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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Gina
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	10 December 1924
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

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INTERVIEW: 53

NAME: MRS GINA GERSON

DATE: 25 MARCH 2004

LOCATION: BIRMINGHAM

INTERVIEWER: HELEN LLOYD

TAPE 1

HL: This is an interview with Mrs Gina Gerson on 25 March 2004 in Birmingham and my name is Helen Lloyd.

Tape 1: 0 minute 54 seconds

GG: My name is Gina Gerson, I was born Gina Bauer in Vienna in 1924 and I come from a typical middle class Jewish family. We were not particularly wealthy. I have a half sister from my mother's first marriage and she was brought up in the sort of luxury that I no longer experienced. I think my parents were trying to live a life style that they couldn't quite afford any more, because conditions in Austria and in Germany and in Europe generally after the First World War, and the economic situation were pretty poor and life was quite a struggle. But I never wanted for anything and I was a very cherished and over protected only child of my mother's second marriage. Now my parents were both Austrian citizens, born in Austria and my father was actually born in Przemysl, a small town in Poland but that part was actually part of the Austrian empire. Now my mother is second generation of the Viennese Jews and my mother especially considered herself Austrian, well Viennese first then Austrian and then way back Jewish. We were Jewish, that was a fact, I was never unaware of it and my parents certainly made me aware of it, but it didn't play a very big part in our lives. In that sense we were very much like the majority of Austrians, certainly Viennese Jews. We were very assimilated, steeped in German literature, music, art etc., and I don't think I ever experienced anti-Semitism personally but there was plenty about, I was aware of that. I was the only Jewish girl in my form and I remember being a little bit embarrassed having to take a letter into school every time we had one of those "special" holidays, that is those Jewish

Tape 1: 3 minutes 19 seconds

celebrations that were about the only ones we observed, because children don't want to be different from anybody else. So I was always a bit embarrassed. I was aware that I was Jewish but as I said, it was nothing that impeded on our lives greatly.

My father was in business and as I have said we had a fairly comfortable life and I never wanted for anything. My future seemed mapped out, I don't quite know that I ever worried about it particularly. I just imagined, I took it for granted, that I would go to university one day and after that I don't think I thought about it very much. The only grandparent I knew was my father's father. He was a lovely very dignified gentleman. He was actually just a wee bit more religious than we were because he was actually president of his Synagogue, a lovely very dignified gentleman. He was the only grandparent I knew. My mother's parents both died before I was born and I was named after my grandmother, my maternal grandmother.

HL: Can you name your grandparents and give their dates of birth if you know them, and as much background as you can give.

GG: No … I know my mother's father was called Markus Edel, and his wife was named Regina, so I was named after her. My father's father was called Jakob, and I never even knew the name of my maternal grandmother until strangely enough I named my first child, my daughter Deborah, because I liked the name and I found out only afterwards that that was the name of my maternal grandmother. Other than that I have no idea, I don't know what they did, I know so little about my parents' background. I mean they were my father, my mother, and as people I never really had a chance to get to know them, unfortunately. They were just providers, they were my security and beyond that I am afraid I had very little interest in their background. And now there is nobody left to ask unfortunately.

HL: What memories do you have of the one surviving grandparent?

GG: He was very learned I always thought, I was always very impressed by him. He had great dignity, but he was also very kind. I remember he, what impressed me, he had a housekeeper and she told me, "Your grandfather takes a cold shower every morning." And I thought, how on earth…? Well, that was something that sticks in my mind and also he had some birds in a cage that I remember, but I really remember so little about him otherwise, unfortunately.

HL: Do you know the name of the Synagogue of which he was president?

GG: No I don't. I am afraid. No.

Tape 1: 6 minutes 45 seconds

HL: Or where it was?

GG: It was, I think it was in the first district in Vienna. I really don't know. No. I just wasn't interested enough to ask him, unfortunately, yes.

HL: Do you have any memories of going to that Synagogue?

GG: No, but I do remember going to the one Synagogue that we belonged to, but only really as I said once a year, or possibly twice, the New Year and Day of Atonement, which was the one day, the two occasions rather that they certainly kept.

HL: What was that Synagogue called? Perhaps it would help if you could tell us where in Vienna it was?

GG: Yes, it was, I lived in the 9th District and the Synagogue was in the 8th District. It was a very nice one, quite a big one. I could take you there but I am blessed if I can remember the name of the street, no, I really can't, it was in the 8th District. It was within walking distance, we went there, yes. Funnily enough we hardly ever went to Synagogue before the Germans marched in but we did start going on the Saturday occasionally after the Germans marched in, when they so forcibly reminded us that we were Jews.

But to come back to my childhood, this very loving and secure childhood of mine came to a very sudden end in March 1938 when the Germans marched in. Now, things in Germany of course had been going on since 1933 and my parents were very much aware of that, and I think they were getting a little bit nervous, a little bit alarmed about things. I do remember one thing, I remember, it must have been 35, 36, that there were Jewish Refugees arriving from Germany in Austria, certainly in Vienna, and I remember a family, there was a father, mother and a little boy who came and stayed with us, we gave them shelter, they were sleeping in our dining room. So, obviously I must have asked my parents why they were sleeping there, and why they were staying with us and I, I know they must have explained it to me, probably without trying to alarm me too much. But, they certainly were aware of what was going on, and so possibly the annexation of Austria didn't come as a great surprise to them.

I remember just before, there was the last Chancellor of Austria Dr Kurt Schuschnigg, and just before the Germans marched in he ordered the plebiscite. And I remember a neighbour telling my mother, now we all must go and vote, it's terribly, terribly important. I expect that she was Jewish.

Tape 1: 9 minutes 58 seconds

But of course it never came to the annexation [sic, for 'plebiscite'], because the Germans marched in the night before and that I certainly remember. I remember the German troops marching through our street, and what was absolutely amazing and etched in my memory was the Viennese crowd cheering them to the rafters. I mean, to them, I suppose they were the great liberators and then all that hidden anti-Semitism really came out and it was brought home to me in the strangest way actually shortly after the Germans marched in in March. I don't know what the occasion was, I can't remember, but I had occasion to have

a little party, I don't suppose it was a party, just that I had invited a few of my school friends for tea and to my utter astonishment, and I have to say horror, nobody turned up. Now, I couldn't understand it all. I mean I was still the same girl I was a few weeks before, I thought my friends were still the same people, but they had changed or rather their attitude to me had changed, possibly influenced by their parents, I really don't know. But I was suddenly reminded that I was a pariah and life became very different and very difficult pretty well overnight, really.

HL: Let me go back to your experiences of school before the Germans marched in. You say you were the only Jewish girl in your class, were there other Jewish girls in the school?

GG: Oh, yes, yes, and we had religious education. I believe it was outside school hours, I am not really sure, but yes we had religious instruction once a week I remember. But beyond that I really, I knew very, very little. And with my parents too, the Jewish background was, what shall I say, we were aware of it, it did not play a great part in our lives. In that way we were very similar to most of the assimilated Jews, certainly in Vienna.

HL: When you say you had religious education, that was with the other Jewish girls in the school?

GG: Oh yes, yes.

HL: Permitted by the school?

GG: Oh, Yes, yes. In fact I think it was the law of the country that we had to have religious education. But, we didn't have assembly like they have here. So I was certainly aware that I was different from the others. I can't remember now what I did when the other children had their religious education, but I was just absent, or … That I can't recall I am afraid. But my school days were reasonably happy. I was a terribly good little girl, I really was, and I tried awfully hard to always do what I am told to. So, I was very, very over protected.

HL: What was the name of the school?

Tape 1: 13 minutes 29 seconds

GG: Gilgegasse. It was in the Gilgegasse, that is all I remember, and it was within walking distance. And I remember having great fun with my friends as we walked home together from school. But all that came to an end very suddenly because you see in Germany I imagine things for the Jews changed gradually. They brought in one anti Jewish law and got away with it, and then they added another and another and so on until, you know, life for the Jews became difficult. But in Austria they realised, because they had plenty of, there were an awful lot of Nazis in Vienna, even before the Anschluss, before the annexation, and by the time they came to Vienna I think they knew what they

could get away with. So for us, for the Jews life literally changed over night. Very soon I had to leave my school and go to a Jewish school where strangely enough the education was actually superb because we had Jewish teachers and for some reason certainly the standard was very high. But I mean we were earmarked, we were pariahs, we were Jews. And my father's business was closed. I remember the most incredible things that happened. I mean, people who knew us before, just suddenly they didn't know us any more. Other things that happened, for instance, I remember trades people would come knocking at your door and insist that you owed them money. That was quite well known, it happened all the time, and such was the fear by then that people just paid up.

HL: This was after the Germans came?

GG: After the Anschluss.

HL: Just backtracking still to your life before the Anschluss, obviously your friends would have accepted invitations to your house prior to that.

GG: Of course, we were great friends, that is what I couldn't understand. I was still, I thought, the same girl I was a few weeks before, and I thought my friends were the same. I have to say that in their defence that possibly it was their parents who said you should not have anything to do with this Jewish family.

HL: What was your father's business?

GG: He was in wholesale trade of perfumery articles and life was beginning to be a struggle, as I said before. I think we lived in a style that we probably couldn't quite afford any more, but I certainly never wanted for anything. It was so strange to walk through our streets and see a restaurant, for instance, or cafes, with notices, "Pigs and Jews not welcome here".

HL: At what kind of age do you remember that sort of notice?

Tape 1: 16 minutes 47 seconds

GG: Well that was immediately after the Anschluss. I mean, I was 13 at the time. We were not allowed to go into any parks, cinemas, swimming pools, life really changed very much over night and also as life became more and more difficult a lot of Jews committed suicide, and there was one incident in my own family which had a tremendous impact on me and my whole family. My father's brother, my uncle, committed suicide when the Gestapo came for him, and I remember it was a tremendous occasion. It was really a tragedy. He had two young children and my parents were so upset. And I was upset, I wasn't allowed to go to the funeral, but I was upset particularly because it really impressed upon me that my grandfather should have lived to see his own son buried in that dreadful way and that he had to live to experience it in his country, as he saw it, and to be a stranger, someone not welcome. I am not sure about my grandfather, but certainly my father fought in the First World War on the side of the Germans. He became, he

actually had a medal for it. It didn't do him much good later. But he was steeped in…, we were just Austrians, and specially Viennese, because Vienna was like a large head to a very small country with the left over of the empire. So Vienna was quite sophisticated, and it was the change in Vienna, it was quite incredible, yes.

HL: What memories do you have of Viennese cultural life before the Anschluss?

GG: Well, as I said, my parents were very steeped in the arts, so I had a love for the theatre right as far back as I can remember. And we went to concerts a great deal.

HL: Where?

GG: Oh, we went to the opera, I still remember my first opera. I can't remember which one it was, but I remember being very frightened, because one scene was in a graveyard. We had one thing in Vienna before the Germans marched in, which was I thought a marvellous thing, it was a subscription for students, for schoolchildren, I have no idea how much it cost, but you had an annual subscription and for that you were allowed so many theatre, so many concerts, so many opera productions and I remember saying to my parents when my birthday came along, I said, 'I don't want a party any more, I want one of those subscriptions.', which I was promptly given.

HL: Do you have any memories of art?

