

IMPORTANT

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AJR

Winston House, 2 Dollis Park

London N3 1HF

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	104

Interviewee Surname:	Cofnas
Forename:	Rabbi Jerachmiel
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	27 January 1912
Interviewee POB:	Deksnia, Poland

Date of Interview:	8 September 2005
Location of Interview:	Salford, Manchester
Name of Interviewer:	Rosalyn Livshin
Total Duration (HH:MM):	4 hours

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

INTERVIEW: 104

NAME: JERACHMIEL COFNAS

DATE: 8th SEPTEMBER 2005

LOCATION: SALFORD, MANCHESTER

INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN

TAPE 1

RL: I am interviewing Rabbi Jerachmiel Cofnas and today's date is the 8th of September 2005. The interview is taking place in Salford, Manchester and I am Rosalyn Livshin.

If you can tell me your name.

JC: My name is Jerachmiel Cofnas.

RL: Do you have any other names?

JC: No, no ... the only thing is that in English they pronounce it Cofnas, whereas the original is Tzofnas, which is a Hebrew name, in the case of Joseph Tzofnas Parnayach, but in English the C-O they pronounced Co ... and in fact even in Israel they write my name as Cofnas.

RL: And were you named after anybody?

JC: No, no ... as far as I know it was just a name.

RL: Where were you born?

JC: I was born in Dechesne, which is near Vilna, Poland.

RL: And when were you born?

JC: I was born in 27th January 1912.

RL: If you can tell me something about your family background, your parents and their families.

Tape 1: 1 minute 48 seconds

JC: Yes ... well, my parents, as far as my father is concerned. The place that I was born was a very small place, it was almost like a kibbutz, like a Jewish settlement, there were 35 inhabitants there and they were all Jewish, the only non Jewish person was the one who looked after the flock, and he was also the Shabbos goy as it happened. And originally that, they, it was a place where everybody was issued with a plot of land, where it stretches for miles and miles of land, because there was plenty of land in Poland, not inhabited, and the only thing was that it was not fertilised enough and it was not producing a lot, so therefore the ... all the inhabitants of that place were all farmers. My father, he acted as the Rabbi there and also he was the shochet, and in addition to that we were also given by the Polish government plots of land. But it was very, what shall I say, it was not fertile, and he only produced on a very, very small part of the land.

RL: What did he produce?

JC: Well, the most common things, he used to try to produce potatoes, vegetables, but he had to, which you had to have for existence, but generally he didn't have the facilities to be able to work properly on the land the same as the others. Because you would have to be fully occupied and also you would have to have a horse and all the facilities and he couldn't afford to buy a horse, so in fact, in the end, he only had a chelek, [Hebrew for] a portion, with somebody else and he shared it at the times that he wanted it.

RL: Do you know anything about his parents, your grandparents?

JC: Well, my grandfather, my grandfather, I don't know exactly where he was born, it was also, in Poland in that area, there were a lot of little villages and places. I only know that my grandfather, he came from Russia, and the reason that he left is because he didn't want to go to the army, to Russia, and because of that, I don't know whether he managed to get a passport in the name of Friedman, and that is Cofnas, and in fact he came to England, he was in Manchester, my grandfather, he used to give shiurim here, in a Shul which was the origin of the Holy Law of Manchester, and he became a very famous person because he was very righteous and learned and later on he apparently took over my father and mother and they were also in England.

RL: So ...

JC: Can I continue and tell you the story?

RL: Go on then, yes ...

JC: Apparently my mother, first of all she couldn't take the fog, the weather here in England, and in addition to that my father was religious, of course, and at that time he was, he was, it was very difficult for a person who was not, [who was] Shomer Shabbos

to be able to get a job or make a living, so really we struggled all the time while he was here, so some

Tape 1: 7 minutes 0 second

of my ... my two brothers and a sister, must have been, were born in England, and then my parents went back to Poland and then I was born, so I am starting my history, after my parents came back from England.

RL: How long were they in England for?

JC: Well, it must have been for about ten years, apparently, because the fact is there were two or three children born in England, and I don't know how much time they spent in between, before they came back, so I am not sure of the ...

RL: Do you know what ...

JC: So I am not sure of the dates.

RL: Do you know what he tried to do whilst he was here? What kind of work he tried ... ?

JC: I don't know exactly ...

RL: Did his father, your grandfather, did he stay in England? He remained?

JC: He stayed all the time, and apparently he, all his services that he gave to the community was voluntary, because in fact on his matzeva, it says that all the work that he did was all voluntary, so I don't know exactly what he was occupied with as far as financials were concerned, but he was very close to the old Rosh Yeshiva and the Rosh Yeshiva himself used to tell me a lot of stories about my grandfather. I do know that a cousin of mine, who also lived in Manchester, he was a nephew of my mother. His father was a brother of my mother. So he told me that when zaide, when he died, there were thousands of people who came to the levaya and in fact they made the oren from the table that he used to give shiurim. He was so famous.

RL: What was his name?

JC: Yehuda Leib Friedman.

RL: And when did he die?

JC: I should say in about 1926 I think, or something like that.

RL: What stories did the later Rosh Yeshiva tell you about him that you remember?

JC: First of all he told me that, at that time, it was not very often that people wore, you know, a long gown, he didn't wear a, this type of hat, I don't know what you call it, like this ...

Tape 1: 10 minutes 25 seconds

RL: Trilby.

JC: A trilby, but just an ordinary, not a cap, but a round one with a little ...

RL: Little rim ...

JC: Yes ...

RL: Like a bowler?

JC: Similar to what the Chofetz Chaim wore. Shall I show it to you?

RL: We can photo maybe later, I will make a note.

JC: He also used to collect, all voluntary for the Reb Meyer Baal Hanes, also when they made the Yeshiva here in Manchester that he used to, boys of about 12 and so on used to start going to work ... and he also used to come over to the boys and say "How many do you have?" and so on, and you should come to the Yeshiva as you will get the same. And he managed to get a lot of boys to the Yeshiva.

