elderly couple who don't know a single word of German. I don't know a single word of English. I'm six years old and I don't know what's happening to me. And... they- I think they thought they would have to return me somewhere, because I just could not stop crying. And eventually they put me to bed and... ..I eventually went to sleep. I distinctly remember the next morning... By then I'd obviously stopped crying. And I don't know whether there was some sort of innate... response in me to all this that was happening, and I realised that there was nothing I could do about anything. And crying wasn't going to get me anywhere. And... I think this is a philosophy I've now had for the rest of my life, that bad things happen and getting oneself into an absolute tizz... doesn't make it any better. It just makes it worse. So... Somehow or other, we managed to communicate with each other. Prudence Perkins, the woman who could speak German, did come... once or twice to explain things to me. And I gathered these were not my actual foster people. That they lived in another part of the village... And they eventually arrived: two elderly spinster ladies. Scottish Presbyterian. And... very Victorian.

What were they called?

[00:34:52]

Agnes McIntyre and Isabel Gordon. And the couple I was living with were a Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler. And they- she had been- it was- the house was the lodge to a stately home. Well, it now is. But it was owned by the Philipps family. And Philipps- the house is now National Trust property. So to give you some idea of the- the scale of the set up. There was huge park land and I lived in- in the lodge - very primitive lodge - to this house. The lodge had no running water, no electricity... an outside loo. And it was grim. It was really grim living. It was Victorian in- in every sense.

With Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler?

Yes with Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler. And then I would walk through the village down to... the- the two ladies... Agnes and Isabel - Aunt Agnes, Aunt Isabel - who... were teaching me English. They were educated ladies. They'd been... almoners at St. Thomas's Hospital apparently when they were working. Although, I find that difficult because I don't think I would have been happy under their ministrations in- in hospital. Because the milk human kindness didn't run through them.

They were stern? ...Victorian?

They were really Victorian, yes.

So do you- Do you think they understood at all where you came from? Or what do you...?

They didn't understand you see because...I mean the- the fact that I was Jewish. I know it was of no importance to me, as a- as a human being. I- I, I'd never really had any experience of being Jewish, as I've said. But now... being Jewish took on a huge new... character, because... everything that was happening to me was because I was Jewish. And I now knew that. So now it suddenly became very important. Not that I suddenly wanted to become religious about it. But I- as a race I- I became very defensive about it. But the Wheelers - the old couple I was living with - he was a church warden. The old ladies - my foster... I don't know what to call them...

[00:38:01]

Foster... well, not parents...

No, not parents. No, they're- they're guardians. They were my guardians. Yes, that's what I should have called them. My guardians, being Scottish Presbyterian, didn't have an outlet in the village for them. There was just the village church. And as soon as I was speaking English, they insisted that I went off to Sunday school. And I was then brought up as... a Church of England Christian. And not only over the years was I... I made to go to church, but I was also confirmed! I was first baptised and then confirmed into the Church of England at their behest. And against my will. Against my will.

Against - you didn't want to.

I did not want to. No. But it was all part of the Victorian thing. I...I... The learning of English was... mainly achieved by sitting hours on end reading Dickens and Austin and... the Brontës and so on. I mean I, I know most of Dickens. It seemed very weird. There was no childhood.

And did you have any other contact with any other refugees at all?

[00:39:40]

No - no.

Nothing?

No. No... None at all. None at all. However, I... I was sent- as soon as I could speak a sufficient amount of English, I think I was about nine when I went to the village school. Because they'd been teaching me at home. And... because I had an accent - a German accent, because I- 'Germany, Austria: It's all the same thing isn't it?' And 'they're Nazis' and you know, small children, what they're like. And... there came a day when we had a stoning. And... I refused to go back to school because I was so bullied. So they decided to continue teaching me at home. And then we got to the point where I was eleven. And obviously some decision had to be made as to where- what I was going to do. And this is where I'm slightly unsure about the relationship between... these guardians and a Miss Joyce Carr who lived in Norfolk and who I'm still reasonably sure must have had some decision-making in what happened to me next.

Who was she, if you could tell us please?

Joyce Carr was... They- they had a huge- the family had a huge house, Hedenham Hall, which her brother - her father now being dead - her brother lived in. He- he was Brigadier Carr. And she lived with her mother in the Dower House. The mother being one of these rather strange people who used to wear a- a veil. I'm, I'm not sure- a bit like Prince Phillip's mother. I don't know whether you've ever seen Prince Phillip's mother, but anyway... she

was a bit like that. And there was no way that Miss Carr would ever entertain having young people living in- she lived with her mother. She never married- having young people living with her, so... She- I don't know the relationship. Well, I know- yes I do to some extent, because I know that she too had been an almoner at St Thomas's Hospital at some point - yes.

[00:42:28]

So they were all fairly worthy ladies, I would say. She, I think, had a reasonable amount of say-so in what happened next. Because they chose to send me to the Godolphin School in Salisbury, which is a really... excellent girls' public school. And I went as a boarder. And I- whatever else I may have to say about these ladies and their lack of... loving kindness... and their inability, perhaps, to show any kindness... They were so- I would say 'frigid'. However, I can never thank them enough... for the fact that they gave me this amazing education. Unfortunately Miss Gordon - one of the guardians – she, I think, was probably the one with the money. And her companion, Agnes McIntyre... was sort of more like a companion to her I think. And Agnes didn't really take to me all that much, but had been left to make day to day decisions about me, unfortunately. And when Miss Gordon died, Agnes - and I'm not surprised that she did this - Agnes decided that she could no longer look after me. Not that she was looking after me on a day to day basis, because I was still living with the Wheelers. But she- she couldn't afford to keep me, she said. And she would have to make arrangements with Miss Carr, in Norfolk. That I should go there. And that on top of that I would have to leave the school. So I don't know you see how the money situation at- the school was expensive and I don't know whether they shared it or, or what, Miss Carr and Miss Gordon. But anyway, I suddenly had to pack up and go to Norfolk. Miss Carr didn't want me living with her and her mother. Well it was impossible, she said, because of her mother. And so she found a family - the Lambert family - in, in a place called Ditchingham, who had two daughters, one of whom was roughly my age. And... Mrs. Lambert was a widow. The- her husband and his brothers owned a taxi service... which was in the village. And I was sent to the school in Beccles which I used to have to go by bus every day. I suppose I stayed there for about eighteen months. And at that point... my father came onto the scene.