GG: I mean, it was part of my life to be taken to the museums. I have to say I was never as diligent with my own children. But, yes, I mean, we went to the museums, my parents took me at the weekend. We had some wonderful museums in Vienna and the cultural life was very active. And, of course the Jews contributed to that vastly, in music, in drama, in the arts, yes.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 54 seconds

My father played the, he loved to play the mandolin but he also played the violin and my mother played the piano. My sister had learned the piano but by the time I came along, you know, life was not so easy, I did not have a governess, I did not have a piano teacher. Well I did start to learn the piano, but I never got very far unfortunately.

HL: Can you remember any of the books that you read?

GG: Oh, books beyond my years. We had lots of books in our flat. Most of us lived in flats. And I was never … I was allowed to do whatever I wanted, and I remember, I remember, reading Anna Karenina, at the age of, I don't know, maybe nine or ten. What I made of it I can't imagine but I must have been interested enough because I finished it and I kept notes of all my books I read, and I came across that years afterwards and I was most amused at my own descriptions of the book.

HL: Have any older members of your family been to university?

GG: Well yes, yes, my mother went to finishing school even, where young ladies were told how to be young ladies. But beyond that my sister went to university but I don't even know what she studied. But university was just down the road and, yes, it was – Vienna was a very beautiful city, a very beautiful city and its university also is a magnificent building.

HL: Coming on then to the Anschluss. You told me a great deal. How did life on the street change for you when you were out, beyond your home?

GG: Well, we suddenly became fearful of being in the streets, I had one advantage, you might say, I looked very Aryan, you know, blond hair, blue eyes, and I was never accosted myself, but it was a common site to see, especially elderly people. They would pick up elderly people to make them scrub the pavement, it was with a toothbrush, if you please quite often, and it wasn't, I think the main idea wasn't to clean the pavements, I think it was just obviously an idea to humiliate these people as far as possible. And this I actually did witness myself, I, I, there were a group of elderly people scrubbing the pavements and there was the Viennese, army, Viennese Nazis, standing around and kicking and spitting at these poor people and I remember I actually saw this myself. I saw the Germans tell them off, the German soldiers holding back the enthusiastic Viennese Nazis. That was to me hard to believe but I saw it with my own eyes.

Tape 1: 24 minutes 31 seconds

Life became very difficult and well, like everyone else, all we could think of was, 'where can we get to?' And it became clear to my parents certainly and to my relatives that life in Austria for us had come to an end. So we were desperately trying to find anywhere where we could go, and I have to say the countries didn't exactly queue up to let us in to give us refuge, and the most incredible schemes I remember were being discussed quite seriously. I mean, it was possible for instance, I remember that it was possible to get a visa for money for Shanghai, and quite a lot of people went to Shanghai, they bought a Visa. But there wasn't any money left for us, so I remember my father writing desperately to a distant relative in Cincinnati and I didn't even know where that was. I mean, we tried to get anywhere where they would let us in. I mean, countries in Latin America we'd never heard of but it became increasingly difficult, because there were quotas everywhere and people just didn't want added refugees on their doorstep, I suppose. The unemployment was pretty grim in those days as well. My sister was actually a Latvian citizen, because she had married a Latvian citizen. That gave her some advantages because in the days, before the war, the Germans were still trying to keep up the reputation of being a civilised country, so certainly the foreigners in Austria and Vienna had certain advantages. I remember those who were fortunate enough to have other nationalities would have an emblem of the nationality, the flag colours on their lapels. Well my sister was a Latvian citizen at that time and she was able to get a domestic permit to come to England, and that was, I think, some time in the summer of '38, and that, I mean, the fact that she was doing domestic work was neither here nor there. It was just wonderful that she could get away.

HL: She could be with her husband?

GG: No, no, her husband was actually still in Latvia. The marriage was on the…, had problems and her husband was actually lost in the holocaust. But she had this job in, near London, and she was able to get a trainee permit for me. She came to England in the summer, as I have said, and it was probably September/October when she managed to get a trainee permit for me. Now, that was going to enable me to come to England for just 12 months, to train for something I suppose. I mean, it was all just an excuse for me to get here. I have often wondered what the authorities would have done at the end of 12 months. I am glad to think they wouldn't have sent me back to Germany but of course it never arose because the war started before then. So I, we started making plans for me to go to England. There wasn't any money to send me by plane, flights were not as common then, nor cheap, I mean they were extortionate, especially expensive and it was something we could no longer afford.

Tape 1: 28 minutes 50 seconds

But before all this happened we had the Kristallnacht, the night of burning synagogues and smashed shopped windows. I remember that day very clearly because to my utter amazement my mother came to fetch me from school which she had never done before, and there were quite a few parents waiting for their children outside this Jewish school. So, I think they must have got wind that something was afoot. And anyway by the time we got, my mother and I got home they gave us two hours to get out of our flat. It was supposed to be for our own protection against the wrath of the German people against the … of course, the whole thing started because a young Jew in Paris killed some embassy official, some German embassy official and that was… All hell broke loose after that, and I remember because I was so mortified, I remember my mother begging a neighbour to help us. And he was as it happened, a high Nazi official, and I remember her begging him to help us, and he wouldn't even listen to her. And I remember being so humiliated that she had to beg and was refused. Anyway, we had to get out of our flat and I remember the things that were important to me at that age, what did I bring with me? The theatre programmes that I had been collecting and also the cinema programmes and I actually brought them to England with me, seriously enough, yes But there was, I mean, the whole thing was of course deadly serious. I remember after we had been chucked out of our flat, it must have occurred to my parents that they had forgotten something. I don't actually know what it was, possibly an important document and they thought they ought to have that with them. I know they tried to get back into their own flat, their own flat if you please, but by that time there was a tiny, only a small paper seal with a swastika over the lock on our door and to open the door, of course, they would have to pierce that paper seal with the key, and no way would they do that. I mean, no way, they were law-abiding citizens and that would have been against the law. So whatever it was they were after they had to leave behind. Now, I never saw my home again, but my parents, after I left were briefly allowed back. But then when all the Jews had to move to a district in Vienna, the 2nd district, they also had to leave their home. But I never saw my home again.

HL: Where did you go immediately after you left your flat?

GG: We stayed with friends, my mother and I stayed with friends. It was all so arbitrary you see, some people were chucked out of their flats, others weren't. My mother and I, as I said, we stayed with friends but I know my father didn't stay with us, perhaps there wasn't room. Possibly he stayed with his sister or with his father, I am not quite sure, but I know we weren't together, and that already was of course a great trial for my mother especially. I continued to go to school and I made some very good friends at that school, I mean, I was suddenly amongst Jewish people and I think the common bond was more, really, that we were all now persecuted rather than the religious side of it, although perhaps some of the children were quite, came from a more orthodox background.

Tape 1: 33 minutes 20 seconds

I don't remember, but I know that later on when I came to England I still corresponded with some of the girls and they ended up, those that were able to get out, all over the world. I have lost touch with most of them except one girl, who wrote to me from France, and maybe she was my age after all, she was 12/13 and she wrote that she thought that her parents would have stayed on in Austria because nobody of course knew what dreadful ends awaited them. She thought her parents would have stayed in Austria and seen it out as they thought, you know, seen it through, but for her sake they went to France, and they, I remember her father was a dentist and they had a great struggle, and she was very much aware of that and was very conscious and very grateful to her parents for doing this, for making this tremendous sacrifice, for her sake, and I have no idea what happened to that child or her family. I tried after the war to find out but of course all trace had vanished.

HL: What was the name of the Jewish school and where was it?

GG: It was, I know it was in the 9th district, in the Währinger Straße. That's what I remember, again I can take you there but I can't remember what it was called, I know there was an ice rink next door to it.

HL: It was fee paying?

GG: I don't think any of the schools were fee paying. You know, I didn't interest myself in these matters. I have no idea. I took an awful lot of things for granted. They were just there and how or why they were paid for or whether they were paid for never entered my consciousness I have to admit. But then children are a bit like that, aren't they, and now I have no idea, I couldn't ask them.

HL: Do you have any memories of the curriculum at both your schools?

GG: Yes. We were…, discipline was very strict. When I look at my own grandchildren and even my children, I mean, there was no way we would have answered back to

teachers the way they obviously do, and stand up to them. Discipline, I mean, you know, we stood up when the teacher came in and we answered, " yes sir, no sir", and when you were given homework you jolly well did it, there was no, no way…. I mean it was just part of our lives, and we accepted it. I mean, children accept anything, really. I have no idea what I really thought that I might become one day. I never thought of a career, beyond that I would go to university. What I would study there, I don't think I had even thought it out in my mind, but that was something that was just understood, you know, this was going to be part of my future.

HL: Do you remember any changes in the curriculum when you moved to the Jewish school?

Tape 1: 36 minutes 48 seconds

GG: Not really, no, except that I was actually aware, although I was a child, I was aware that the standard was very much greater than before. Why that should be I am not sure, possibly we had Jewish teachers, as I said, whether they were more qualified, or, I don't know, but it was a fact that I was aware of at the time. And I can't say that I was actually unhappy at that school, I made some great friends there, but it didn't last very long, and one knew that it wouldn't last very long. You came to school and some places where suddenly missing. They'd gone into, they'd managed, they were lucky enough to emigrate somewhere. Everybody was on the search. I don't know that people like my grandfather would have ever considered, I don't really know, but, I mean, for him, at his age, I don't think anybody realised what was in store for the Jews, nobody. We couldn't have conceived such a thing. I think a lot of the elderly people thought this was a temporary thing. Well surely, you know, people will come to their senses and before long things will return to normal. A lot of people fooled themselves that way, because they wanted to fool themselves and I don't know that my grandfather, I never asked him but whether my grandfather ever considered emigrating, but certainly my parents, not only for my sake but I think for their sakes as well. They were very eager to get out, oh yes, very eager. That is really all that occupied their minds and I think the minds of most of my relatives and most of the Jews probably in Vienna. Just to get anywhere.

HL: Do you have any memories of what the newspapers were saying at that time, or the radio?

GG: Ah yes well, that was actually vile. There was that infamous paper, Der Stürmer, and that was actually displayed in stands in the street so that nobody should God forbid, miss the lessons that were being given out and the caricatures of Jews. It was really vile. And I remember that they gave out a little brochure. How we got hold of it I can't imagine, but there was a brochure of the decadent Jews, those, that one should avoid, and how they have influenced the arts in Germany. And I remember looking through it, it was with photographs and there were pictures, it was like a gallery of celebrities. There was Freud, there was Schoenberg, there was Gustav Mahler, Reinhardt, who was a great theatre director, people that anybody else would have been proud to call Austrians or Germans. Life became incomprehensible actually. Values changed, attitudes changed

and more than anything, I think, the way people's attitude to us has changed. I think, to be fair, maybe they were scared, maybe it wasn't even a conviction of many people, it was just that they were scared to be associated with us because we were, as I keep saying, pariahs over night.

HL: Did your parents have any non- Jewish friends?

Tape 1: 40 minutes 57 seconds

GG: Oh yes, of course, very much so, yes. But, gradually, you know, they somehow flitted away. Well, social life came to an end, as far as we were concerned anyway. Whether they actually refused invitations or what, I don't remember. But the sort of social life we had before suddenly came to an end. They didn't go out very much, at all, I don't think. I think the bond became closer between relatives. The family suddenly became very important.