RL: Did he actually raise the money himself? Did he actually go collecting?

JC: He collected, voluntary, for the Yeshiva, for the Yeshiva. But the main thing is that he tried to get as many as possible to the Yeshiva, to entice them to come to the Yeshiva.

RL: Any other stories that you heard about?

JC: I do know that I remember I was a little boy and we never used to write long letters, very, very small writing, and it was all in Hebrew and all about, you know, Chidushei Torah, you know, he was very, very religious and very, very strict all the time, he was occupied in learning.

RL: And then if you can tell me a little bit about your mother's family.

JC: My mother's father in Moldetchna, he was a Dayan. And I don't know much ... I have got a photo of his sisters and so on, all very nice and dignified people, religious people. That is as far as I know, I don't know why, my father was, he was the same probably, he had the same nature as myself. Not to talk about the ... about every detail of life. He was going round with what he was busy with, and I don't know if that is maybe ... on my part or our part, lack of intrigue that we tried to find out every detail of his life.

RL: Did you meet your mother's father? Your maternal grandfather?

Tape 1: 13 minutes 43 seconds

JC: No, never. He wasn't alive. When I ... when I was already growing up, he was not alive.

RL: And your grandmother? Did you meet her?

JC: Grandmother, no, wait a moment, grandmother, I remember, very vaguely seeing my grandmother, but she probably died when I was about three or four.

RL: Do you know how many brothers and sisters your mother had? How big a family she came from?

JC: I do know that she had two sisters, in Moldetchna, and also I have got a photo of their children, but otherwise I don't know much about them.

RL: And your father ... do you know how many brothers and sisters he had?

JC: Yes, my father had some brothers in England. Because my grandfather lived here. And he also had one brother in Poland with him, and this is as far as I know. But here in Manchester they are quite a big family. You know cousins, relations, and I don't know the family too well, because there is such a distance. We were all brought up in Poland and away there from the family, but I do know that he had one or two sons here in Manchester, that is my grandfather. Incidentally, my brothers, who were born here, so they, because of their namesake, they were registered Friedman-Cofnas and therefore when the time came of my middle brother, Hershel, who, because he was in Poland, and then it was, you had to go into the army in Poland, and when he received his birth certificate from England he was freed from the army because of that, because of being an English subject. And also before the war, he and my sister, they emigrated to England, while we were in Poland, because they didn't, they had no difficulty because they were English born. My sister married my cousin and my brother, the other brother, he was ... he occupied various positions ... in Belfast, Londonderry, he was there ... he looked after the community for a long time, and then he came to Manchester.

RL: What brothers and sisters did you have? Can you just go through your siblings?

JC: What?

RL: What brothers and sisters did you have? If you just start from the eldest and go down?

JC: Yes ... yes. My oldest brother, that is besides Miriam the oldest sister who passed away, she was 12, she suffered a lot of illnesses, and my other brother, he went, from the time that I remember, he went to various Yeshivas and then he went to Slabodka, which

Tape 1: 17 minutes 34 seconds

was another country, in Lita [Lithuania], we lived in Poland and he was in Lita in fact he also, he went, from Poland, illegally, because the border was not far from us, and they used to be, to take people, over the border, and then he went to, he learned in the Yeshiva, so he didn't have to go to the army in Poland, and then he learned there all the time until later on at the Yeshiva, which was Slabodka Yeshiva, half of it, it was a very big Yeshiva, they had about four hundred bochurim there, and half of it, they were, an American rich person took over to Chevron that is half of the Yeshiva, and my brother was also one of those who was also taken over to Chevron and so therefore, for most of the time he was not with us, he was in Yeshiva all of the time. In fact when I was young, when I was in my childhood, we had to go through the position ... at home at that time it was a very difficult time, starvation and we had hardly anything to eat, and a lot of illnesses, there were no doctors and so on, I remember a case, when my brother came from the Yeshiva, that was before, he went to Lithuania, to Slabodka, and we were all down with typhus, the whole family, and he could only look through the window to see us, because he was not allowed in, and then he had to go back to the Yeshiva. Fortunately all of us survived without any medical help, the only medical help that was available at that time was a quack doctor who used to have, you know ... what do you call the bankes?

RL: Leeches.

JC: Yes, he used to do that. And some other macho remedies that he used to have and that is the whole medical help that you could have at that time. But apparently Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the Almighty, was very kind to us, and we survived because of his mercy.

RL: Bankes, was that glasses?

JC: Glasses, yes, glasses, to take out the poison, especially if one had bronchitis and so on. I believe there is one Kalman, who uses this method for certain illnesses.

RL: Can you describe what they used to do?

JC: What they used to ... well there used to be a glass, like a rounded glass, and they used to put it in hot water first, the glass, and they used to place it on the ... with a candle, and with the heat it used to suck in, it used to stick, and after a certain time, and it used to draw out, into that glass, the poison or the infection, and this is how they, that was the remedy at that time.

RL: Did they used to use leeches as well?

JC: I think maybe in some people, but I am aware of later years that some used it, but in our time it was too expensive and they only used this, this method.

RL: Now, you were telling me about your brothers and sisters ...

Tape 1: 22 minutes 12 seconds

JC: Yes, my other brother also spent a lot of time in Yeshivas, that is the older one, and the younger one as well ... the younger one later on settled in Manchester, he was born originally in, in England, and I don't know if you remember the family Friedman, in Old Hall Road, Rose Ruth. Do you remember her?

RL: Yes, yes ...

JC: Well, he, her husband is my nephew. Yes. So ...

RL: So his father was your brother?

JC: That's right.

RL: So what was his name, your brother's name?

JC: Hershel.

RL: That was Hershel?

JC: Yes. And, of course, later on, after, after the war, he came back to Manchester and he worked for the Manchester Shechita Board, my brother.