[00:46:09]

And... I had spoken to Miss Carr about- she'd asked me what I wanted to do. I had in fact

despite all these goings on, passed - initially passed - my eleven plus. And finally at the school I passed all my exams and got matriculation, which would have enabled me to go to university. But... at this point, my father came on the scene, having arrived from North Africa... with the Pioneer Corps. And he was stationed up at North or South Shields - I can't remember which, where... there were quite a lot of his company in the Pioneer Corps - foreigners of course. And they were housed up there. And they had some sort of social club where local ladies used to help out and arrange food and dances and so on. And there he met a woman called Ruth Ainslie. And... he- I still hadn't- although he'd been in this country for a while, I still hadn't seen him other than... once. Well, no, that's not quite true. I saw him once when he arrived with this Ruth Ainslie at my boarding school. I think that was 1947. And I think I was... fourteen. And I hadn't seen him since I was six. So that was eight years. And I didn't really recognise him. And I certainly didn't want to know this woman, whoever she was. She... So, when I eventually had to leave school- I was seventeen. And- and I had wanted to go to university and Miss Carr said, "Your father is asking that you should go and live with him." And the main reason for this, was that this woman who in the meantime he'd married in order to stay in this country because the government decided that all the Pioneer Corps would be sent back to wherever they'd enlisted - to be demobbed. And he suddenly saw himself going back to Africa. So... she was a single woman - not a youngster. Quite near his age. And she seemed quite keen. I'm not sure, you know, exactly what the situation was. But... anyway, she- she said that she would marry him and- in order for him to be able to stay in this country. And that's what they did. The unfortunate thing is, that soon after, after much lobbying by relations you know, and my sister lobbied and, and her husband and...oh, loads of other people who, you know, who had- a lot of these people who had relations here already were all lobbying for them to stay. And the government relented. And so they were allowed to stay. And so he didn't actually have to marry her, but there we go. Too late. And she was- she had no money, my stepmother. He had no money. She made it her mission to - they wanted to come and live in London - to find a, a flat. And she thought that because of his situation and the fact that he had a daughter who had no home, she could get herself a council flat. And she lobbied, and lobbied, and lobbied and eventually she made it. And she got a council flat in Brixton. ...Not exactly what I was used to... by then. And Miss Carr said, "You are underage still, at seventeen. I have no jurisdiction over you now your father is here. And I'm sorry but you're going to have to go and live with him."

[00:51:04]

And that's what happened. And it lasted for about six months until there was one almighty row. And... I just walked out and said, "Enough. Enough. You've got what you wanted; you've got the flat now and..." you know, "get on with it." And I... went to my sister. And- and they were just living in a one room flat in Chalk Farm and- one bedroom flat I mean, in Chalk Farm. And I stayed there for a few days and... she and her husband found me a hostel in Gower Street. A hostel for young girls who needed protection. [laughs] And I found a job in- I was quite good at maths, so I found a job in Lincoln's Inn Fields with an outfit called May, May & Deacon... Solicitors. I did their trust accounts. I wasn't earning enough to cover everything. And for a while, Miss Carr did help me. Because my sister and her husband were fairly poor at the time. They couldn't help me anymore. And... I realised I was on my own. I had to make it and I was determined I would. And I suppose... I've been... doing that ever since.

And how- how did you feel? I mean you had to move twice probably against your will from the school...in terms of leaving the first school and leaving the second school. How- how did you feel in both instances?

[00:53:03]

I- well... I've always had... Luckily, I'm not the sort of person who is going to be - I don't know what the word is - I'm not going to crumble. I'm quite strong. I've- I've grown very strong. And from a very, very early age, I determined that nothing was going to get in my way and stop me from finding my own security. My friends around me were all getting married and so on and so forth and I didn't get married. I- I said, "I can't get married because you see, I'm never going to rely on a husband to keep me. I'm going to find my own way and find my own security." And... I suppose from roughly- I had a rough time. I went from hostel to hostel. I went from job to job. I went- I eventually you know, shared bedsits with various girls I met on the way. ...I... eventually got myself a...a rather- quite a nice mansion flat in Baron's Court with a- with a great friend. And we lived there for some while until- until she got married. And then I used to let her portion of the flat out. It was quite a big flat. I was working and earning a reasonable sum by then. And then they wanted to repossess those places because we'd been on controlled rents in those days. And so I did a bit of bargaining with the landlord and got myself a sufficient amount of money out of him to put down a

deposit on a flat in Acton. And from then on, I have just purchased a number of flats and this is my last one. Even though I married in the meantime, it was always me who bought the house.

You stayed independent?

[00:55:43]

I had to. I- it's the most important thing in life to me that I must have security. Because no one is ever going to turn round to me now and say, "Oh I'm afraid you can't do that." Or, you, you know, "You haven't got enough money to do that." Or... No...

And of the foster... or guardians- of the people you met, who were you most- were you attached to anyone? Or were you...?

Not really, no.

No. You kept- they kept their distance or you kept your distance.

I kept my distance, I think. I- I realise now perhaps I- I didn't show- one of the phrases that Miss Gordon and Miss McIntyre constantly used if I ever argued about anything - and you know, I was a teenager. I was a child and a teenager and I had normal... feelings that any child would have. And I suppose I wasn't always the best behaved. But you see if I did anything it is always, "You are the most ungrateful child. How on earth you could say those things, or do those things, when we have done all this for you?" It was always having to be grateful, grateful, grateful. And I think you know they were their own worst enemies because anyone saying that to you, constantly... It's not going to endear you.