HL: Do you have any memories of your father's colleagues or the people who worked for him?

GG: No, not really.. My mother helped him in his business. She was very much more a businesswoman than a housewife actually. And we always had help in the house, but that didn't signify great wealth in Vienna, because in Austria the economic conditions were very poor and girls from the provinces, from the country, would come and work in Vienna for just their keep and earn a bit of pocket money. So having servants was no great measure of your wealth.

HL: Were they living in with you?

GG: I don't think so. I don't know whether they could have done. We had one little room, yes, where certainly they slept, yes. I can see our flat so clearly still. It was, I thought - I remember particularly the wallpaper in our dining room - I thought it was beautiful. It had roses on it, and, in our flat - they were very different to flats here - and they had these big double doors between rooms. And I know I was very envied by my friends, because between the doors, the door hinges, when I was good, there was a swing that they could attach, so I was able to swing in our flat, and I remember that. That was always a special reward for being good. I remember funnily enough, my mother's, my parent's bedroom. They had what I think now, when I look back, was quite modern furniture and it was inlaid with mother of pearl somewhere, and I thought that was the last word in elegance.

HL: How many rooms where there?

GG: Oh gosh, four or five I think, and then the little room. We had no central heating, that was really mostly - although central heating was known in Vienna - but mostly in, I think in government buildings, official buildings, I don't know many private houses - well, people didn't live in houses, in flats - that had central heating. It was a nice district

where I lived, it was a nice street, but things look so different as a child. I thought that we lived in a main thoroughfare, well it was, it was a main thoroughfare, the Alser Straße.
Tape 1: 44 minutes 45 seconds

But the one occasion when I went back to Vienna after the war I remember showing my husband where we lived and it suddenly had become a very little street. I suppose that is not unusual for children.

HL: Do you have any memories of your immediate neighbours in the flat?

GG: Yes. There were the neighbours opposite on the same floor, they were the ones who told us that we must go and vote, they were Jewish, but Jewish in the same sense that we were Jewish, I mean, they were Jewish and that was that. I think that is as far as it went. Then there was the party official, the Nazi official that my mother begged for help. I remember that they manufactured stamps, not stamps that you put on letters, stamps to put dates and names on, and so on. Funnily enough I remember their names, Markreiter, and they were always very friendly. I don't think we were actually on social terms, I don't think we exchanged visits or anything like that, but we stopped on the stairs and exchanged greetings and talked about the weather, I suppose, but I don't remember. I know that everyone was very friendly. There was a porter for instance, he was, as porters are, very keen to deserve his Christmas present and so he was always very helpful. All that changed of course, yes, all that changed.

HL: How would your neighbours in the flat have known you were Jewish?

GG: Because, like most Jews we actually had a mezuzah on our door. That was about the only, I was about to say concession, but I mean, the only acknowledgment, and why they did it I don't know, it was probably just tradition, but you know, you had a mezuzah on your door, so that's how you knew.

HL: Do you think they removed it when the Germans marched in?

GG: No, oh no, certainly not, I don't think that would have occurred to them, but what happened to it I don't know, whether my parents when they were forced to go to another district, whether they took it with them I don't know, that I don't know. It is all a very long time ago don't forget.

HL: Any more memories of Kristallnacht?

GG: Well there were Storm Troopers in front of the shops, they had big notices, "Kauft Nicht bei den Juden" "Don't buy in Jewish shops". I think by that time nobody really in their senses would have gone into a Jewish shop, it was really, I suppose, too dangerous, but the whole Nazi institution was out to get us. That was pretty clear, but to what extent they were determined to get us, nobody could have visualized in their wildest dreams. I mean I thought they were just eager to get rid of us and actually now I think about it the

extraordinary thing was that there were the Germans trying to get rid of the Jews, and yet they made it as difficult as possible for us to get out.

Tape 1: 48 minutes 27 seconds

When I received my permit from my sister I remember queuing with my father from the early hours in the morning to get the various documents that I needed. For instance, I had to have at my age, a certificate that I didn't owe any taxes to the government. I had to prove that I wasn't an imbecile, an idiot etc, etc. I had to have certificates that I was immunised against this that and the other. I have got most of those documents still. We weren't allowed to take anything of value out of the country. We were only allowed to take very little money with us and something I wasn't actually aware of until I read about it recently that they actually made us pay a 'Reichsfluchtsteuer', which means a tax for escaping from Germany. We had to pay a tax for being allowed to leave the country, and yet they were eager to get rid of us. The irony of it is really incredible.

HL: While your father was assembling all these documents for you was he still trying to make arrangements for himself and your mother?

GG: The situation was so that really all that was left was to make enquiries, to write letters to various consulates I suppose. The main hope for them was actually my sister. They hoped that somehow she would be able to get permission or documents that would enable my parents to come to England as well, because obviously we all wanted to be together. A lot of families were separated, I mean children and parents at different sides of the globe, but obviously my parents were hoping that they would be able to come to England and join us there. And when I said goodbye to my parents in Vienna, it was in fact the last time I saw them, but we obviously hoped we would be together before long.

HL: What was your sister's name in England?

GG: Well her name was Klara, she was known as Klari, but in England she became Clare.

HL: And her surname, her married name?

GG: She was Levinson, Levinson, yes. She had a difficult life, for her to be a domestic. I think she, I believe she had quite pleasant employers but she spoke no English. I remember she had a toothache and she told me afterwards, that her employers took her to the dentist and instead of just putting a filling in he just took the tooth out. You know, life was pretty difficult for her I can imagine. But she was mainly occupied in trying to get us out and she managed to get me the necessary permit. The difficulty was that actually nobody was responsible for me. She couldn't afford to keep me once I was in England, so what exactly happened I really don't know.

Tape 1: 52 minutes 21 seconds

I think once I was in England perhaps the Refugee Committee took over, because… I will tell you later on if you want to carry on with the Austrian part of it. Just before I came to England on the 10th of January 1939, and just before, on 10th of December was my birthday and I certainly remember that birthday because I was given, although we weren't in our own home, my parents… Birthdays were big occasions in my family, so they still tried to make it as special as they could, and I remember, I don't know who gave it to me, I think an aunt gave me a little manicure set, and it was my first grown up present and I was so proud of it. I can still remember that, I can see it still, it was in the shape of a heart, with a zip all round it, and that plays a part in my story when we get to it later on.

HL: Do you know what responses your sister had when she was trying to make arrangements for your parents too in this country?

GG: It was very, very difficult. Because don't forget the newspapers were full of adverts of really highly qualified people begging for jobs as domestics and so on. So I know she tried everything and she actually did this superhuman thing and managed to actually get permission for my parents to come, but alas, that didn't happen as it turned out. But it was extremely difficult for her. But don't forget she had to earn her own living in a difficult situation and she didn't speak much English. How any of us learned English I don't really know because I never certainly, I spoke no English at all. And people asked me did you go to school here, no I never went to school here, but one just does, one just learns the language when you have to.

HL: Had you learned any other languages when you were at school?

GG: Yes, I learned French and I remember going to a kindergarten before I went to school where French was one of the languages we spoke. In the kindergarten I remember, yes but I hate to tell you that none of it has remained in my mind, my French is atrocious.

HL: Any Latin or Greek?

GG: No, no.

TAPE 2

HL: Before we move on to your emigration can we talk about attitudes among Jews in Vienna?

GG: Yes, I am ashamed to admit that we really looked down on the Jews from Poland. We used to call them the 'Kaftan Juden'. It is not a nice thing, but we did really look down upon them, I don't really know why.

Tape 2: 0 minute 35 seconds

They were poor, certainly not well educated, but one wouldn't dream of socialising with them. One gave them charity but you wouldn't even shake their hand, I was always a little bit, really ashamed of that, but that's how it was and it was pretty prevalent amongst the rest of our people, middle class people. Not a nice thing but that's a fact.

HL: But your own father's family came from …

GG: Yes, you see I know so little about him, whether he came from what we used to call a 'Shtetl'. I think Przemysl was actually a town, I have no idea, I really have no idea. It just occurred to me, they were talking about my father and me queuing to get my documents to come to England and how difficult it was. I remember actually that we were queuing in the early hours of the morning. Because in Vienna the winters are very cold, I am talking about end of December beginning of January and we were queuing outside a magnificent building, and I remember my father told me afterwards it was the confiscated Rothschild Palace, which the Gestapo had taken over as their headquarters, that is where we queued And the difficulty of the long queues! The officials were officious, they weren't… I think they were just doing their duties, but those endless queues I do remember, and it was very, very cold. And of course most of my clothes were still in the flat and so to come away to England, I remember my mother bought me some boots, lined boots and some lined winter gloves for the journey.

HL: How quick did things happen after you queued for those documents?

GG: Fairly quickly after that. I actually left Vienna on 10th January and how my parents must have felt letting a young child, a very unsophisticated child, as we all were, to let a child go across Europe by herself. It wasn't until I had children of my own that I remember, when they were about that age, I remember saying to my husband, 'I can't understand how my parents could let me go, go across Europe for about 36 hours.' And he said, well it was a stupid question, and he said, ' Well, they did it to save your life.' But the sacrifice! It didn't really occur to me until I had children of my own, and grandchildren, I mean what they must have gone through, all those hours, because I came on my own. There were lots of children's transports because England let in about 10,000 Jewish children. They were the well known Kindertransports, but they had adults in charge of them, and I was entirely on my own..

HL: Do you remember them seeing you off?

GG: Oh, indeed, yes, as I said, that was in fact the last time I saw them. My mother was trying very hard to be very brave. And they were both pretty affected by it. It was the strangest thing, because you know one grows up so quickly somehow and I was, I was excited and apprehensive all at the same time.