RL: So how many brothers did you have in total? How many brothers altogether?

JC: Two, two brothers.

RL: And how many sisters?

JC: I had ... one ... two sisters, one is Doris, who married to my cousin in Manchester and the other which was left in Poland unfortunately. When I left to England and the war broke out later on, she was married, she had two children, and she lived in the same house where I was born, because we didn't have the facilities to settle her in a more prosperous place, so she was there, and then the war broke out and her husband had to go into the army and as far as we knew she was, she had a bit of tough time in Vilna, and they ... we had a letter from the Red Cross, about my father and about my sister, that they perished in the war. That is all the information that we had.

RL: What was your sister's married name?

JC: Dombrovsky. Binyomin was his name. And her name was Dombrovsky. He was in the army, the Polish army, and then we don't know exactly what happened to him.

RL: What is your earliest memory as a child?

Tape 1: 25 minutes 11 seconds

JC: Of my own memory? I spent most of the time in, with Rebbeim, and this is where we used to get our secular education as well, because we didn't have, it was after, when I came of school age it was already after the war, after the first world war, and in fact in those places there were not so much organised, there were no public schools there.

I remember the later years when I was already in Yeshiva that they were going to register people for public school, but before that there was no organisation in public school at all. I spent times in the Yeshiva and later on in various places, which were in Vilna and so on, and then my father, he moved from the place where I was born, to, first to a place Eishyshok, which was called, near Radin, because he was offered to be a shochet there, but it was temporary, because they wanted a shochet and a chazzan, so since he was not a chazzan he was only temporarily taken on and it was very difficult to get, to make a living at that time, generally things were very, very short and there was a lot of starvation and so on, so he was in Eishyshok, and then later on, after a couple of years, he got a chazzan he was again unemployed, he had nothing to do/

Later on, a couple of years later, he had a job in another small place as a shochet, and this is where, we lived, which is called Ostryn, and this is the place where, from where, when I came to England, I left my father in Ostryn, he didn't want to, when my mother, Oleh Hashalom, when she died my oldest brother, who was already settled here in England, you know, he came here from Israel, from Chevron and in fact he got married in Manchester and he lived here and offered to take him over, but he, his memories of England as far as the religious side was concerned was not very good, and he refused to come. That was one reason. The other reason was that he used to say that he wanted to be independent, he didn't want that their children should have to look after him and so on, so that is why he refused to come back to England.

I left him in Ostryn, and the reason that I ... you see my mother died a couple of years earlier, and when I left it was in 1938, '39 and in the meantime he .. in the meantime he got married and he carried on. He had his job, he got married, and, when I was learning in Radin, in Radin, and my mother became ill, so I left the Yeshiva and then I had to go, because my mother, afterwards she was nifta, and my father was left on his own, my younger sister was with him, but he felt he wanted somebody who could have more companionship, so I spent quite a time with my father. In fact he taught me at the time, while I was there, in order to occupy the time, that I shouldn't, you know, because bitolo, to be without any, not to work, or not to be occupied, is a very difficult, and very dangerous thing to do, so he practically taught me at the time, perhaps we used to learn together, he was a learned man, and he said "I will teach you shechita, because it might be of use to you". So while I was there and I kept him company and so on I also learned

shechita and as it happened I was quite an expert with it. And then later on I went back to Grodno to learn in the Yeshiva at Grodno, under the famous Rabbi Shkop, Reb Shimon, Breinskers, there is a photo of him and I was in Yeshiva, my brother, my older brother, tried, he already tried to take me over to England, and he tried various ways, but the restrictions were very great, and he was not successful to find a way

Tape 1: 31 minutes 39 seconds

to bring me back to England. But later on he, when he was in Birmingham, my brother was in Birmingham, and he used to give shiurim in the Shul, it was not a very big Shul, and it was, he gave the Shul, voluntarily, he didn't take any money for it, so he asked the executive, would they give permission to apply in their name that they should come over as a Rabbi. So in fact I came over, I was already 24, and I came over and I used to help in the Synagogue, officially I didn't get any remuneration for it, and of course the difficulties I came. I didn't know English, but I had to learn, and then later on my brother left. And also the Shul, also it was during the war, that the congregation moved to another part of Birmingham which was more Jewish inhabited and I took over to look over the Shul properly. And gradually we built it up and later on I was very, very successful in the Synagogue. And before I came I learned Bris Milah in Vilna, to be a mohel, and as it happened I was, I had a name as one of the experts in Bris Milah, and this helped me a great lot in my rabbinical position in Birmingham, because naturally when a baby was born, you come into the house, and the mother is sensitive and she is worried about the baby, and if you can assure them and be kind to them and so on, you remain, one of the family. And through this, I was the only mohel in Birmingham, and in fact I used to go to other places as well and therefore I became very, very friendly with the community, exceptionally friendly, and I had a very happy life in Birmingham, and that is the reason really that I was there. Officially I was the Rabbi for nearly 45 years, and I, when I announced, when I decided to leave Birmingham, there was something in between, when I decided to leave Birmingham, I announced it before neilah that I have to tell them that I intend to retire and so on, people were sobbing, in the ... they couldn't believe it, because we were really ... we were very close to the community. Although on the other hand, as far as religious wise, I had a lot of, I was very strict, I mean I didn't make any allowance, well I did make allowances, as far as the Jewish law was concerned, as far as it was allowed, but otherwise I led the community in a strictly orthodox way and there are a lot of instances where I am able to tell you that in spite of the generally that people wouldn't be so happy about it, but the Baal Habatim, my executive, they always gave me, in the end they always gave me right, and I was always, what shall I say, they always came to good terms, and they always accepted my rulings, very happy to go by it.

RL: Can I just bring you back to Poland ... ?

JC: Yes ...

RL: For the moment ... I am just wondering, you are probably too young to remember, but I am just wondering, what happened to your family during the First World War and whether the First World War affected your family in any way.

JC: As far as I know, that the First World War was 1916 ...