And were you in touch with your sister throughout, or... What happened to her?

[00:57:25]

Well- well, my sister you see was was not living very near to me. And... really it was only when she eventually left school and came to London- and then later I left school and came to

London, that we were able to get together properly again. Then in the meantime, she met... Malcolm. He was a man who was eleven years older than her and it showed. I don't mean physically. He was- he was a very grounded, down-to-earth person and I think she was looking for a father figure. I've always thought of it that way. However. However it lasted, and when she died they were about to... have their fiftieth wedding anniversary, just before- she died just before. And- and he- you know, it was a good marriage for her. ...So, you know, who am I to say?

And what were her experiences compared to yours... regarding a foster home or...?

Well she stayed- she stayed with those same people until she... left them- left school and came to London.

And what were their names please?

They were... Miss Sealy and Miss Duffy.

Two women?

Two women who ran a preparatory school for girls. ...A boarding school. And she was luckier in some ways, because they had already taken in one or two other refugees. So... Doris, one of the- these refugees - a German girl who- she was able to speak with her. And so in a way, she was a bit luckier there. Although she always bemoaned the fact that the education she got there was not- not the best because they continued to educate her after the age of eleven. Although it was only a preparatory school.

They kept her there?

They kept her there and continued to teach. And she came away with virtually no qualifications. So... However, she did have a, I think, a happier time because she was with other children. And I went- we did exchange holidays from time to time. So I would go to Colwall, where the school was and she would come to Dinton. She didn't enjoy her Dinton trips very much I don't think. And we did a lot quarrelling when she came to Dinton. It was better when I went to Colwall... because they weren't as- they weren't as strict with her. Mnn.

[01:00:36]

And was there- were you in touch at all with- in your memory - with any refugee organisations or any organisations...?

No.

Worrying about you?

No.

Or taking care of you?

No.

You said The Austrian Centre at the beginning, but there was no follow-up or anything?

No... no - none. No. I- I don't think I even realised that I was part of what we now call 'The Kindertransport', until I was quite grown up. It never occurred to me. When I- when I found myself in in London working, from that day on, I put the whole thing behind me. I realised then I was never going to see any of my relations again. I knew my mother had probably been taken to a camp, but I didn't know that for sure. And it's only in the last ten years that I have discovered exactly what happened to her.

So maybe tell us a little bit about what- what happened to your parents after you left?

That is... Oh, gosh. That's a long story really. I've written some of it... down, because it- it's quite interesting. They- they were... deported from Yugoslavia. I presume we were there on a visa. I'm- I'm not sure. They were deported... and they went to Italy. And they went to... various towns in Italy. They were- we would hear from them. They were in... Venice. They were in... I can't remember the names of the places now. They were in Trieste. They were in Ventimiglia. They were- so on and so forth. And... they were in touch with other Jewish refugees who were also trying to find a haven somewhere. And together with them, they-

they decided that the best thing they could do was to go to France - South of France - Nice... where there is quite a big Jewish... colony. And also there was a Jewish Committee that was helping people. And... she writes in one of her letters that... they eventually got to- all this time they were living hand to mouth of course because, they weren't earning any money. They'd spent just about every penny they had, and they were relying I think on the charity of these various Jewish organisations. That's my theory anyway.

[01:03:37]

Eventually, she wrote and said that they had arranged with a- this Committee, that about forty of them could be transported by night - this is illegal of course - to go from Italy to Nice without any kind of visas or any- you know? And that they- they could get a place on a boat. They hadn't got the money. And she says in her letter, that the other people on the boat and a member of the Committee decided that... to help them, and found, I think it was about 1,600 liras were needed at the time to pay the boatman to take them to Nice. And they went on a three-and-a-half hour journey from there to- and the boat landed at a beach about- I think an hour's drive away from Nice. And just landed them on the beach - all these people. And they dispersed. And it was coming- it was still nighttime. And they stayed in the woods overnight. The next day they went to the... They found the- the road- a road and didn't quite know which way they were going to go. And three gentlemen - this is her description, my mother's description - three gentlemen in linen suits... came walking down the road. They had a car somewhere in the background. And they were obviously looking pretty bedraggled and these gentlemen said, you know, "Where- where do you- where are you looking for? Where are you trying to get to?" And so they told them the whole story of what had happened. They thought there was nothing else to do; they had no money, they had nothing. They didn't know how they were going to get to Nice. So these- these three men took them in their car to the villa where they were staying, temporarily. And as they approached the villa to one side there was what looked like a castle. ...A really grand house. And they said, "Oh," you know, "who lives there?" And... they said, "Oh, this is one of the properties of the Duke of Kent... and our garden actually borders their property." And they took them back... and they gave them- she lists, you know, eggs... cheese... bread. They were- hadn't eaten for a long time.

[01:06:47]

They took them and, and fed them and generally, you know, helped them to brush up. And then asked them where they wanted to get to. And she said, "Well, we need to get to the Committee in Nice, who are going to help us." And they said, "Well, we'll drive you there. But if anyone stops us, you stopped us on the road. We don't know you." So I don't know at what point in the war this was exactly. You know, I presume by this time war had broken out. And they got... They dropped them off in Nice. They gave them 100 francs. And... they were then arrested by the local police, together with several of the others. And various things happened then. They were threatened with being taken back to... well, they took a lot of them back to Montand, and were going to put them back on a boat to- to Italy. But my mother refused. They were going-

[01:03:37]