Tape 2: 4 minutes 40 seconds

But just before the train was leaving I remember the strangest thing I did. I was leaning out of the window, saying goodbye, and I tore a little sheet of paper out of my little

notebook I had in my handbag and I scribbled on it, would you believe at my age I put on it, never leave each other, always stay together. I mean, for a child to say that, well one grows up pretty well overnight. And how they must have felt when they got back to their…, you know, it must have been agony.
But my journey was pretty eventful as it turned out and one that I really haven't forgotten, I had a ticket, I had a ticket from Vienna via Ostend to Dover and then from Dover to London where my sister was going to meet me. And I had very little money with me because we were not allowed to take any money. Anyway, there we were in the train going through Belgium, towards the Belgian frontier, and a town called Aachen, that was the frontier town. The train stopped and all the Jews had to get out. 'Juden Raus!' And so we all got out and everyone's luggage was minutely examined as you can imagine, and then for a reason that I can't fathom out to this day everyone else was allowed back onto the train except me. I can't imagine why. It is difficult to put yourself into the minds of these people, but whether they thought, because they were taking advantage perhaps of the fact that I looked so Aryan, that perhaps my family was trying to smuggle something out of the country. For whatever reason it was difficult to fathom out how their mind worked, but they kept me back. And I was taken into a little wooden hut, and I can see it still, and a great, big woman, well, she seemed a huge woman to me, stripped and searched me. I mean she was perfectly polite. In fact she didn't say a word, she just did her duty, but it was a dreadful experience for a child, I mean, it really was. She didn't find anything, obviously. I was a bit shaken by the time I got back into the little office where they were examining my suitcase. Well, I only had a little suitcase with me because all my clothes were still in the flat, but for the first time I was actually really scared because I saw them reading my diary. And in the diary I had written in the graphic language of a teenager, you know, the marching to Austria, and what particularly frightened me, because I realised they were reading my entry about my Uncle's suicide, and that was the first time I actually got a bit scared. And had my parents known, I must have smuggled this into my suitcase, because had they known what was in the diary they would never have let me take it with me. But anyway, they read it and I was getting very nervous by then, but then something happened, and I really, I could weep for it still. The little manicure set I was telling you about which I was so proud of, well they cut right round the lining to look for… What could I hide in a manicure set? Not only that, those winter gloves my mother bought me because it was so cold, they cut round the lining. Now, what can you hide in a pair of gloves? Now apparently I have been told since you can hide banknotes. And they even squashed my chocolates, I had a few chocolates that a friend gave me for the journey and they squashed those. It was just too ludicrous but anyway they found nothing, I had nothing except my tickets and a few, very little money.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 15 seconds

Anyway, in the end they let me go. Well of course the train had gone. There I was on the platform and what do I do now. Somebody must have said, 'You had better try and get to Brussels, perhaps you can get from Brussels to Ostend.' That was where I needed to go to get my, to come across the channel. Well, after several hours I found myself in Brussels and there I met the first, first human being. He was a little porter, I still remember, a little man, and he spoke to me in what I think was Yiddish, which I didn't

understand and my schoolgirl French wasn't much help. But he was very, really very kind. I wonder if he was, well he must have been Jewish because he was speaking Yiddish to me. Anyway he must have realised my plight, and obviously I made him understand that I needed to get to Ostend and he put me on the right train. So after several hours I found myself in Ostend and after that my journey gets a bit nebulous, you know, nebulous, because I had been travelling for many hours. I was terribly tired by then. Anyway I got on the boat and that was an experience because I had never been on a big boat before, and I do remember being very seasick. And then we got to Dover and I think things changed from then. I think the immigration officials were very, very kind. I mean my papers were obviously in order and somehow I found myself on the correct train to get to London. I do remember I was very nervous because, in fact I was a bit scared because in England the second class trains are all upholstered and on the continent, certainly in Austria, second or third class trains are wooden benches. And I was quite convinced I was in the wrong class of trains and I would have to pay the extra and I didn't have any money. Anyway, I must have fallen asleep, I think, I was so tired, and before long I found myself in London. My sister was telling me afterwards I was 12 hours late, so she was very agitated as you can imagine. She told me afterwards she was running up and down the platform trying to find me and she ran past me a couple of times because I had just taken my suitcase out, put it on the platform, sat on it and fell asleep. So that little figure was me. The first thing she did of course was to phone my parents to say that I had arrived all those hours late. You know, I so often think what must have gone through their minds before they knew I had arrived safely.

HL: Your parents had a telephone in the temporary accommodation?

GG: Well they were able to use, you know, the people they stayed with, they were able to use their telephone. Yes, the people they stayed with, he was an eye specialist, I remember. Dinold, I think Dr Dinold was his name. Yes, they had a telephone, yes, so my sister was able to phone there. My sister was no longer working in.., I remember her job was in Esher, somewhere near London. But by that time she had a job in London. She was working for Woburn House which was a place where they actually helped refugees. It was set up to help refugees, and she was working there as a secretary.

Tape 2: 13 minutes 7 seconds

And she had a little bed-sit in Kings Cross and so she took me to her bed-sit for the first night and we went on the underground and of course I had never seen, I had never been on the underground before. It was all a bit overwhelming, but I do remember the staff in the underground, in those days were wearing black uniforms. I do not know what colour it is now, I think it's blue, but anyway it was black in those days and I remember being tired and I was a bit alarmed because black uniforms meant Gestapo. Well my sister took me to her little bed-sit and then the problem arose: what was going to happen to m? I remember she told me she was earning 30 shillings a week out of which she had to pay for her room and live and she couldn't possibly keep me on that.
But I imagine the Jewish Refugee Committee took over and the next thing I found myself in, my sister took me to this family in the east end of London. And thinking back on it

now, I am sure, in fact I am absolutely convinced the committee must have paid them, because they were very poor people. They were very kind but they were very poor themselves. And it was one of those back to back houses in the east end of London, in fact I have to say I have never seen such conditions in my life. I shared the bed of the daughter of the house, we washed in the sink in the kitchen, the toilet was in the yard and we went to a public bath once a week. But they were very kind. I seem to remember that he was a tailor and they had a little outhouse where there were a few machinists working. I think he was probably subcontractor to some firm. He did alterations, and I remember having to take tea out to them. They were very nice to me, I tried to find them actually after the war but the building had been bombed.

HL: Were they Jewish?

GG: Oh yes, very orthodox Jews. And, in fact, I think they must have wondered what they got themselves into their house. Because I had never heard of what we call 'milchig' and 'fleischig', that you don't mix milk and meat. They must have thought that I was a heathen. I remember trying to do some needlework on a Saturday, on the Shabbat and they were appalled. I mean, you know, what had they got themselves into? But they were very nice. I remember as a great treat, they took me to the People's Palace in the east end of London which was an opera house and I heard Madame Butterfly there, it was a great treat. You see, I didn't go to school, I didn't do anything, I helped the woman in the house and I remember going to the markets. I don't think I was there longer than a month or two, then for some reason the committee must have decided it wasn't the right place for me and they found a place for me in a hostel, a refugee hostel, which was in Maida Vale, in Randolph Crescent, I remember. Now that was different, so different, chalk and cheese, I mean we were brought up like young ladies. We had dancing lessons, there were three girls sharing a room and we had dressing tables. And I remember at the weekend occasionally we were invited to the homes of the committee ladies.

Tape 2: 17 minutes 10 seconds

They were living, I don't know where, somewhere in Marble Arch, Mayfair maybe. But anyway, it was very impressive. we were invited to tea with cucumber sandwiches and servants. It couldn't have been more different to the east end home. But I remember when I came to this new home, this new hostel, I remember, I still wince when I think about it now, the matron put me in a bath and washed me and washed my hair. Maybe she thought I was lousy coming from the east end, but it was a very humiliating experience for a, you know, teenager so conscious of their bodies and I still squirm when I think about it now. And, well I knew all the time that I wasn't going to stay at that hostel, because I was only taking the place of another girl who hadn't arrived yet, because like me they had difficulties in obtaining the various documents, but when she finally was due to arrive I had to leave. That's another extraordinary thing how life is so full of coincidences that change the future. I remember I was going to go to a hostel in Edinburgh, in Edinburgh. And of course they wouldn't allow me to go by myself, but somebody was going to escort me. Now, the matron took me to the station, it was either Kings Cross or Euston, I don't remember that, but my sister, I remember my sister came

to see me off because she wasn't going to have the money to visit me and she wanted to see me at least before I was going such a long way away. And there we stood waiting for the train and waiting for my escort. And that escort never turned up. We learned later she was engaged in a traffic accident, or something, anyway she never turned up and so the train went without me and I never went to Edinburgh. And then I went, it was just before Passover I remember, and some Rabbi took me in his car to stay with a family and I think it must have been on a Friday, because it was getting towards Shabbat, and I remember he stopped the car at a certain time. He stopped the car and walked me to the next place. I was staying with some people in Willesden and they were called Kadish. The mother in fact was a born Miller. Her father was Emmanuel Miller, who was quite a, no her brother, I beg your pardon, her brother, was Emmanuel Miller, he was quite a well known surgeon and specialist and his son was Jonathan Miller. So I met Jonathan Miller when he was a boy. I stayed with this family just over Passover. That was very pleasant. They had, they were very nice to me and I remember we walked towards Hampstead Heath one day and they pointed out Sigmund Freud's house in Hampstead. They had a daughter of more or less my own age, Vera, who I am still friends with. She married into the Nabarro family and she has been a great friend. But I couldn't stay there either, so then I went to several families because they couldn't find a proper home for me. And don't forget, all that time I wasn't doing anything. I didn't go to school. I wasn't doing any work. How I occupied my days I don't know.

Tape 2: 21 minutes 16 seconds

The next family I went to was somewhere in Colindale. I think he was a taxi driver I'm not sure, but they were also not too well off. But I remember I was within walking distance of the Hendon library and I spent my time going to the library and reading English books, I think that is probably how I taught myself English. I remember crying my eyes out over Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*, it was very… I remember actually now, in the hostel, in Maida Vale, I read *Jane Eyre*. Oh, that made a great impression on me as well, so by that time I must have known enough English to read all these books.

HL: How long had you been in England by then?

GG: Well I am talking now about, I came in January, it must have been May, end of May by then, beginning of June. Because after that they found a more or less permanent place for me in Southport, in Lancashire, and again somebody took me, one of the committee ladies probably, took me to the station and there was another girl, she and I together were going to Southport, and they put us on the train and let us go by ourselves. And the matron met us in Southport. Now, that was a lovely big house where we stayed. There were 13 girls of us and there was the matron, she was herself a refugee from Vienna and her mother used to do the cooking. She was not that nice but really no matron is nice. I mean, she tried to keep order and none of us cared for her very much. Life in that hostel was, we had a lovely huge garden, and again there was a committee in charge of us. I read somewhere afterwards that they allowed 10 shillings, 50 pence, for each child per week for expenses and living expenses, and there we did have, there was somebody called Leonard something or other who came and, he was an ex-actor I think, and he

came and gave us English lessons. And I think he inspired me rather and I remember we put on a little play for the committee ladies. It was called, "Noblesse Oblige" and I played the leading part and I was very proud of that. It was quite a pleasant life in that hostel and most of the girls were slightly older than myself. But anyway I do remember one day, some people, a husband and wife came to the hostel and literally looked us over. They were looking for, they had a hairdressing shop, and they were looking for a girl as an apprentice. And they were Jewish people. I still remember their name, Crystal, Mr and Mrs Crystal, and they picked me, and I was very pleased because hairdressing was better than domestic work. But I was very worried, I remember I was terribly worried, I thought the girls now won't like me because I was picked for a better job and I slept very badly that night, but I found that they were alright, they still talked to me. And I remember I started working as a hairdressing apprentice for half a crown a week. Do you know what half a crown is? We all got very fat somehow. All of us were overweight and I don't know why, I think possibly we had a lot of potatoes and bread. I know we all put on a lot of weight and it was a hell of a job to get rid of that.

Tape 2: 25 minutes 43 seconds

I remember that at the end of the week I also got the occasional tip of course. Sixpence was quite something. And I used to buy myself, at the end of the week with my salary, I used to buy myself Lyons Cup Cakes, my indulgence. Some of the other girls did also find jobs. One became an assistant in a chemist shop and so on. I don't want to get to the beginning of the war yet, just about the hostel. The matron was very keen that we shouldn't be known as Germans. Especially when the war broke out, you know, there we had come from the continent and most of the girls were either German or Austrian. We had come from Austria or Germany where we were, "bloody Jews" and now we were, "bloody Germans" suddenly. And she didn't want us to speak German. But, I remember, we had to go to Synagogue every Saturday, I think that must have been a new experience for quite a few of the girls. Not all of them, but some of them were brought up like me, but I remember there were some. One day, that must have been after the war started we were walking to Shul, to the Synagogue, and some workers were shouting "Jerries" after us. And I had no idea what they were talking about because now we were enemy aliens when the war started, yes.