RL: 1914 to 1918.

Tape 1: 37 minutes 8 seconds

JC: To 1918, well I don't remember a lot of it, I only remember that soldiers used to come and go. And in fact I remember one of those things, that soldiers used to come and take everything that you had, and a soldier came in and he told us to lift our hands up, and he demanded money and so on, but fortunately he didn't have it, and then in fact he was shooting over our heads, in the house, and also there used to be a lot of, at night, a lot of bands, robbers and so on, and they used to come and do all sorts of difficult situations that we had to go through, because where we lived, it was not a proper ... there was no police, it was like an open city, an open place, and therefore we very often from time to time, we had nobody to be able to turn to, to be able to protect us. But Boruch Hashem, but we relied on the help of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the Ribbone Shel Olam, and we relied on it to get through, and this is the memories that I have, of course, economically we have gone through a very, very difficult time. Not only was it difficult, mamish, there was no bread, there was no nothing to eat, there was starvation, people used to absolutely suffer, there was nothing at all. A lot of people, including our family, that.. because we were farmers, and as I said before, the land did not produce a lot because it was very poor, and they didn't have the means to fertilise, to make it, so even the other Baal Habatim, the other farmers who worked very hard on the farm and so on, they just probably managed to be able to sow, you know, just to come through, on the bare minimum, but we, as far as we were concerned, we didn't have that either, so very often we had to ask somebody if they had got the peelings of the potatoes, and so on and so on, and we used to wash it and this is what we had to exist on. This is what I remember clearly.

I also remember that there are certain types of wild grass nettles, you know it is not poisonous, and because of the hunger we used to cook it, my mother used to cook it, just to fill ourselves, there was no nourishment at all. This was the time which I remember, it is very difficult to forget all these difficult times that we had to go through.

RL: Can you describe your home? What it was like?

JC: Well the home, we had, what I remember, there was, I remember we had, there was a front room, and there was a little side room, and an oven, a brick oven. This is really what ... a little partition, we called it a kitchen. Of course everything was so primitive, as far as water was concerned we had to go to the well, there was a well, which was dug very, very deep until we got water and built up, and we ... with a bucket, we used to lower down into the well, probably about fifteen, twenty feet down, and it had to be dug until you came to reach water. And later on, I remember in later years, in one place we installed a pump, that is, you know that brought up the water by ... a water pump, that was already, you know, getting more modern.

In the house, naturally., the bedding used, was straw, we used to use very ... there was not a lot of furniture and so on, the life was very, very simple and very, very poor. This is how we existed. In Erev Pesach it was very easy, that was the easiest way, that everything went outside, and we, they whitewashed the walls and so on, everything was absolutely pure, no chometz whatsoever, because there was none at all. So it was very

Tape 1: 43 minutes 0 second

interesting that erev Pesach, we had to bake matzah, and this was also, we were very short, of even flour and so on, but whatever it was managed to save up. It was all the people used to, we used to arrange one place to make the ovens suitable for baking matzah and everybody helped. So they, in turns, first they baked for one, then when they finished theirs then they baked for somebody else, and everybody helped, and this is how we got on. Of course we were also helped at that time, whatever they could send ... we used to receive parcels from England and from America, by the help of Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, who was the famous Rabbi of Vilna and who was very much involved with the helping the whole community. He was so famous that he would say that he received letters that would say Rabbi Grodzinski, Europe and it used to ... he was a genius, he was the Rav of Vilna, but in addition he had a great name with a lot of Seforim that he wrote, and they bring in, it was exceptional, but he organised all the help from America and from England as well. Naturally the demand was so great that we didn't manage to get a lot, but it was something to help us. I remember that we used to get tinned milk, you know tins, they used to send, that was the situation that they had.

RL: Did you used to get milk yourselves?

JC: Well, we, later on, we had one cow. So we possessed a cow and therefore that was the milk that we had. That was already at the time it was getting a little bit better, more stabilised, the situation, because before, it was , you know, they used to call it soldiers or prisoners or so on, they used to come or go and we didn't know who they were, and the situation was not settled at all.

RL: Did you ever meat any chicken or meat?

JC: Well, sometimes, but not very often. Everything was very, very short. Of course, I am not talking about later on, in later years it has improved, but there was a period, they had a couple of years that the shortage was tremendous, it was unbelievable.

RL: Was that when you were quite small?

JC: Yes, I was in ... I was about six, seven ... and so on. I myself, I used to really see the miracles of Ribbone Shel Olam, that in spite of, I mean we had no medicine and no food, and yet I myself, when I was a child of six, seven, eight, nine ... I had every illness that you can think of, and Baruch Hashem, I just naturally grew out of it and thank G-d as far as I am concerned ... I mean, I have my little problems now, but as far as age is concerned, but otherwise, thank G-d I lived ... I enjoyed a very healthy life up to now.

RL: What would you do in your spare time as a child? What would you do to play?

JC: As a child ... well we used to, well we were a lot of children, the children of the same village, and we didn't have ... I mean our parents weren't able to buy us toys or any

Tape 1: 47 minutes 57 seconds

complicated puzzles and so on, we had nothing like that, so we used to play with stones, with wheels ... with anything to occupy our time. But the main thing is that when you feel, when you are short of the most important things of life you do not, you do not think, you do not demand a lot, you only wanted to be able to, to be existed and to have something to eat and to be alive, and then it gives you happiness.

RL: Did you ever experience any anti-Semitism?

JC: Well, we definitely experienced anti-Semitism, but I remember that was at a later stage, when I was at, I think it was when I was at El Kaneek [?], there was one, first of all, when it used to come, at the time of the national holidays, the fear was tremendous, because we were very much afraid, because they, I mean goyim could attack you without any reason at all. I do remember, one night, when the hooligans were going from house to house and attacking people and so on, and it was a very, this was, and we were hiding ourselves and that was the case that went through the night, we were afraid from hooligans might attack.