They'd separated the men and the women. My mother refused to leave... her husband. And... eventually, I think they got rather sick of several of them who were causing such a palaver. They had taken their passports away. They said, "Well"- it was then coming up to nighttime I think and they said, "Well, if you've got any money you can go and- go into a hotel." I mean they couldn't go very far, cause they hadn't got their passports. So luckily they did have some money... and they were able to stay somewhere. Next day the Committee I think helped them to sort the whole thing out... and managed to get their passports back. And found they were able to find a room... in Nice. A pretty grim room I gather, from the description- where she and my father were able to stay for some while and just take stock. Eventually, the men, the Jewish men in the area were all rounded up and taken away. He was for a time... in a place called Fort Carré in Antibes. And she used to be able to go and visit him there for a while. But he was in various camps. What happened to my father next... is- is really difficult, cause I don't- I don't have many of his papers. I do have a few. And they're- they're difficult- it's difficult to find out where he... how he managed eventually to be landed with the British Pioneer Corps. Because at one point he was working for them together with a lot of other foreigners. And just as a skivvyng- he was a washer-upper or something. And I know at another point they were moved to northern France.

[01:10:25]

And- because he wrote to us and said, "I'm probably much nearer to you now than I am to

your mother.” And- but in- in the meantime, my... mother was sent from Nice, I think by the Committee, to a little village in the Alpes Maritimes called Puget-Théniers... Which is quite a Jewish sort of village from age- from long ago. There's even a...an- a road you know named after... Jews. And she lived there in a room. She had help from... She had help from the Committee. And she also had a little help every now and then from my father's sister who lived in Switzerland still, and was able to get some money to her. And but in- in addition she worked for... two ladies there, who were quite- a Dutch lady and a - I don't know, a German lady possibly - who were quite well-off but whose husbands had also been taken away.

And - sorry to interrupt you - this information you have because of the correspondence?

Because of the correspondence.

So she continued to write to you?

Oh, yes. I've got loads of letters from her. Yes. ...And... eventually in 1940 she wrote-four... Her four last letters to my father... who was- I- I honestly don't know exactly where he was. Somewhere in France, at that point. And eventually they were deported to North Africa, where I think there is a Pioneer Corps base in, in Colomb-Béchar - a place in the desert there... where he was interned, I think.

[01:12:35]

I don't- it's very hazy, and we never really got down to discussing it. Unfortunately he died before I was in a frame of mind, as I might be now, to ask him such things. Anyway. The last four letters that she wrote to him, he kept. So when he died, I had them. And those are very revealing as well. But they were- numbered all her letters. A hundred-and-odd, on the top of each letter. So she had written, in that short period of time that they were apart - a year-and-a-half I think - in total. She'd written over- well over 100 letters to him.

So what...?

I haven't got the others.

So what happened to her? She was in the village...

She was in the village and she was rounded up in 1942. She... was put on the train together with all the rest of them to Drancy. And from Drancy she went directly to Auschwitz. And the French Holocaust Centre has- had- I didn't know until I was with computers and could look these things up. Has- has all the details of all that. And gave me, even, the- a photocopy of the carriage they went in to go to Auschwitz. And told me that she was sent on the 2nd of September 1942. And that at that point, those carriages were going direct to the gas chambers.

So this is Vichy France?

Yes.

Deporting...

Yes... yes...

But you didn't know that- that...

I didn't know that...

until...

...until the last ten years. We all knew that, you know, if there had been the slightest chance that she had survived, we would have known about it. She was a strong woman.

So by the end of the war when you were still in- in school- you were in the- in the public school by then?

Yes.

Forty-five.

Yes.

Do you remember- how- how did the end of the war impact you? I mean, was there a feeling that you thought, now I have to find the parents or- at that point, did- what did you think?

[01:15:15]

I- I had already- In my mind I knew that if my mother was alive somewhere- I mean I knew my father was alive anyway. But I knew that if my mother was alive - and I suppose it was my mother I wanted most - I would have known. ...So- I- no, I didn't know where to start. We didn't have the communications we have now. Everything would have been so much easier. Mnn... Yeah. But... I- it's only in recent years I suppose in the last... ten or fifteen years that I've- I've got- I've, I've forgotten most of my German. I can just about recognise easy German, but the rest I find- I find it difficult. A lot of the letters being in everyday German I can kind of get the gist of them. But I- I have... a sort of friend of a friend who speaks fluent German. And... it was suggested that she might like to help me to translate them.

Yeah...

Well we did do a fair number of them but I haven't had them all translated. And it- it wasn't done in a very professional way because... I had a little recording machine and she would read it out and I'd record it. And then I'd come back home and transcribe it. And some of it was difficult to do, so...

And have you got all the letters?

I have, yes. Yes. And I thought it might be a nice idea perhaps to leave those letters to... I don't know, the Wiener Library, or...

Yeah...

Yes.

And did your father ever talk in later life about his experiences and...?

[01:17:26]

He didn't want to. That was the problem. That's why I- by the time I was old enough to... you know, be more forceful about it and make him sit down and do it, it was too late. ...Yes. And he just didn't want to talk about it. Little snippets I might have got, which were of no real value, you know, now and again about: "Oh well, you know, we used to do that in Vienna." And, "Do you remember the time when...?", because he was great chess player and he used to- if we didn't know where he was, we could find him in the nearest café playing chess. And occasionally I'd be allowed to run around the corner and get him- remind him that food was on the table.

And where did he... did they stay in Brixton? Earlier you said they had a flat in Brixton.

They stayed in Brixton until he died. Yes. And I'm afraid I didn't- I- I don't want to be really unkind about my step-mother. But she was a rather silly woman. And... She- she did- all that she did, she did for the wrong reasons. And I don't- I feel very sorry for her because she had a very unhappy marriage because he wasn't faithful to her. And... he was more away from her than with her. He was away from her, I now realise, at places like the Austrian Centre playing chess and... chatting to people in German. ...His English was never very good. When he first came, we had to- my, my German was so bad, that we had to... communicate in French. Because my French was not bad.

That's how you could speak to him?

Mnn.

And do you member of that meeting... when you first met him?