HL: Your mastery of English is quite extraordinary, is that really true that between January and May 1939 you were able to read an English novel?

GG: Don't ask me how. Actually, I forgot, when I was in the east end of London for those couple of months I did actually go to an evening class, off the Commercial Road. It was interesting, there I was in the east end of London, and they let me go by myself, in the evening to those evening classes. With no thought of a worry about letting me go and I think I probably for a few weeks I attended lessons there. A few years later I went back to that school, that's a different story when I taught, and I taught drama there, only for a short while.

Yes, to come back to that hostel, when the war broke out the impact on us… I don't know if you want me to talk about that now, well, I mean all those months before the war started all of us only thought of how to get our parents out, because most of the girls had family still in Germany, and I was able to do so little. What could I do in a hostel by myself? Although now you know that well known guilt feeling we all have, we survived. I often wonder maybe I should have gone from door to door and knocked on the door and asked them for help. But it was in fact left to my sister. It was all on her shoulders. She managed somehow to get a domestic permit for my mother, it wasn't easy but it was just about possible. So she got a domestic permit for my mother, well she wouldn't, my mother wouldn't have gone without my father. Now that was the big problem because my father was over 60 by then and not terribly well. And she couldn't find a job for him. She had to find a guarantor, and the guarantor meant somebody had to put a lot of money, I am not quite sure, I always thought it was £1,000 but anyway what in those days was an astronomical sum, for a complete stranger to put that money in the bank as a guarantee that this refugee wouldn't be a burden on the state.

Tape 2: 30 minutes 3 seconds

And how she did that, I shall never know. She found, considering she didn't know anybody, neither of us knew anybody here she found someone who was prepared to do that, and now, my sister and I never talked about this because we got so near to saving my parents, so we never talked about it, it was too painful a subject. But now that my sister is dead, she was ten years older than me and she died some years ago and I am really sorry I never asked her who this was. I don't know whether it was a man or a woman, I would have liked to say thank you and have shaken his or her hand. I mean to do that for a complete stranger was really incredible. But I never found out and my sister died some years ago and I never thought of asking her and now it's too late. But that was a tremendous achievement for her. I still have those telegrams somewhere. She sent me a telegram sometime in July or in June - I beg your pardon - that just simply said, "Found a Guarantor", "Garant gefunden", and then we thought we were nearly there. Then in July she sent me another telegram, all of which I have still and on that it said, "Have just sent off permit for papa", for my father. Not her father, my father, but she had a wonderful relationship with him and then on the 31st August I got a telegram, "Eltern eintreffen Mittwoch" which means, "Parents arriving on Wednesday". They had somehow scraped enough money together to come here by air. They were due to arrive at Croydon Airport on the 6th September and on 3rd September the war broke out. So we really never talked about it, it was too painful a subject. My sister did tell me that before the war, probably on 30th or 31st, maybe on 1st September, I'm not sure, she phoned them, I think by then they must have been back in their own flat, she phoned them and she said, 'For Heaven's sake get out, the war is imminent, it's your last chance', and you know, you've got to remember they were my parents, middle aged, law abiding citizens. I mean what were they supposed to do? Go with a rucksack over the mountains into Switzerland maybe, and then be perhaps put in prison for being illegally there?. It didn't occur to them and they must have said to my sister, 'Well look it's only a few more days. We'll hold on, we'll hang on. We've got our tickets, we've got our luggage packed, surely', but they never made it.

HL: How much contact did you have with your parents before the war broke out?

GG: Oh, twice weekly, I mean we, don't forget before I had a job all I had, I had all the time in the world, and I spent my time writing letters to my parents and to my various friends who by that time had been, ended up in the rest of the world somewhere. So yes, my parents wrote to me regularly, I remember my mother even wrote in German, it must have been in German because she didn't speak English, but she wrote a very nice letter to that lady who looked after me in the east end of London. Because I remember I had to translate it, how I managed it I don't know, but I did translate it. Yes, we wrote regularly before, but of course after the war started, all we had were the Red Cross messages, every two or three months ten words.

Tape 2: 34 minutes 44 seconds

And I remember in one of them, I did by then, I realised because their address was different that they had been forced to move from their home, from our home to the second district in Vienna, which was a predominately Jewish district anyway, but then by that time they put all the Jews that were left in Vienna into that second district and my parents had some accommodation there. I wrote to them there. And in one of the communications I remember my father wrote that my grandfather had died, and I remember thinking what a shame that poor man had to live to bury his own son and to live and die in what he considered to be his country under such terrible circumstances. A lot of people, a lot of people in Vienna, were pleased, it sounds awful, but they were pleased that their parents and grandparents were no longer alive to go through these experiences. Yes, I remember that was one of the communications I had, and then they stopped, in 1942 they stopped. While we were in the hostel after the beginning of the war, to start with we had the phoney war, what we call the phoney war, and it wasn't until the real war broke out that really things became quite difficult. And overnight they had to close the hostel. We were enemy aliens, we were likely to send signals to the Luftwaffe, I don't know, but anyway we had, the hostel had to close and because I was the youngest I was allowed to stay. The reasoning behind that was difficult to follow, because maybe I wasn't likely to send messages to the Luftwaffe before a certain age. But anyway I was allowed to stay, and I remember I stayed at the family I worked for, I stayed with them in their home, in Lord Street, in Southport. Southport is a very nice town. I stayed with them and went to work there. But of course, my sister wanted me, we wanted to be together. She had responsibility for me, or at least she felt she had responsibility for me. When I think about it I mean she was a young women herself, 24, 26 by then and there she was landed with a teenager to look after which isn't perhaps easy at the best of times. But we always had a wonderful relationship and she really was my best friend and took her responsibilities very seriously. Well anyway, she wanted me to join her in London, by that time the blitz was on and not unnaturally the committee ladies who were still responsible for me in Southport didn't allow me to go to London. So I did something awful, I really did. I still feel a bit ashamed about it but I actually absconded one morning, instead of… I did look after, they had a little girl and I did look after her occasionally and I must have somehow packed a suitcase and taken it to the

station and left it there, I don't know when or how, but on the morning instead of going to work I went to the station. I think my sister probably sent me the ticket. Anyway I went to London and I was very worried about that, because they were very nice people and they must have been very concerned about me suddenly disappearing. Anyway, as soon as I got to London my sister met me and she met me with a friend of hers who became quite well known, his name was Erich Fried, I think he's dead now but he became a very well known poet. He translated Shakespeare into German and so on he became quite a well known poet. Anyway he and my sister met me and he phoned up my employers and explained.

Tape 2: 39 minutes 27 seconds

I remember I even put them to the trouble of sending on the rest of my clothes and I remember they had to return a library book for me. I still feel a bit ashamed about it, I just hope they understood. After all my, sister was my only relative and obviously we wanted to be together. They were very kind, it was no reflection on the way they treated me, not at all. Anyway I was in London and living with my sister. We had various bed-sits in Bloomsbury, one was I remember in Mecklenburgh Square and I was by then, well, hardly a qualified hairdresser, I tell you I was quite the worst hairdresser that ever practiced. I had no inclination, no interest in the job and certainly no talent for it. But anyway I found myself a job in Oxford Street, next to John Lewis and I worked there, no longer as an apprentice but, well, the next stage I think it was. I wasn't fully qualified but anyway I worked there. And I remember the blitz was by that time pretty frightening, I remember we had to go to a shelter, there was a shelter in John Lewis and we were allowed to go in there. Life was beginning to be quite difficult. My sister was doing quite well in her secretarial job and we, you know, we somehow managed. People often ask me now who helped you. But by that time nobody helped us. We earned what we did and we lived on what we earned and what we couldn't afford we just didn't have and that's all there was to it. And we thought ourselves jolly lucky to be here.

HL: How did people react to your German accent in London?

GG: I can't remember that I ever found any hostility, no, I have to be fair, I found people on the whole, I think that by that time it had filtered through that we were not exactly enemy aliens. We were here for reasons of persecution ourselves. Well, if you remember, people were interned in those days as enemy aliens and the incredible thing was they put them… A lot of them went to the Isle of Mann and they were incarcerated together with the actual Nazis. I mean, when you think about it, those refugees, who fled for their lives and the Nazis who were for some reason or other were here in England, and found themselves here when the war started and they were all interned together. But that didn't last very long, I think there was quite an outcry in the Houses of Parliament and then they were released. My husband later on, who was also interned, he was staying at a family in London, and they came to him and to the father of the household. And he just came down the stairs, and they said to him, 'Who are you?' and he said his name and they said to him, 'You're German, you had better come along as well.' So he was interned as well, but funnily enough he never thought back at those days with any grudge

or, in fact he found them very interesting days because typically there were German, Austrian Jewish refugees and they immediately started all sorts of classes. There were music groups and literature groups. And Norbert Brainin was interned and met, I think his later colleague, was it Siegmund Nissel, I think, there. And whether the germs of the Amadeus Quartet were formed there, I don't know.

Tape 2: 43 minutes 47 seconds

My husband certainly looked back on it as quite an interesting time, but you know, people did realise we were the wrong people to be interned, I mean after all we were there, we fled for our lives. Quite a few refugees were sent to Canada, to Australia and one terrible incident where one ship went down and everyone was drowned, yes. What else can I tell you?

HL: How did your life progress then in London during the six years of the war?

GG: In a strange way, because we didn't know anybody really in Vienna. I had one aunt, my mother's sister, who managed to get to England, she lived in Swiss Cottage so we also moved to Swiss Cottage and lived again in a bed-sit together. We didn't think that we were particularly poor, we were glad enough to be here and to live in a bed-sit and to cook on a gas ring was nothing dreadful. We were, as I keep saying, we were one of the lucky ones after all.

HL: What was your mother's sister's name and how long had she been in London?

GG: She and her daughter, her husband perished, but she and her daughter escaped to Yugoslavia before the war and from Yugoslavia I think to Italy, and somehow or other managed to get to England. Her name was Rosa, Aunt Rosa, I was not particularly fond of her because I remember I was influenced by my mother who didn't get on terribly well with her. I think there was childhood jealousy or something. She wasn't my favourite aunt, but she was my only relative. Anyway, we didn't see that much of each other, but we moved to Swiss Cottage because that is where a lot of the refugees were. In fact, I never heard this, but, I never heard it myself, but it was well known that apparently the bus conductors used to call out when they got to Swiss Cottage, 'Everyone show their passports!' Because it is not unnatural that people gathered together, because for social reasons, for security almost, you know, to be amongst their kind.

HL: Did you have any social life?

GG: Strangely enough my social life such as it was.. I mean we worked very hard, by that time I was the next stage in hairdressing. I eventually even ran a shop if you please, in West Hampstead, in West End Lane, right next to the underground station. I took over the running of a little hairdressing salon because the owner of the shop was in the forces, and because of that I was excused war work. Yes. Except I gave that up I wanted to be part of that, but I am jumping ahead of myself. Our social life, well my sister was grown up, but I was a teenager then and I, there was an organisation called Young Austria and I

let myself be influenced into thinking, I mean, how I could have been so stupid, having seen what it was like after all.