Otherwise in Poland, we didn't know what freedom is. I remember when I came, when I came, when I arrived in England, and I was going with my brother in law, who was my cousin, who met me at the station. So it was in Commercial Road in London, and he was always very friendly, you know lively ... so he went up to a policeman, and he patted him on the back, and he wanted to know where the enemy aliens office [was]. I had never seen it to touch a policeman! It was in Poland if a policeman would go on one side of the road you would go on the other one, you would be afraid to be on the same side because of the ... everything was so strict ... and so ... we were afraid, the fear was a terrible thing, we was afraid. And I could see this, and I was absolutely, I didn't know what to, I thought they would soon arrest us and so on, I have never seen it in my life. So you can see otherwise the anti-Semitism, you felt it in whatever you did that there was some restrictions, some terrible restrictions. We never felt free as we do here.

RL: And what memories do you have of Shabbos or Yom Tov at home?

JC: That is really very beautiful. First of all in spite of the fact that things were very limited, life was very limited, but I remember the Shabbos, first of all a wonderful thing used to be, that if a couple got married due to the fact that they didn't have enough money to spend to make a party and celebrate, especially sheva brachos and so on, most of the weddings used to be Friday before Shabbos and we used to have the Chuppah and then we went home and had kabbolos Shabbos, and each one ate at their own home,

whatever they had and then they came to where the Chosson and Kallah were, and they used to sing together and so on, and although we were very limited in our things that we had, but it was very beautiful and very friendly and each one felt so dedicated to each other. And this we cannot feel today with all the affluence that we have, because everything is now is business like, you are too busy to spend much time with someone else, generally, and there it was the feeling of unity and ahava v achva ... you know,

Tape 1: 53 minutes 34 seconds

being very united, and you felt the simcha of someone else, you felt was your simcha. And therefore this was very, very beautiful, life and Yom Tov and Shabbos and Yom Tov was also like that, in such a spirit.

Mind you, there were some funny times as well, comical, you know in the ., since it was a farming place, so every day during the week, naturally it happens that your animal or your horse or so on happened to stray into somebody else's field. Now that was the contention of, of problems, and they could never settle it in. So on Shabbos, some of the baal habatim used to come to Krias Hatorah, and some of the baal habatim would say I am not allowing Krias Hatorah, we have to settle ... his horse went into my field and he did a lot of damage and so on. He used to start a lot of arguments and so on. Even at times there used to come, mamish, physical violence, that was one other side, a picture of what was at that time, but otherwise generally the people were very genuine by themselves. And as far as religion is concerned, as far as the davening and so on, everything was real, from the depth of your heart. And because ... the people were very sincere that way, that was the only thing they had in life. I know my own mother, she had a thick Kolbo Siddur and all the Tzeno Ureno which used to be a lot of midrashim in Yiddish, and that was her treasure. And when she used to daven mamish, tears were flowing, and her siddur was soaked, mamish soaked with tears, when she used to daven, and most of the people were like that, because we were very, what shall I say, there was nothing to distract them apart from Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the Ribbone Shel Olam, and the seriousness of being able to exist and to ask the Ribbone Shel Olam should be, there should be produce, there should be rain. There should ... everything we were thankful to G-d to know that it comes from him. That was the general situation, the nicer side of that type of life.

We always felt, you know on a Yom Tov and so on that there was a great unity. I remember, on Motzei Shabbos, there was one non Jewish person, and he was the only one who was able to play the violin. He was not a great expert, he was not a great expert, but nevertheless,.. but we took it as a very nice tune, and that was the enjoyment of Motzei Shabbos, that was the enjoyment of life, that people used to get at that time.

RL: Now this film is about to end so we will just stop here.

TAPE 2

RL: This is the interview with Rabbi Cofnas and this is tape 2.

JC: You asked me before what the houses were like in Poland, in our ... of course I am speaking about this particular place, yes. I wanted to tell you that apart from the two or two and a half rooms that I mentioned. In addition there was no bathroom, and there was no toilet either, all these had to be outside. There was one place which was called the bath place which was only a place which was heated up from wood. They used to heat up the stones and underneath was the fire and the stone became very hot, and then water

Tape 2: 1 minutes 15 seconds

used to ... they throw water on the stones, they call it Turkish bath, by the steam, this is the place on Friday that it was the pleasure of people to go into the bathroom l'kavod Shabbos, you couldn't do it for one person so it had to be done for the whole community, it was like a communal holiday that one had to go to the bath to.

In addition to that, when the times were very bad, I am talking about periods ... times were very bad, people didn't have a change of clothes and so on, they didn't, whatever they wore, they wore all the time, there was no change. And naturally there was a lot of vermin and ... absolutely ... so on Friday, they simply had nothing else to change, we used to take it off and put it in the hottest place in that bath place, and then after that ... all the, I don't know whether, after it was gone through the heat, it killed any insects, so then you put it on again, the same thing, because they had nothing to change, that was the situation at that time ... a time that existed ... which is unbelievable, the suffering of the people was very great.

My mother, I am coming back to my mother, who was very, very religious, very religious, I remember that at Pesach when she had to kasher the oven and then she had to burn it. Of course the fuel we had to use was wood, because all around was forests and places and the job of my brothers when they used to come for yom tov was to cut wood and gather near the house, it should last for the whole, for as long as we could, for the winter, that was the fuel that we used to use, there was nothing else. We didn't have any coal, we didn't have ... there was no gas, that was the only thing. And the oven was, it was a brick oven, and we used to burn the wood until, on the surface of the oven on the inside, and I remember that my mother, after it was finished after burning for hours and hours and she used to stand and ask for mechilla from Hakodosh Boruch Hu, she has done whatever she could and perhaps she hasn't done it properly, "as a lemochelein" and so on with such tears, she used to cry bitterly, she was so dedicated and so frum. That was the situation. She was ... and I remember my father on a Shabbos, when he used to lie down to sleep, you know it is mentioned in the Talmud, "Shino beshabbos tanug" it is a pleasure to lie down a little. I remember, used to pass by half an hour, she used to wake him up, she said "Shabbos Kodesh, mir tour nit, mir tour nit", you mustn't waste your time and you have slept already half an hour, so she rationed him as a rationer, and again learning and davening and occupy yourself with the religious things.