[01:19:44]

Yes it was... totally embarrassing. I was- it was the more embarrassing because it was at my boarding school. Don't forget that this boarding school... had pupils... who came from

homes where their parents... came to fetch them in their Rolls Royces and their Jaguars and so on. Take them off- off for the day, and so on. And this little couple come up the drive. And they don't look anything like anyone else's parents, you know. And I, I suppose as a child, one is very influenced by one's peers. And so... I should be ashamed to say that, shouldn't I? She was... not... She... She was not of the same intelligence as my father. No.

And you told us that you were bullied in the first school, but how did you manage in that- in the boarding school?

Boarding school was lovely.

Was it? And did...?

It was the best time of my life... because there were a lot of- ...at- in those days there were still an awful lot of British people who were working overseas, you know, in, in embassies and, and you know banks and this, that and the other, and sent their children home... to be educated. And these children were used to foreigners.

Right.

And I didn't stand out at all. There were other Jewish children there, as far as I knew. Yes. In fact, I know there was another one in my class.

And also by now your English was...

Yes.

...good.

Yes. Yes... yes.

Mrs. Beigel I think we should have a little break now and continue.

[sound break]

[01:22:05]

We were talking about the period post war. Maybe tell us a little bit more what- what your sister did after she left her...

Yes...

...foster situation.

My sister came to London and- from Colwall in Worcestershire. And she... I don't know quite how it occurred, but she got herself a job with the Hampstead nurseries of... Anna Freud. And she trained there for a couple of years. And then... at this point she met- she was only about eighteen at the time then, I think. And she met very quickly her husband-to-be. And...her husband-to-be was... a conscientious objector and was therefore not fighting. And he was doing all sorts of various jobs, somewhat related to the Quaker movement, in helping... people who had been bombed out and so on. And refurbishing buildings, et cetera. And... so, when they got married, she left that job. And I'm a bit hazy about the dates. But she and her husband were employed by a company that was American-based. And I- 'was called something like *'The Foster [Parents]Plan for War Children'*. I- I can't remember the exact title. And this was American-funded. And it was down near Denham in... which I think is in Buckinghamshire. And... They were- they ran this home for about twenty or more children, all of whom were from war zones - mainly from Germany and other European countries. Some of- most of whom I think had- had lost their families, et cetera. And they stayed there for some years. I- I, I can't remember exactly when- when the place closed down.

And what was the place called?

I've- I- I have got the name written down somewhere. I can give it to you. But I think it was *'The Foster [Parents]Plan for War Children'* or something like that.

And what were the names, please, at the point of your brother-in-law and your sister?

[01:25:16]

He- he is Malcolm Andrew and she was then Trude Andrew of course. It was- they got married when she was... eighteen... And, as I say, they were there for some years. And then... during that period, her husband trained as a children's social worker and he was doing the exams in his part- as part-time from the job. And eventually he became qualified. And he then got a job in Southwark as a social worker, mainly dealing with children. And they came to live back in London. And... they lived first of all in Chalk Farm...in- in one of these big blocks in Chalk Farm. And later, as a result of Malcolm's mother dying, they inherited some money and were able to buy a small house in Hampstead Garden Suburb, which is where they lived for most of their lives. My sister had... a child with Malcolm. And then, having had problems with that, they then adopted another child, Rachel. The child they had was Susan. And then they adopted Rachel... and... I think there's about the same- well there is the same age difference between Susan and Rachel as there was between my sister and I.

And did you stay close to your sister, or...?

I was unfortunately not as close to my sister as I would have liked, because we'd been separated for so many years. And we'd gone our different ways. And I was doing completely different things from her and I wasn't- perhaps if I'd been married with children we might have been closer together but... My aims in life were somewhat different.

[01:27:44]

What were your aims in life at that- post-war as you- you discussed it before a little bit, but maybe...?

My- my aim in life was that I would not allow what had happened to me, to affect... my life... in a detrimental way. That I was determined that I was going to make some sort of success of my life. And... the one thing that I was really keen to establish was... security. And therefore... after really just bumming around for a bit, doing nothing... very grand for- job wise, I worked- originally, my first job was in a solicitors' office - May, May & Deacon in Lincoln's Inn Fields. And I worked there for probably a couple of years; I can't remember. And then I joined London University Senate House and worked in the exams department there. I was a bit spoilt there, because one was allowed to use all of the facilities of the

university. And it probably kept me there longer than I should have been. But I was working in an- administration in the exams department, and I stayed there for about five years. And at that point, I- I decided - I was then in my early twenties - I decided that really if I was going to be doing anything with my life I'd better do it now. And through friends and contacts I managed to get an interview with... Thorn EMI. Well, at the time it was 'Thorn Electrical Industries', which later became one of the big blue chip companies. And it was the early days of PR. Most firms didn't have any PR and... I- I really learnt on the job. I was lucky enough to be taken on as a dogsbody in the PR department. And I stayed there for about three years, and then applied for another job with 'Formica'... and I managed to get that job. And became press officer in the team at Formica, and stayed there for about ten years, which was a- really enjoyable. And then... towards the end of my stay at Formica, I was head-hunted back again by Thorn, who were now Thorn- Thorn EMI. And they asked me would I come back and be their press and public relations officer for Thorn Lighting. So, that's what I did. And I stayed there for about ten years. And... then due to various internal... problems and the appointment of various people within the general publicity department, I suffered consequences from not being the most popular person in the group. In all of these jobs, I was the only woman in- in, in the group and... it was a big fight always. And so I left there. It was a- a- virtually a mutual parting, but they did have to pay me rather a lot of money, which helped me to buy a house in... Ealing.