Tape 2: 47 minutes 24 seconds

You know, they had the idea that the Austrians were the first victims of the Nazis and so I used to go and speak about that to English groups sometimes. But it was, I mean, to all of us, lets face it, it was just an excuse to be somewhere, to have the company of like minded people, people with the same background, the same difficulties. And we formed a choir I remember, and we even sang in the Wigmore Hall, if you please, The Young Austria Choir. And we sang Haydn's The Creation in the Wigmore Hall, not the Hall but part of it. But anyway this was all because it got us together twice, once a week and they also, the refugees also formed a theatre which was in Eton Avenue in Swiss Cottage, in the Austrian Centre. And there was an excuse of a stage and actually well known actors who had escaped from German, produced some very good plays there on a makeshift stage, and that's where I had my first experience of drama. I remember playing a maid in some drama or other in German; this was in German, but some of the actors… There was Martin Miller, who became quite well known, there was Hanne Norbert, his wife who was also a well known actress, there were several who had been. There was somebody called Marlé, and we put on *Nathan the Wise.* All of that actually had real merit. They were not amateur productions, they were professional, when you think of the conditions, it was really quite remarkable. I remember we did one well know English play which was translated into German, and did that, I can't just think of it, a restoration comedy about a miser. I'll think of the name in a minute, and it was all fun and a reason for getting us together for the rehearsals etc., and a reason for just being together, I suppose.

HL: Where many of you in non professional jobs?

GG: Yes, everybody had a struggle, some of them were seamstresses, some of them worked in factories, a lot of them wanted to be part of the war effort and I also decided I didn't feel that my job at the hairdressing shop - even though I was keeping it open for someone who was in the forces - I did not feel that was really the thing and I wanted to contribute to the war effort, so I gave up that job. I don't know what really happened afterwards. I think they probably found someone else to run it and I went to work in the factory. They were the Super Brothers(?) in Colindale. And that was quite an experience, I can still smell the oil, the smell of oil which was so typical in the factories, I can still smell it now. You know you have to clock in and clock out. I was a capstan operator, I was a capstan operator and was paid piece work I remember, and I do remember that my fellow workers were incredibly nice to me. They must have known my background because I remember my sister and I managed to find a little furnished flat by then, and we were bombed there one day, and I had to take time off from work I suppose. And one day one of my fellow workers arrived with a collection they had made for me and a little note which I have still got.

Tape 2: 52 minutes 11 seconds

They called me Jean in those days, not Gina, Jean, J-E-A-N, and there was a little note, 'Please don't be too proud to accept this, it's from your fellow workers and we would do the same for anybody'. I thought that was so touching, that was my fellow workers. Then the blitz became really rather… That's when we started the doodlebugs, and I think we were bombed out once or twice, so my sister decided we really ought to be safe. We went to Glasgow where I had a distant relative, I think a second cousin or something. I don't know why we went to Glasgow, but we got there.

HL: What year was this?

GG: It must have been 1940 probably, 1941. We only stayed the weekend we came straight back. We had our cat with us, we had our pet and we took this cat with us in a basket to Glasgow, but we stayed there just the weekend and we came back. We really didn't like it at all, and we came back to the bombs. But then we were bombed out once more. By that time I was working in the east end of London, near the Old Vic, as a hairdresser, and I remember arriving there one morning for work and the shop had gone, it was bombed.

HL: You went back to hairdressing after making capstans?

GG: I think, that must have been before. I think once I was a machinist I stayed a machinist. Yes, my sister and I decided we would go to Oxford, no before that I worked in another factory, near Regent's Park, again a factory, because I remember 6th June, when they announced over the radio, we had a radio in the workshop, they announced the invasion, the second front, which came on my mother's birthday, 6th June and I remember being very emotional because I really wondered whether it was too late. I mean none of us knew what was going on on the continent, perhaps just as well, but I mean, that the Jews were having a tough time I think was pretty obvious because after all concentration camps were known right from the beginning of the Nazi, the Nazi followers and the Nazi government. So it was nothing new to us.

TAPE 3

HL: Talk about moving to Oxford and the year and when did it happen?

GG: I think it must have been 44, sometime in 1944. I left hairdressing by that time behind me, thank goodness. My sister was working as a secretary in an American firm, Nielsen I remember they were called, in the High Street, near Carfax in Oxford. We were living in a bed-sit again in, I forget now where it was, in Oxford, in one of the suburbs. Anyway, in Cowley, that's right, it was in Cowley. Oxford was a lovely place, I enjoyed Oxford very much and there was a repertory theatre there where we went quite often.

Tape 3: 1 minute 13 seconds

My sister, as I said, had a job as a secretary in Nielsen's - they were an American market research firm - and she found me a job in what was the comptometer department, and so I

became a comptometer operator. I must have been reasonable at it because you know I took to it very easily and I remember after the war ended, I'm jumping ahead a bit, I went to a school in London where I did a course, because don't forget all the, we were used to metric, so feet, inches, pounds, shillings to work in you know fractions like that was all very strange to me not having been to school here. But anyway I became reasonably proficient because from then on until I married I made my living as a comptometer operator. In Oxford life was very pleasant. I don't think we were too bothered by bombs in Oxford but I remember being in Carfax when the end of the war was declared and there was great jubilation, I remember that very clearly.

HL: You must have thought about your parents …

GG: Oh, indeed, we tried desperately immediately to get in touch with them. We had no address to write to. The last address of course they had gone from there, and nobody knew where they were. Because we felt by then that they were no longer alive because they would have done everything to get in touch with us, but nevertheless, of course we wanted to know. I remember being in a cinema with my sister after the end of the war when they liberated some of the camps, and there were all these graphic newsreels of conditions in the concentration camps and I mean, we were just… I remember, we had to leave the cinema, we couldn't take it, we really couldn't take it. And I often think of that now, how we all looked to the future quite differently. I have to say, even in England it's quite an admission, even in England, the only time in my life, and that's the honest truth, the only time in my life that I felt safe as a Jew, even in England, was immediately after the war when all the horrors came out and we thought, everyone thought I am sure that such things could never happen again, and alas fifty sixty years on we haven't learned much from history, have we? And if you don't learn from history you will make the same mistakes again, racism, anti-Semitism. I shall actually go to my grave not understanding it, I really can't. But anyway, we were very unsettled after that. My uncle, an uncle of mine, I think on my mother's side - he wasn't a real uncle, I think we just called him uncle, he was a relative, Professor Kestenbaum - he was a very well known eye specialist, eye surgeon and he had immigrated to America and he sent us an affidavit to join him in America. We thought seriously about it and then decided we couldn't uproot ourselves again. I think one of the reasons believe it or not was our cat. We doted on that cat. Then again, my sister and I actually quite seriously thought we would join the American Forces. They engaged former refugees to help with the translation work in Germany and we went through quite a difficult course, we had exams and so on and we were ready to go to Germany as translators. I think we even would have worn uniforms I think. And certainly the pay was very tempting, but you know we could not face going to Germany, we just couldn't face it, and so that's another thing we didn't do

Tape 3: 5 minutes 52 seconds

By that time we were both back in London and both by now having better jobs and I was working as a comptometer operator. My sister had a job and between us we were earning a lot better and I remember we had a little furnished flat in Hampstead. And life was very difficult then because we were all so unsettled, we didn't know how or where to get

in touch with our families, I mean, there wasn't anyone else left to enquire but we wanted desperately to know where our parents were. But, anyway, we carried on like this.
In Oxford I had restarted my interest in drama and in London when we came back to London I joined the Toynbee Theatre in the east end of London. You know it's an educational establishment and there I joined the Toynbee players. Well, first of all we had the courses; we learnt speech, elocution, fencing, dancing and then after a couple of years at that I was elevated to join the Toynbee players and I have to say, there were teachers there who were particularly helpful to me knowing perhaps my background. There was one Marion, Marion Graham. She was a proper drama teacher, she taught later on at the Old Vic Drama School, and she was particularly nice and helpful and I played some very interesting parts, we had some marvellous… By that time it was really sort of semi-professional and we were reviewed in the papers etc. And I was persuaded that I had talent and I should take it up professionally. Well, I wasn't built to be a film star, a stage celebrity really, but I thought I could get away with character parts and I was, yes I was very keen. I think now I come to think of it maybe it was a way of getting away from my own personality and be somebody else. Anyway, they thought, they encouraged me to try and get into one of the drama schools and I went for two interviews, one for RADA, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and, no three interviews, the Old Vic school, which was, I mean, they had some future great stars there when they started that drama school at the Old Vic, and the Central School of Speech and Drama. Anyway, I was accepted at the Old Vic but I was persuaded to go to the Central School instead because they concentrated on language, on speech and I still had a slight trace, then, a very slight trace of an accent, so they thought that this would be a better school for me. And I went there and passed the audition which paid for my fees. I got a grant, and it was a question of how to live, and I remember I was sent to the LCC and they gave me a grant of £183 a year.

HL: What year was this?

GG: I think we are now talking about '48. I remember the director of the Toynbee Institution sent a letter of references for me saying how much pleasure I had given them in the plays and recommending me for the grant, and I got £183 per year. And this Margot, this teacher I was telling you, I can't remember her second name, she was a remarkable woman.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 43 seconds

Without any question, she gave me a loan of money because my first instalment of the grant wasn't going to come through for several months so she gave me, she lent me £50, I remember, which was plenty, I remember, and I of course paid it back, but I was very, very grateful to her. I had a lot of encouragement in those days and I started drama school. Just before that I went with my friend, my friend was accepted at the Old Vic School and I was going to start at the Central School so our last holiday together before we started as students, I remember, we hitchhiked in France and Italy. That was a great excitement for us. And then life was again very different and quite difficult. I worked every weekend, wherever I could get a job. I worked again as a hairdresser and I worked

as a comptometer operator, to add to the money that I was getting as a grant which wasn't enough. I have to say life in the drama school was interesting for me perhaps for different reasons to the others. I was a student again, you know. We had, and strangely enough I remember enjoying the exams we had. We had exams on English Poetry, on history we had to write an essay, I remember in one of the exams about how Queen Elizabeth went from one of her aristocrats to another. She was quite famous for staying away at someone else's expense at their house. And I really rather enjoyed that. I enjoyed the learning bit. It was a three year course which I must say I enjoyed very much, and I had one teacher who was particularly helpful, Cecily Berry, Cec Berry, she became very well known. She became voice director for the Royal Shakespeare Company and she was very helpful. She gave me separate lessons for getting rid of my accent, and she made records so that I could hear it. It was an inflection more than an actual accent. You would hardly believe that now that I have got my accent back again. But thereby lies another tale. When I finally became as it were a fully fledged actress, I remember the only jobs that anyone was interested in offering me… I used to go to these interviews, and, 'yes dear, we'll get in touch, don't get in touch with us we'll get in touch with you.' Until somehow or other I perhaps mentioned, or it came up that I was bilingual. So they took a greater interest in me and it sort of happened that bit by bit I ended up doing quite a lot of work for the BBC as a foreign actress, so I had to relearn my accent. I remember playing a Hungarian in one and yes, there was a lovely incident where I played an Austrian refugee in a play called *Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat*, and my leading man was no less than Michael Horden. I remember during the rehearsals he was more worried about the cricket match that was going on. He kept sending people out to get the latest news about the cricket match. But anyway, it was quite an exciting time. And also at Central School we had…, I mean Lawrence Olivier would come because he was an ex pupil. Peggy Ashcroft came to adjudicate our final performance which was in the St James Theatre and, as I said, we had great fun. There was Judy Dench who joined as a first year student when I was in my last year. Virginia McKenna was part of our course. There was Frank Windsor and several people who made it. Most of them I have to say didn't however, too many people chasing too few jobs.