My father of course he was a Baal Tefillah as well, he used to daven as well, for the Olam, he wasn't a chazzan, but he davened for the Olam, and then it was the occasion to tell her your feelings you have, about your personal life, or anything that you are praying to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, that he should help you, that he should help your children, and

you should be able to overcome all the problems and the difficulties, and the best place was when you said your prayers in the Shul, in the Beis Hamidrash, to express so vividly express in tears in good fear, that he was standing before the Ribbone Shel Olam and he was begging for his mercy and so on, which was really an impression which always left for the children watching it, which is something you should never forget, which is

Tape 2: 6 minutes 45 seconds

something with you, with the person all the time and I remember it so vividly of my parents, their ways of service.

Now, I want to tell you, that when I was travelling to England, it was on a Wednesday, I remember I left home on a Wednesday, I remember I left home on a Wednesday. And I had to stay over the night, on the Wednesday night, in Warsaw, in a place, and then in the morning we travelled, I was booked with Cook, the agent, and it was to the Hook of Holland, and there, there was a boat to England, to arrive in England Thursday night.

When we came to the German border, after, from Germany to Holland, to the border between Germany and Holland, and of course they were checking the passports and so on, the Germans, and he took a long time and the train left, well I didn't know, when we finished with all the formalities, and we came, that train left ... there will be another train in two hours time or three hours, but that second train would not meet up with the boat to England. Because there was only one, so I came to the Hook of Holland, and at the station they used to have somebody representative of the hotel and they can see you are a visitor and so on, so they took you to a hotel. I came to the hotel, and of course I could hardly make myself understood, but from the Yiddish and Dutch they could, so I told them, I showed them my ticket to England, and he said "You will be too late for the boat. Too late. You won't arrive in time." The only thing he could suggest is that there is the Hook of Holland, and there is another port in Holland, I can't remember what it is, there is another one, and from there, there was a boat, second class, and I was booked on third class, from Hook of Holland, I don't remember ... anyway ... I don't remember the other one, so he said you could travel to the other one, but the other one is second class, you will have to pay more. I didn't have any money ... in fact I didn't have any money for the train. I got my ticket and so on, and that is all. I didn't have any ... it isn't that I didn't want to take any money with me, I just didn't have. So I told him, I went to, I said there is an office of Cooks, so I went to Cooks, and they said "We can't do anything, if you want to wait until tomorrow, then you can go." But then I would arrive on Shabbos, so I couldn't do it, you see that was on Thursday, I would have to arrive Thursday, I, it was on Thursday that I travelled, if I didn't take the boat at night which means coming Thursday night, then you had to wait until tomorrow which means coming on Shabbos, I told that is impossible. So he said that the only other method, the only other way, is to travel to, I have forgot ... to the other place, where there is the second class boat which goes late at night and you arrive in the morning in Harwich. So first of all I said "I haven't got any money at all." I hadn't got any money. And also my brother in law, which was my cousin, was supposed to meet me Thursday night in London, Liverpool Station, so he was so kind, at the hotel he was so kind. I don't know, he had rachmonus

on me. First of all he sent a telegram to London to tell them that I am delayed, that I wouldn't be able to come yet, secondly he said, "I will lend you money." So he lent me money to travel to the boat, only to travel to the boat, so I travelled to the boat, and he said "When you come you will send it back yourself." I came to the boat and he said "But you have got a third class ticket, this is a second ...". He didn't give me money to buy another ticket, only to travel from the Hook of Holland ... Vlissingen is the name

Tape 2: 12 minutes 20 seconds

... yes, yes ... only to travel. I came there and I told him, I made my own way, the best I could, anyway they agreed that I should go on the boat, whether they will charge or not to charge, so he sent the telegram that I ... and I felt that it was really such a kindness of the hotel man, that was what happened on my way to England. And then of course I arrived Friday morning because I travelled over night, second class, I had arrived Friday morning and my brother in law met me at Liverpool Station ... that was a very ... incident and also an act of kindness as far as the people were concerned.

RL: Can I just ask you, you know you were talking about your memories of religious life in that farming community, where did you daven? Was there an actual Shul or where was it that you davened?

JC: Where?

RL: In the little farming town.

JC: There was a Shul, there was a little built Shul. Yes, it was very nice, there was a minyan every day in the morning and at night. When they finished work at night the next thing was, was to go to Shul, there was no other entertainment or reasons to keep you back. And that was really, that was the life, that was the happiness of the life, to come after work and to go to the Shul and to daven and to say Tehillim with such fervour, with such feeling, of expression to Hakodosh Boruch Hu to every word. And also at night I remember father used to give a shiur at night, a short about half an hour or so, in spite of you used to be, of course very worn out but this is how they...it was also the facilities, there was no.., except for Friday night, we used to have paraffin lamps and candles, there was candles, but otherwise during the week, we used to go to sleep just after dark, after we davened ma'ariv it got too dark and the way of lighting was they used to make from certain wood, you know you can peel it, you can make long strips, and that used to be a certain wood which peels. Do you know what I mean? And of course we got up early

RL: Right, yes.

JC: Some wood which is grown together and it doesn't ... and some are like in layers, and you can peel it, so he used to give a strip of wood, thin wood ... he used to have something to stick it in, there was a special stand, you stick it in, and that was the way of lighting, and of course we used to get up very early because there was no other fuel to ... this was what we used for fuel, that was the primitive life that was in the ... in the, in the ... that place.

RL: What about Sukkos time?