[01:32:02]

And... then, I did- I'm trying to think what I did after that. I worked part-time for- I, I'd become something of an expert in the PR field when it came to lighting, and a lot of people in the industry tended to know each other. And they knew me. And so I did find it reasonably easy to find part-time work and- and consultancy work in- in...in lighting companies, or with lighting companies. And... it's difficult trying to remember the- the sequences. And then I was headhunted by Osram. And... I went to Osram for about three years. At the end of three years - a company I absolutely loathed and detested, and most of the people I was working with - I was happily made redundant. And decided enough was enough and I decided to become a consultant. So for the next six years, I worked as a consultant... mainly working for lighting companies, but there were other companies as well. And wished I'd done it a long time before, because I found myself much better off doing that than working for a company. And far less hassle. And then when I became sixty, I said to my husband that I'd had- I'd

worked for forty years of my life, non-stop. I thought my time had come to put my feet up and just enjoy myself. So... that's what I did. I retired.

And tell us a bit please about your husband. Where did you meet?

[01:34:17]

Yes. I met my husband originally in one of the light- in Thorn Electrical Industries many-many years ago. He- he was in... He was a, a- a lighting engineer. And... he was married at the time and with a family and so on. And he was just one of many lighting- we had at least a dozen lighting engineers working there at the time. With whom all- I was quite friendly with all of them, so- but we used to get on quite well. And we sort of vaguely kept in touch over the years because he was still working in lighting and so was I. And then there were long gaps when we didn't see each other. I hadn't really thought of him as husband material at all. And... Then when I was working at... at Osram... he was a...a technical author at the time working for himself but also a journalist. And an expert witness. And something occurred within Osram that required an article to be written by- by an expert on whatever subject it was - I can't remember. So I approached him and- and said would he do this. And... contact was made. He was no longer married and... the rest was history, really. We got together quite late in life, so by that time I had acquired... two properties in London. And he had left his wife and left her everything. And he was living in a studio flat in London... just with what he earned. Because... It's a- it's a difficult story that one, but we won't go into it. And so we got together about 1983. In 1985 we decided to leave London. And because we could both work - being self-employed - from home with our computers and all the rest of the equipment. And... So we moved to the Cotswolds and first of all to Shipton Oliffe... to a beautiful village. Bought a house. I bought the house outright, as a result of the price of property in London at the time being totally off the scale. I got an amazing amount of money for the house in Ealing. And I was able to buy a house outright in, in Shipton Oliffe. And we did a lot of work on it. And we thought that would be where we'd spend the rest of our time, but unfortunately I really didn't like South Gloucestershire and the village - the people in the village - not the village. And decided I couldn't go on living there after I retired. So... We looked around and eventually found Willersey. We loved the locality. We didn't love the house particularly; it was a grotty little house when we bought it but... we made it as comfortable as we could and we loved this village. And we were very, very happy here.

Unfortunately, Stanley developed bladder cancer and within eighteen months, he died. He died in 2000. And... So... I was able to continue to live here, because I don't have a mortgage. I don't have high outgoings.

[01:39:06]

And you don't plan to move somewhere else? You like it here?

The only thing I might do, because I really feel the garden is too much. Unfortunately this week on top of everything else I have lost my gardener who has been told she's got to stop working so hard. So... [half laughs] And I can't- I can't deal with the whole of my garden; it's too much. So I might move for that reason. But I did what I wanted to. I reached old age in total security.

That was important for you.

It was the most important thing in my life. ...Yes.

At what point did you become British?

I became British in the 70s. I had applied before I was twenty-one, and was refused. They later- later when I reapplied and asked why on earth they'd refused me it was to do with the fact that my father, who had arrived in this country, he hadn't asked for British nationality. It was something to do with that. And they apologised and said perhaps they'd made a mistake.

[01:40:30]

And was it important for you to have the citizenship? British citizenship?

The only importance to it was that the Austrian embassy were not terribly polite every time I went back to renew my Austrian passport, and said, you know, "Why don't you get a British passport?" "Why don't you go back to Austria?" - or whatever. They were really... not very nice.

And when was the first time you went back to Austria?

I think I was probably in my... forties.

And what was it like to go back to Vienna?

It was rather a weird visit because I went with a boyfriend. And... I think perhaps I wasn't totally... on the ball when it came to my past history in Vienna. We would just enjoy Vienna like a couple of tourists. So, it was only the next time I went with my niece that... I wanted to know everything. You know: where I'd lived... my history. And I've amassed quite a bit of back history since.

So what do you think triggered, in a way, your interest at a so late a stage?

Quite honestly I think it's a- it's a feature of old age. I know so many people of my age who start talking about their youth. And- and had never talked- you know, or events that happened in their youth, or their back history, or their parentage and all the rest of it. You wait until you're in your eighties. It's...It's ridiculous really. ...And my niece is interested, yes. Well particularly my elder niece. The one who is adopted, she's - it doesn't seem to affect her in the same way. She doesn't show very much interest.

But your older niece...wants to know.

My older niece is interested. Yes.

[01:43:00]

And how do you think did your experiences shape your later life? What effect do you think did it- did they have on you?

It's difficult isn't it? I- I've... ...I'm quite... self-sufficient. I- I don't- I don't really get into a flap when bad things happen. I've had two lots of cancer, for instance. Other people seem to go into meltdown when they're told they have cancer. But I just accepted, "Oh well it's just another one of those things that happens to you." And... just got on with it. I think that's- a

lot of people say that about me. That- they say, "It is truly amazing how normal you are for someone with your background." And I just try to be that - normal. I don't- I do- I actually feel that if I let it affect me badly, then those dreadful people who did all this to us - have won! So... why let them? ...I think that's probably at the back of it, yes. And also, the fact that... so many members of my family died.

Who died, apart from your mother?

Oh, aunts and uncles and grandparents and... I have actually got a- a list that was printed off from the synagogue in Vienna, which we visited. And they have everybody on that list who died- who was from Vienna, who died. And there are ten people on it. And I think the- if- if I didn't make the most of my life, they all died in vain. So... I would feel so guilty if I just became a, a layabout and... hadn't tried.