Tape 3: 15 minutes 33 seconds

But one or two became quite well known and Peggy Ashcroft adjudicated our last performances. And I remember one of the… I think we had a poetry recital and there was, oh, I can't remember his name, an actor, he was in that radio series, television series, about elderly men who were in the army, Dad's Army, somebody called Laurie, an actor, came to adjudicate us and he was told that English wasn't my first language and he was very complimentary, I was very thrilled about that. So those were interesting years, years that I really enjoyed.

HL: When you worked for BBC radio were you billed in the Radio Times as Gina Bauer?

GG: Gina Bauer, yes, but I changed the spelling of my name because Bauer - which is a very common name in Germany, like Smith - Bauer, which means peasant, people here

would pronounce it 'boar'. And anyway it wasn't the right name for a stage career as I thought I would have. Anyway, I changed the spelling of my name, quite officially to B-O-W-E-R and the result of which was when I was in England they called me Bower, but when I went abroad I became Fräulein Bover. But anyway, yes, I changed my name by deed poll. By that time I had also become an English citizen and yes, I was very proud of my British passport. I really have to say that on the whole after my initial experiences which weren't perhaps so happy, I was very lucky, I had a good life in England. So, one can rise above experiences, anyway, which I managed to do with the help of my husband and friends.

HL: Is it time to start talking about meeting your husband now?

GG: Well, yes almost, yes. I made one or two great mistakes. I nearly got married and went to America which was on the rebound and luckily I didn't get a visa, but that's a different story. That was really lucky for me. Anyway I met my husband on a blind date. Apparently he was in London, he lived in Birmingham and he was at London at some do and somebody heard the name Frank Gerson, and this somebody, somebody called Shearer, Ken Shearer said, 'I went to school with a Gerson', so they found each other and so he, my husband, my late husband, invited these people to Birmingham then they invited them to London and one day a joint friend said to Ann Shearer, the wife of Ken, 'Do you think Gina will join us for a theatre outing?' and my friend said, 'A theatre outing, you bet! Whatever it is, Gina will be willing.' So we went on a blind date and we went to see a musical, *I Remember Mama* I think it was called. Anyway, all of us were of the same background so we got on terribly well and that is how I met my husband.

Tape 3: 19 minutes 43 seconds

HL: What year was that?

GG: That was '56, no 1957. And we became engaged very soon. I met him in May and we got engaged in August and we got married in January 1958. And that was the best thing that ever happened to me.

HL: What was his background?

GG: His background, contrary to mine, was from a very, very wealthy background, and when I say wealthy in the sense that we hardly knew in Austria. His father was a very able business man. He owned a factory, a malt producing factory, he had several apartment buildings, office buildings, in Breslau, which became Wroclaw later on, that belonged to him. He and a partner had a firm called Carry and Gerson, and they were importers and exporters of foodstuff and corn merchants and he had quite a bit of contact with Poland for instance. A lot of his customers were in Poland, and because the Germans - I am going back a bit now to before the war - were very keen to get foreign currency, they encouraged anything to do with foreign trade, so he, although he was Jewish he was allowed to go to Poland quite frequently. And it was on one of those occasions that, now my husband, strangely enough, he came to England as a schoolboy.

He came to a minor public school in Taunton, Kings College in Taunton, and he went to school there, and he even went back to Austria, I mean Germany in the school holidays, it was most extraordinary, but his sister also came to England, she came to Birmingham because a relative, an uncle was in Birmingham, he was an engineer and he was also working in a factory And when the Germans took over, strangely enough he wasn't given the sack, but he was asked to sign a paper that he would not divulge what he was working on, and he realised it was rearmament. He saw the light very early on, and he came to England during this holiday pretending to be on holiday but actually looking for a job, and they told him to go to Birmingham because Birmingham was the centre of industry in those days. And so he settled in Birmingham and that's how the rest of the family, found themselves in Birmingham. Now what happened, strangely enough my later mother in law was in England visiting her children, but with every idea of going back. My father in law was in Germany, I mean Poland, on a business trip and he must have had occasion to ring his secretary and his secretary just said, 'The Gestapo are coming tomorrow, they have made an appointment to interview you', and he just never went back. With his weekend case he phoned his wife in England and said, 'Stay put', and he went via Italy I think, to England. Now that was the difference, because my father in law was a rich man. They had money in England and there was no problem about him coming here. So in fact later on, they managed to get both the grandmothers out. His mother and my later mother in law's mother, and one of those old ladies managed to pack all their belongings.

Tape 3: 24 minutes 10 seconds

I mean these paintings that you see here and a lot of… I mean they managed to bring more or less all of their things. Lots of original paintings, china, even a Bösendorf piano which is, you know, one of the special ones, which was quite expensive.
And there was a funny story. Later on my father in law who established himself in England again quite well - I mean he was a very good businessman - he had this old furniture from Germany still and they were replacing it, and he gave his three piece suite to an employee. And that employee must have, I don't know, tried to recover it or something, he found some jewellery hidden in that settee. I mean, he was honest enough to give it back and how or why it was left in there I have no idea. The grandmothers must have been quite elderly by then, perhaps they forgot but even that, you know the things that people did to get things out, but certainly they were lucky, they got a lot of their belongings out.

HL: After you married did you work at all?

GG: My husband, without saying anything too much about it, but I think he wasn't too keen on me carrying on with stage work. I have to say, I never actually earned my living at drama. I managed to earn a very useful bit of jam for the bread and butter, but my bread and butter still came from comptometer work. But I did the occasional broadcast, and that was extremely well paid and I remember sometimes we had money that came from repeats. The *Pussycat, Pussycat,* a friend of mine wrote me from America that it was repeated there and she heard it, she heard my name and she was amazed. And then I remember there was a broadcast about, I can't just think of the name, Lawrence, D H

Lawrence, a programme about D H Lawrence, and they cast me as Frieda Lawrence, who was a German wife. You see there was my German accent again, and I remember that was most interesting, I read all I could about her and her background. So I really enjoyed that, but I could tell that my husband wasn't too keen, in fact he wouldn't ever admit it, but I think he thought it was a bit of my shameful past, you know one doesn't actually talk about it. To begin with I still worked here in Birmingham as a comptometer operator. Don't forget my husband was 38. He was, they thought, my parents in law thought they had him for life. And, you know, he was going to be the eternal bachelor, and I was 32 when I got married, so we were neither of us spring chickens. I expected my first child very soon after we got married and after that I gave up work and we were looking for houses and then my first child came along, my daughter, and not long afterwards I had a son, so I had two children and seven grandchildren.

HL: Were you part of the Jewish community in Birmingham?

GG: Yes, I took over the friends of the, you know, the Gerson family, and they were not entirely, but mostly, people with the same background.
Tape 3: 28 minutes 11 seconds

It's inevitable, you know, so a lot of them were German refugees, and hence my German accent again. I am a bit of a monkey, I copy what I hear, and yes, the first time I was told, I was asked, 'Where do you come from?' I was most upset. I was most upset, because I had got away with Shakespeare and Wilde and Shaw on the radio, but anyway, there I was, and all that hard work of Cecily Berry! I don't think she would be too pleased with me.

HL: What synagogue did you go to in Birmingham?

GG: We were actually married at Singers Hill, because I had no affiliation at all, with any synagogue in London, and my husband, he was brought up very much like I was brought up, very assimilated, but I think he was much more conscious of his Jewish background, intellectually if you like, you know, I mean they didn't keep a kosher household or anything like that, but he was very much aware of being a Jew, much more than I was, and I think it was inevitable that our social lives revolved around the Jewish community, they were very welcoming and we made some very nice close friends here. In fact, as I said, I have had a very good life, until my husband died, and it has never been the same again.

HL: What was your sense of identity, Austrian, Jewish, British?

GG: That is an interesting question, I am often asked that. I can't honestly say that I consider myself English or British. I certainly don't even want to hear about Austrian, I mean, I haven't told you but I went back to Austria once under great misgivings.

HL: What year was that?

GG: I think it must have been in the late 70s, because my sister was no longer alive, why I went back was interesting. My cousin, my mother's brother's son was a doctor and I remember going to his - am I going into too great detail? I went to his graduation as a doctor and the family was told that he and his young wife were going to France, he was going to work in a hospital in France, but where in fact he was going as a doctor was to Spain, to fight with the international brigade, and his wife went as a nurse. He had a very interesting life, he had fought with the international brigade until Franco overcame the partisans and he, well, he wasn't a partisan, he was helping the legitimate government in Spain. Well anyway, he escaped into France, where he was promptly sent to prison, and his wife managed to come to England, in fact she worked as a nurse in Dudley and in Birmingham and in various hospitals, and my cousin was in France by then. Then France was taken over by the Germans. They sent him and the other prisoners to another prison, and that was part of Vichy France in those days, and Vichy France was taken over by the Germans.

Tape 3: 32 minutes 26 seconds

There came word to them, apparently, that the Nazis, that the Gestapo were going to take over that prison, and there was apparently a quite well known mass break out from that prison, and my cousin joined the Marquis, the French partisans and then somehow or other, I never quite found out how, he actually found himself in Yugoslavia, fighting with the partisans. So he went back to Austria as a conquering hero kind of thing and he settled in Vienna as a doctor. His daughter, who also became a doctor, married in England but he was still in Vienna, and when it was his 80th birthday he wanted me and my husband to come, because I was actually his only living relative he had left, apart from his immediate family, his daughter and his grandchildren. So very reluctantly I went to Vienna and I remember my husband was so keen to make it bearable for me. He was altogether so protective of me. He made me phone from England to book tickets at the opera and we went to Vienna. We flew in by plane and I have to say, I really, I couldn't get out of Austria quick enough.

HL: Did you go back to see your friends?

GG: Yes, yes, I showed my husband there that street that had suddenly shrunk, as things do when you are a child. I have to say, I have to be honest, I think I am almost clinging to my hate, I have to admit it. It is a hatred that I have for the Austrians, for the Viennese, because they were more ardent Nazis than the Germans, there is no doubt about it. And all that hidden anti-Semitism came out and if anything they were worse than the Germans, and I wasn't even prepared to give way. M head was telling me that the young generation was different, they had nothing to do with it but I just didn't want to know. People were very friendly in Vienna, when we asked the way or anything, they went out of their way to be helpful, but I just didn't want to know. In Vienna it was somehow, you know, more sophisticated there, so it wasn't quite so apparent, but we went into the country for a few days for a proper holiday in the mountains, which I was yearning for really, because Austria is a beautiful country. But again there are the provincials, they were the heart boiled Nazis still, you know, the older generation, and my husband was

quite ashamed of me because I couldn't bring myself to say good morning when we came down into the dining room. As I said my husband was always so protective, my children knew nothing of my background until many years later when I was involved in the making of a television film about that hostel in Southport where we were. And that was really the first time my children who were grown up and married by then, that they knew about my background because they told me that whenever they wanted to bring it up my husband would stand behind my back and do this, put his hand to his lips and so they were never encouraged, in fact they were discouraged to ask me.

HL: What about media representation about what happened?