JC: Sukkos time we used to build a Sukkah. We used to build it just outside. There was plenty of room, and there was plenty of room to get whatever you had, all the boards and so on, and there would be a curtain, to make a Sukkah outside the house, it was

Tape 2: 16 minutes 38 seconds

getting cold, Sukkos time it was already getting cold. But it was a pleasure of Sukkos and so and Yom Tov was very, very great, we felt the spiritual pleasure of being able to sit in a sukkah, and everything was green, there was no dye, there was no question. Everything was absolutely real that you felt Sukkos, because our forefathers were sitting in the sukkah when they were travelling in the wilderness and so on. Everything that we did was to fulfil the mitzvah the way Hakodosh Boruch Hu told us to do.

RL: Did that little community ... was it Chassidic in any way?

JC: No ... no ... very ... misnagdim. The Ashkenazim, no Chassidim at all. In fact, not only there when I was in Vilna or Radin Or so on, we hadn't seen a chossid, I had never seen a chossid. The first time I had seen a chassidische Rebbe was when I was already in Brisk and there there were some Chassidim and also I remember the Slonimer Rebbe, zecher tzaddick livrocho, came for Shabbos, that was the first time I saw a Chassidic Rabbi, otherwise it was all misnagdim or litvaks.

RL: Can you tell me about your education? Take me through your education.

JC: Yes. As I was saying, as I told you there was no schooling at the time, and whatever we learned was only from the Rabbi, the Melamed. Of course education was not as well advanced as it is today, even if it is a matter of O levels, but we just learned a little bit of cheshbon, what do you call it, to be able to reckon up, the basic things and so on. And the rest we had to do ourselves later on when we grew up, and we had to, complete it, but in the cheder.. Mind you I must tell you, that way of education, it was not advanced as it was today, also children were not given a chance to express their opinion or to discuss it if they have got any problems. It was non existent, even at home, I remember my own father, if you did something wrong, he wasn't quick to hit us or so on, it was a whole ... I remember once he found out I was trying to smoke. I was a little boy, so I remember he took me in and I had to say what I did, and he gave me a lot of mussar and then he put out a bench and I had to lie down on the bench, and he was supposed to give me three strokes, and I promised not to do again, and so on. He was on the ... he worked up the situation as well, but nothing happened, and then I went by my sister who used to stand near me, because he said I am going to smack you and so on, but it never happened.

But, he also, we were, we did not have the opportunity, especially in education, even at later stages, even in the Yeshiva, to be able to discuss with our Rabbis, as what people do today, I mean you can discuss now with the Rosh Yeshiva, anything, any problem that

you have, anything, even if it is things which are not so popular, of even if it is one that you would be ashamed to repeat if you made a mistake, and so on. Everything can be on the table and can be discussed; this did not exist in our time. And that is why a lot of people, especially people who are more sensitive, remained like that, they were not forward, because we were not trained to ... they always kept things back ... for

Tape 2: 21 minutes 53 seconds

yourself, this was a great difference to education today and what it was education in our time. Of course I am not talking about non Jewish schools where they are violent and so on, but even in a more social manner, in behaviour, it did not exist that one should be able to discuss. I mean one should be ashamed, even if we were to consider that whatever we did was wrong, we would never think that we would mention it to somebody else, we would be hiding it. And this is a great difference in education today, which from a religious point of view there is a great advantage that boys today are able to discuss with the Hanhallah, with the Rosh Yeshiva, everything... they were quite wide, open minded, to be able to discuss it which was a very great advantage in comparison of our time.

RL: Can you tell me about the different Yeshivas that you learnt at and the different Rebbes that you learnt under? The Rabbonim that you learnt under and different experiences ...

JC: Now ... the difference in the seder, in the order in the Yeshiva is, that you used to learn up to a time that you are able to go through a blatt Gomorrah, and to understand it reasonably well by yourself, because learning is not only to translate or what it is, it's not like if you read an English book, and there is no more depth to it, it is only what it is, learning is a very, very, everything has got a deeper meaning, and the same thing that has got on a low level you can take it on a higher level and so on and so on. And this is how it can go on for ... so, if we were able, and in the Gomorrah there is the Gomorrah itself, and there is Rashi, which usually Rashi explains the Gomorrah, and then there is Tosfos which is an addition of questions, for instance sometimes that one commentator doesn't agree with the comments of another, and so on.

So if you have reached this stage, so until we were able to make out something of it, of a ... then we are able to go ... so up to that time we had to go to a shiur, we had to go to a class, so naturally at the beginning you have to learn, you have to learn even translation, because we don't know how to translate, the Chumash also does it, so when you know the translation and you understand it well, you would go to a second class, second form, and there you would probably learn a little bit more deeper, to say that this is the explanation of Rashi, but Tosfos doesn't agree with it because it seems contradicting to some other ideas and so on, so you raise the standard a little bit more. Then you go already to a ... I mean if you do well in the second class then you would go to the third form where they raise the standards, not only Rashi and Tosfos and so on, but they would bring Rishonim, you know the other commentators, for instance the Rambam, the Rosh Rashba All the other commentators who was, who create ... I mean every problem

can be so complicated and so difficult. And even now, the greatest lomdim, you can hear a shiur from someone else, with asking questions and bringing riyas from one side, whereas other Rishonim, other tanoyim and amoroyim disagree with it. It creates a form of discussion, there is no end to it. Until you arrange, it depends how and why you want to go. So then, if you reach such a stage that you can also learn Rishonim,

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and understand basically the Gomorrah and then the Rashi and Tosfos, and then you would be in a situation to go the kibbutz. Kibbutz is that there are no more shiurim, no more forms, everybody learns in the same Beis Hamedrash. A shiur is only given only once or twice a week, a general ... but the basic, all the ground work and so on you have to do yourself, and you do it together with your friends. You have got a ... we call it a vaad, we say if you reach you enter the kibbutz, which is ... you call fur sich, that you are already able to learn fur sich, so you have a chavrusa, and you have a chaver to discuss it with in the morning, in the afternoon you have another chaver to discuss it, about ten of equal bochurim. About once a month, once a month, once a week, they come together and instead of, similar to what the Rosh Yeshiva gives a general shiur, a general discussion of the contents of the Talmud and Rishonim and Acharonim, Rambam and so on, so you do it in a smaller way amongst your friends, that each one has got a turn. So if you get a turn, once in two months you would have the time to prepare your own Gomorrah, Tosfos, you would say that Rishonim ask against Tosfos, there is the Rashbar answers that, you would built it up into a discussion, and each one has to prepare it himself, and the other chaverim would ask him questions. They would question him about it, what do you say about this, it would be difficult about that, so far this is the way of learning in Yeshiva. First of all there is Yeshiva Katana, and then there is the higher Yeshiva. And then it depends how much you learn there ...