[01:45:29]

That's quite a bit of pressure, then...

Mnn...mnn.

...to live...

I don't think I thought about it or in obvious terms, quite like that. But look- as you ask me how, I- I think that's probably the reason I did it all.

And how different do you think your life would have been if you...?

I just can't imagine! I mean, a young girl in, in Vienna. I suppose I would have been doing all the things that young girls in Vienna do now. Still living there and... I just have the, the one cousin. He- he is the son of... of the uncle who died in the Warsaw ghetto. And of course he was- his father was taken away while his mother was still pregnant. So he never knew his- his... But you see he has- admittedly had his mother there, looking after him. And she was quite a strong woman, Aunt Hilde But he has made a huge success of himself. He has quite a big business and so on.

And does he see himself as Jewish? He's half Jewish, or...?

Yes.

He does?

Yes. Yes. And he's taken- he has one daughter and a grandson, and he's taken them to... Israel...to a memorial and shown them all the, you know, his background. To make sure that they know.

And how would you identify yourself today in terms of your identity? How- how do you see yourself?

[01:47:30]

Well I- I see myself as, as British of course. But I feel - more so in my old age - I feel more Jewish. And it was something I never thought about. During the whole of my working life I hardly thought about it. Perhaps I thought about it a bit more while I was working for Thorn EMI, might cause Thorn was started by Jules Thorn who was a German refugee in the twenties, and who started literally from nothing, rather like the Tesco man. In fact, I knew the Tesco man, Cohen, because he used to visit Jules Thorn at- at- when I was working there. And he- he- when he became successful, he took on- virtually all of his directors were Jewish, some of whom had backgrounds, some of whom had been imprisoned in the Isle of Man during the war. And so, yes, I suppose when I- all the time I worked in that company which was a total of about thirteen years, I was very much more aware of the Jewish thing because he was- he was outwardly very Jewish.

And where was he from?

He was originally from Vienna. And- but he came over in the 20s. And he had studied- he was- he was a...a very small, typical Jewish-looking man. And people- I think because of the way he looked and the way- the fact that he was a small man probably not a lot taller than me, he- he had a hard fight in life, in every sense. But I admired him tremendously because of

what he had built up. And I enjoyed being part of that set up. Although he was quite difficult to work for.

And did you talk about your background with other people or colleagues? Or was it something you didn't talk about?

No, none of them talked about it on the whole. It was only when you'd been to a sales conference with them and they'd had a few drinks, you know, you might get a bit out of them. But on the whole, none of them wanted to talk about it.

And you? Did you talk to your husband about your experiences, or...?

[01:50:09]

Yes. My husband was Jewish.

Yes.

Yes. And he was therefore very interested in my background. Yes. I talked to him quite a bit about it. Yes.

And you don't have any children.

No.

So was that a conscious decision on your part, or...?

By the time I met Stanley, he- it was too late for me to start thinking... I was... well into my forties when we got together.

Yes... No, I'm just asking whether your own- in a way your own difficult childhood experiences in a way shaped... do you see what I mean?

I- I've never- I am slightly sorry when I see- when I saw my sister with her family and when

I see other friends. I have lots of friends with children. I was always quite close to the- these were friends I was very close to and, and I was there when their children were born, and used to see them regularly and so on. So I was always around children. And I suppose I thought that would have been nice. But I don't think emotionally I was all that unhappy about it. Especially as I'd had bad experiences with children as well. You know when- when I was growing up at school I thought they were horrible little so-and-so's, or can be, can't they?

That's what I mean. Whether you think there's a relationship...

Well, I don't know. Perhaps there was- there was. But certainly as I grew up- and I- unfortunately I don't remember my- the other children in Vienna... that I must've been close to.

You don't remember...?

I must've gone. I'm sure I went to kindergarten. I think my sister said I did. But I don't remember any of them, no. And presumably those were good experiences. But... mnn.

[01:52:24]

And how do you think- I mean the separation I guess from your mother must have been a difficult thing – to deal with?

I think that has always been the most difficult thing. Yes. I desperately wanted- I desperately wanted her. Yes. And throughout the entire war and afterwards, when we didn't know what had happened to her, it was the one thing I prayed for all the time. Yes.

You remember that?

Mnn. Mnn... Yes. And I- yes, I suppose even to the point of saying, you know, if one of them had to go... it's not very nice is it? Well especially as the relationship with my father was not good. It seemed so sad that... Because I know that if my mother had been there, everything would have been different. ... Yes. ... Oh, well. ... Yeah.

Do you have any message for anyone who might watch this interview, based on your experiences?

...I suppose if- if I can do anything for anyone else watching this, is that it's perfectly obvious that whatever life throws at you, you can deal with it. And you should deal with it. And unfortunately I don't probably have a lot of patience with people who... just can't seem to deal with anything these days. Every- every program you watch on the television at the end of it says, "If you have been affected by...". You know. Gosh, I've been affected. We were all affected. Loads of people are affected. But they just have to pick themselves up and get on with it.

Do you think it would have been good for you for example to receive counselling or any... help...

Counselling?

...at some point? Yes.

If I've had...?

Did you?

The only time I went to counselling was after my husband died. And this did affect me quite badly, because it wasn't- of course I was terribly, terribly upset by his death. We were soul mates and we had so much in common apart from- we, we understood- even understood each other's work, you know, and so on. We had a- it just seemed very unfair - very unfair that after all that had gone, this should have happened to him. And... I just couldn't deal with it for a short time, so I went to a counsellor then... which was supplied- a counsellor who was supplied by the hospice where he'd been. And... I suppose- I suppose it helped a bit. But not a lot... Not a lot. What can anyone do? You have to do it yourself.

[01:56:07]

Yeah. Is there anything else which we haven't discussed, which you'd like to add or...?

I can't think offhand of anything else.