Tape 3: 36 minutes 19 seconds

GG: Well, again my husband was incredibly protective and I wasn't allowed, the moment anything came on the television about camps and so on he would just get up and turn it off. And when we had the Eichmann trials in Israel, I remember the articles about the trial were cut out. I mean, he wasn't like that at all but he just wouldn't allow me, and I remember having quite a to do with him because I was really in tears and I said, you know, people had to endure this so the least I can do is watch it, and he said, 'Why, what good will it do?' I think I, I really started to occupy myself with the holocaust and all it meant, certainly long after my children were grown up.

HL: Do you remember what year the programme was about the hostel in Southport?

GG: Yes, that was in '81, and I remember because it was the year my daughter got married. But before that, there was funnily enough… Does the name Karen Gershon mean anything to you? She was a refugee from Germany, she became quite a well known poetess. And my husband saw an advert in *The Observer* which said that she wanted to edit a book about refugee children, and would anyone who was in that position write to her? I think it was called *I Came Alone*; I have got the book here somewhere. And then I remember, it was a lovely summer's day, and I sat in the garden with an old typewriter and I typed, mistakes and all, about my life up to that date. I found that quite, not exactly therapeutic but you know, I think that it was quite satisfactory. It was part of a, it became part of a book, and yes I remember that was when I said to my husband, 'How could my parents let me go?' Stupid question, stupid question, I didn't realise, even then I didn't realise what a sacrifice they made.

HL: What about your other activities in talking about the holocaust and everything you have done?

GG: Like so many of us, I didn't really come face to face with it. One was so busy just living, you know, being a wife, being a mother, earning a living because when we were refugees nobody really helped us, we just lived on what we earned. So it wasn't really until, I think it was, the point was the liberation of Auschwitz, and it was an anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz when suddenly there was a lot of information in the papers. And a lot of searching questions were asked about Auschwitz, and I think it was after that

that people began to confront their own history. I mean, I am one of the lucky ones. I have never been in that camp but there were survivors who just couldn't bring themselves to talk about it. And it was 60 years at least after the liberation of Auschwitz. That was the turning point that people began to talk about their experiences and about the holocaust. And then, you know, books came out, I think before that, apart from Anne Frank's diary, there weren't that many books, but after that a lot of people were able to confront these experiences and write them down in a book. And after my husband died I found myself very much at a loose end. People say time heals, but it really doesn't.

Tape 3: 40 minutes 28 seconds

HL: When did he die?

GG: In 1994, I beg your pardon '74; it's ten years exactly, ten years exactly, in July 1974.

HL: '94 then.

GG: '94, yes, ten years, sorry, my math is not that brilliant. In '94, yes, in July it is going to be ten years. And I was eager to do things. I did a bit of, I still do, a bit of charity work. When someone, when a partner dies, you are left without an arm almost, and so you have to fill your life somehow, and I found myself trying to be terribly busy. I never told you, I took an A level in English Literature, that was when my husband was still alive. I think that was when my, when both my children had left home and I was suffering from the, you know, fled child syndrome. And my husband knew, and unless I passed and passed well I would be impossible to live with, so he encouraged me no end. He said, 'Isn't it time you went and did a bit of revision?' Well anyway, I passed well and I went to classes, I still go to classes, I try to occupy myself. But then I of course, I heard about Beth Shalom in Nottinghamshire and I heard about the Smith family, who are really quite remarkable people and non-Jews. In fact he was a pastor, Mr Smith, he was a pastor and his wife was a schoolteacher I think, and they had a place in the country near Newark Castle, near Laxton in Nottinghamshire, and they called their house Beth Shalom and it became a retreat for Christians. And the story goes that they took their two boys to Israel, their two sons, they were both students at that time. One, James, was a medical student, and Stephen the other one was a student in theology, and they took them to Israel and they went to Yad Vashem and they were absolutely bowled over by all that, and they felt that this was a Christian problem, that anti-Semitism was a Christian problem which ought to be confronted. And they, I mean, Stephen Smith dedicated really his whole life to the… His parents whole heartedly supported him, and Beth Shalom has been in existence now I think no more than seven,eight years, and it has become a world wide learning centre. They have schools there every day, it's an education centre and schools bring coach loads of youngsters there. And I got involved with them and I was full of admiration for them. James, who became a surgeon, has more or less given up his medical career to help in this, and in fact he married a Rwandan refugee. So he, the whole family is involved in this work, and I think for non-Jews, for Christians to do that, carries a message which is far more impressive than if Jews were

doing it. Anyway, I got involved with them, and I do occasionally go there and speak with youngsters of more or less the age that I was when I came to England.
Tape 3: 44 minutes 54 seconds

But they are so much more sophisticated, and I am so conscious of that every time when I show them the picture of my passport photograph with short cut hair. You know they can't believe that any girl worth her weight would be seen in a hairstyle like that. But my own granddaughters think it's hilariously funny. But that is how we were, we were children. So I speak to them and I tell them about my experiences, and I always emphasise that I am one of the lucky ones, because I am here to tell the tale.

HL: Can we return to the question of your identity? You said that you don't feel British, and you don't feel Austrian or Viennese.

GG: No, I don't know what I am. I think it is quite sufficient for me to be a human being.

HL: What about your children? What is there sense of identity?

GG: Oh I think they consider themselves British, absolutely, I don't think it would occur to them to think of them as anything else. Their allegiance is here, their home is here, they have never known anything else. It is obvious they are very British.

HL: Did they grow up as part of the Jewish community?

GG: It is very strange, my daughter never was very interested, but she married a Jew, and because he was more orthodox she promised to keep a kosher household and, which she does, but she has never been interested. In fact, I know she is, she probably won't admit it, but she is a little bit scared of the fact that she is Jewish because of what Jews experienced. Whereas my son took a completely different cue, I think partly influenced by his wife who came from a London Jewish background, but I think his leanings were always towards that, his traditions mean an awful lot to him. And strangely enough my husband was very pleased with the fact that he… I mean he hasn't become crazily observant, but he does, he does observe, and he is quite involved, and so is the whole family, in the synagogue in Cardiff where he practices as a doctor, and he wouldn't have it any other way. And strangely enough my husband was quite pleased about that, although I never held him back from having a kosher household ourselves or lighting the candles on Friday night, but I knew he was very pleased when my son did. And, I mean, he didn't object to what my daughter did but he thought it was a pity. But we were partly responsible for that because we did not bring them up …

HL: You didn't keep a kosher home?

GG: No, no, it just never occurred to us.

Tape 3: 48 minutes 2 seconds

HL: Did you send them to the local Jewish primary school?

GG: No, my daughter went to Edgbaston High School and my son to Mosley Grammar. No, they knew they were Jewish, they, I think for a little time they belonged to some Jewish youth groups, but it was never a big part in their lives either, but I think my husband would have liked it if, but both my children had Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah. It meant something to my son, nothing to my daughter.

HL: Is there anything else that I should cover before we end about your life in Britain?

GG: I am often asked the most extraordinary questions by the youngsters that I speak to. One question that I get every time is, 'Are you still a Jew?' 'Are you sorry that you were born Jewish?' 'Why didn't you take off your yellow star?' Well I actually never wore a yellow star, but you know they ask, 'Why didn't the Jews take off their yellow star?' You see, the idea that when you are confronted with machine guns you are not heroic, and that is something they cannot really understand. They said, 'Well, are you still Jewish, in spite of what you have gone through?', as if you could just shake it off. I am Jewish because of how I was born. I am no more responsible for that than people with black skin are responsible for their black skin, and I always end my talks by saying, "I can't understand racism, I can't understand why people would look up or down to anybody because they were born differently". And the Jews after all were persecuted, not because of anything they did, but because of who they happened to be born as. And you know, you wonder, that people don't understand that because we are going through it again now. There is Kosovo, there is Rwanda, there is the Sudan, there is… It is all springing up again, and I can only acknowledge one race, and that is the human race.

HL: Do you have any contact with Israel?

GG: I have been to Israel on a couple of occasions. In fact, our 25th wedding present to ourselves was our first visit to Israel and I was, oh I was starry eyed, I thought it was just wonderful. And I tell you one thing that stands out in my memory because people ask me, 'What did it mean to you to be in Israel?' And I tell you, I was on a bus, we were going to visit Massada and there was a really objectionable, I think American tourist, Jewish and I remember saying to my husband, 'Now if this were in England I would be squirming, whereas here I can just say she is just a horrible, unpleasant woman.' But anywhere else you feel somehow responsible for their bad behaviour, it is something that reflects on all of us, and that is how it is, unfortunately. We are capitalists, and at the same time communists. We rule the world. That is all coming out again, alas.

Tape 3: 51 minutes 44 seconds

So I find myself towards the end of my life, being very frightened again, very worried. Not just for my family but for the world, quite frankly.

HL: Do you have any message for people who will view this interview in the future?

GG: Yes, I suppose, a rather forlorn one. I mean, as I said before, I shall go to my grave not understanding that people can look down or up to anyone else. I shall not understand, I shall go to my grave not understanding anti-Semitism. If I have a message at all, I mean to me there is only all this racism that we get now… I can only acknowledge as I have said before, I can only acknowledge one race, and that is the human race.

HL: We just ask you to sit still, that is all.

Tape 3: 53 minutes 19 seconds

GG: This is a picture of my mother taken when she was a young woman and I think it is just the typical Viennese young woman, which in fact of course she was, and considered herself.

Tape 3: 53 minutes 40 seconds

This picture shows my family. First of all there is my photograph, which is in fact my passport photograph and that is how I looked at 13, typical haircut and typical dress actually, which a lot of children wore. And my sister next to me, that is how she looked when she came to England and below that my father and my mother.

Tape 3: 54 minutes 10 seconds

This is a picture of my grandfather, Jakob Bauer, he was a lovely, dignified gentleman in his 80s who had to bury his own son who committed suicide.

Tape 3: 54 minutes 36 seconds

This is a picture of my parents, my father and my mother, which they sent me from Vienna when I was already in England. So it must have been some time late in 1939.

Tape 3: 54 minutes 55 seconds
This is a picture of my sister Clare later in life. The difference between this picture and her picture as a refugee is, she became very anglicised and of course her whole life pattern had changed.

Tape 3: 55 minutes 19 seconds

This is one of the many documents I had to obtain to have permission to leave Austria. This is a certificate to show that I, at the age of 13, didn't owe the state any taxes.

Tape 3: 55 minutes 41 seconds

This is a telegram my sister sent me to Southport to the hostel where I was staying in June 39. She had managed to find a guarantor for my father.

Tape 3: 56 minutes 00 seconds

This is another telegram I had from my sister in Southport telling me that she had just sent off the visa for my father.

Tape 3: 56 minutes 18 seconds

This is another telegram, the last. It is yet another telegram I had from my sister on 31st August 1939 to say that my parents were arriving Wednesday, and Wednesday would have been 6th September, and of course the war started on the 3rd, on the Sunday, so we lost the race by three days.

Tape 3: 56 minutes 53 seconds

And this is the notification I got in January 1956 that my parents, Herr Aron Bauer and Frau Berta Bauer were sent to Izbica on 5th June 1942 and that their names do not appear on the list of returnees.

Tape 3: 57 minutes 20 seconds

This is a picture of my diary, one entry in my diary, just before I left for England. It played a big part in my life because I recorded many instances in this diary and it was one that was perused in great detail by the Gestapo at the frontier before I was able to get into Belgium.