Maybe- I have one last question for you as- because you mentioned it briefly. Do you think that the fact that you were a woman affected your experiences as a- as a, let's say, a 'girl refugee' so to speak... and a woman in work. Do you feel...?

I think I had the same problems, because I was working in the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s. These were not good times for women in work who had any ambition. So I don't think being a refugee was any different from any other woman in - you know - wanting to get on.

But you experienced the same problems...?

I did experience exactly the same problems.

Did you face any... bad experience as a- at that point as a refugee? Or probably nobody knew of your background. Or- do you see what I mean? Did you...?

Apart from my name, which gives it away.

Yep.

[01:57:30]

Yes. I- my accent was fine, and therefore, it wasn't apparent. So... I remember on one occasion - this is a ridiculous story - I remember on one occasion when I was living in a hostel in Gower Street and a- a British girlfriend there who was living in the same hostel. And she and I had to go out because I was changing my job. I had to go and register with the police. And I went to Tottenham Court Road police station with- with this friend of mine. And the man- the policeman was extremely offhand and rude with me. And she turned round- she was a very outward-going woman; she shouldn't have said it. She turned round to him and said, "Why are you being so... rude to my friend? Is it because her English is so much better than yours?" [Bea laughs]

What's did he reply?

I didn't say anything. I was terrified of the police. I never want- I know anything I do or say might get me deported, so... [laughs]

And did you ever contemplate changing your name, speaking of...?

No, definitely not. Definitely not. When my husband and I came to the Cotswolds to Shipton Oliffe, it was he who did say, because he knew- we both knew the area before we came here. He used to holiday here with his family. And it was he who said, "Do you think that we should not say anything about being Jewish in a village like this?" And I said, "How dare you say such a thing? I would never deny it. And if they don't like it then that's their problem isn't it?" I mean, you don't go around telling people. But if the subject came up, I would not deny it. So... No.

Something important.

It is important to me.

Although it's not the religion...

Not the religion. No. You can keep that one. [laughs]

OK. Mrs. Beigel, thank you very, very much for this interview. Now we're going to look at some of your photographs and documents.

OK. OK...

Thank you.

Thank you.

[02:00:13]

[End of interview]

[Start of photographs and documents]

[02:00:28]

Photo 1

My grandmother, Marie Herlischek... taken in- around 1939 I would guess. ...In Vienna.

Photo 2

Renate Beigel, one years old- one year old. Vienna.

Photo 3

Stephanie Herlischek and Walter Beigel on their wedding day, in Vienna.

Which year?

I don't know. I have no idea. I don't have their wedding certificate.

How old was your sister when- I mean, after how many years was your sister born? You know when she was born...

She was born in 1927. So...

Mid-20s?

Possibly, yes.

Photo 4

Walter, Trudi and Renate Beigel in Zagreb, on the 23rd of October 1938.

Photo 5

The Beigel family Walter, Stephanie, Trudi and Renate in Zagreb in May 1939.

Photo 6

Stephanie and Walter Beigel in Le Mée, France, in 1940. Is that right?

Photo 7

Possibly the last picture taken of Stephanie Beigel in France in May 19- no - April 1942.

Photo 8

Walter Beigel, centre front row, in- in the internment camp at Colomb-Béchar Algeria, January 1940.

[02:02:51]

Photo 9

Renate Beigel with Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler in Dinton, Wiltshire, soon after her arrival in the country.

Photo 10

Philipps House Lodge - Dinton. The house where Renate first came on arrival in England. Is that right?

Photo 11

Renate Beigel and Trudi Beigel. About a year after arriving in this country. The clothes I'm wearing are very unlike those that I came with, because as I grew out of the wonderful clothes that my mother made which were all hand embroidered and, and- and really very lovely... I was made to give them away to other children who had more need of them than me.

Say that again, please - what you just said: "I wish I..."

I wish I'd kept them, because I very much would like to have them now... if only to hand on.

Photo 12

Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler with Renate, outside their house. Renate aged approximately nine, I should think.

Photo 13

Renate Beigel on a school outing from the Godolphin School, Salisbury at Muddiford... I can't remember- is it in Dorset? I think it's in Dorset- doesn't matter. Where did you say I was? The second row, left of centre. Renate Beigel on a school outing from the Godolphin at Muddiford. Second row, left of centre.

[02:05:16]

Photo 14

Renate with the Lambert family in Ditchingham, Norfolk. Mrs. Lambert and her two children Margaret and Doreen.

Photo 15

[My sister Trudi and her husband Malcolm on their wedding day, in Cheltenham. No it wasn't. No- start again. Of course they weren't in Cheltenham. ...Can I start again?]

My sister Trudi and her husband Malcolm in Colwall, Worcestershire, on their wedding day.

Photo 16

Renate Beigel during her working life at Formica, as part of a kitchen exhibition. ...About 1960.

Photo 17

Renate Beigel and her husband Stanley Lyons in Shipton Oliffe, around 1994.

Photo 18

[Renate Beigel and her niece, Susan Andrew, in the Jewish ceremony... Start again: cemetery.]

Renate Beigel and her niece, Susan Andrew, in the Jewish cemetery in Vienna, discovering the tombstone of their great great grandmother Betty Herlischek.

Document 1

One of the many letters from Stephanie Beigel to her daughter Renate... soon after Renate arrived in England.

[02:07:54]

Document 2

The deportation notice for Stephanie Beigel, acquired from the Mémorial du Martyr Juif Inconnu, in Paris. On the... 2nd of September 1942.

Mrs. Beigel, we would like to thank you again for sharing your story and your documents and photographs with us.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

Thank you very much.

Yes, we found something else. We just found this passport belonging to you.

Do you want me to say that?

Yes please.

Document 3

Oh, yes. We just found my passport. Age 6. Issued in Zagreb for the journey on Kindertransport to England.

Thank you.

[02:09:04]

[End of photographs and documents]