RL: How old were you when you went to the higher Yeshiva?

JC: I was just over 15, near 16, and it is that age, that is the time, because we start early. Mind you, I must tell you, that in, as far as we were concerned, a lot of time earlier was wasted, because the Rebbe, it is not the discipline, was not good enough, there was a lot of messing about, there was one person, it was not the same as you have in a school, I mean you have problems in a school as well, but especially with the Rebbe. But the average, since we started Gomorrah from about eight or nine, so at 15 we used to go on to the higher ... to the kibbutz. And in the kibbutz there used to be bochurim from the age of 15 until 30. People didn't get married as early as they do today, there were a few bochurim over there. The opportunities were also more difficult in Poland than what it is today, so people were there. After that, first of all, the Talmud itself, is called the Yam Hatalmud, the sea of learning, it is indeed like a sea, there is no end to it. First of all there is the amount of mesechtas, the amount of Rishonim, and how much you learn it. Somebody will have seen ... Do you want to ask me?

RL: I was just wondering ... yes, well ... I know you are telling me something general, but I was interested in which actual Yeshivas you went to.

JC: Yes, that is what I was saying, I went to Radin. From when I went out fur sich, to a kibbutz I went to Radin, in Radin there was the famous Chofetz Chaim, famous Chofetz Chaim. He himself at that time was already over 93 and he was very hard in movement, he could hardly move, but his mind was terrific, otherwise physically he was very, very handicapped. He had a minyan in his own house, and really the things, to see this saintly
Tape 2: 32 minutes 38 seconds

person is absolutely tremendous. He had a minyan in his own house and I used to very often try to go to daven in his house. Not many people used to go, ten, fifteen, just for a minyan. You know, you think you have a talent, it is no ... you have got it every day. But the first time I met ... I came to the Chofetz Chaim, was my father came from our place, my older brother learned in Radin, and my father wanted to come to see the Chofetz Chaim and also to ask him advice and so on and for brochas, so he took me with, and I was about six. So, with us, I am telling you now, I wrote in the , which is now eight volumes, I wrote in one about the Chofetz Chaim, I will show you. So this is what, so with him, he came, another baal habos came, who was not frum at all, and he was not a nice person, even 'bein odom v chavero', he was not very ... and his younger son happened to be very clever and he wanted to go to the Yeshiva and he went to Radin. He was in Radin at the time, so he asked when my father spoke to the Chofetz Chaim, the other person said, he should ask the Chofetz Chaim that he should give him a brocha for parnosa, because he has difficulty in making a living. So the Chofetz Chaim, he didn't look at him, you know he used to sit like this, bent down at the table. So my father said to him, "The Yid was is mit mir will the Rebbe sollen geben a brocho of parnossa. So he said "ich latzell a meise. I will tell you a story." The Chofetz Chaim said, when I was young boy and I went to cheder and when I went to cheder my mother gave me a bulke, a bulke is a , you know what a bulke is, a bun, a bun. And he said if I didn't want to go to cheder, the mama wouldn't give me a bulke. So he said, "Heb do gehen a cheder, he said to the other person heb do gehen a cheder so the Ribbone Shel Olam far geben a bulke, he will give you parnosa." Do you understand.... I was six and I couldn't get over it. He hasn't seen him, he has never looked at him, and he spoke to him as if he would have known him for years. And then he said, he had another two boys who were not frum at all, one was studying as a doctor and one as something else, they were mechalel Shabbos, so he said "Rebbe I have got a boy in Yeshiva." And er sagt her, er sagt her, "der a her oder a hin habt don gehen in Cheder." I was absolutely out of my Keile when I could see how he recognises people, not recognises ... he had a feeling of prophesy in him, that he could assess the person so quickly. I suppose I can't, when we have a break I will show you the sefer in which he ... So this was the Seder of learning. And then you asked me about the order of learning ...

RL: If we just stay with the Chofetz Chaim for the moment and you say you used to go to his home ...

JC: To daven ...

RL: How did he live? What was his home like?

JC: Now, his home life was very, very simple. The house, there was bare floor. Mind you in Poland there were houses even without boards, just the plain earth, there were ... now there, there were boards, plain, there was no furniture, a few benches, benches was a board with two ... he himself sat in a chair similar to a little bit of a support for him, and

Tape 2: 37 minutes 43 seconds

very, very plain, nothing there. He always used to say if you put decorating on the wall you are decorating pages of Gomorrah, because for that time, for the expense that you expend on the decoration, you can't learn, in other words his whole life was dedicated to the service of Hashem of the Ribbone Shel Olam, and he was ... the problems of the whole world was on his shoulders. He tried to advise this one and advise that one and everything, the Jewry of Russia that had no religion and so on, it was constantly on his mind. Erev Pesach to help them with matzah and so on. But spiritually, spiritually he was tremendous, I mean in that way. Dedicated 100%.

RL: Can you describe any incidents or any particular memories that you have of him and your contact with him?

JC: Well, for instance, there was no, I must say there was no personal contact except on a special occasion, because to him, time, he said, he wrote as well, time is the most precious thing in life, there is nothing else than time. Money is the biggest evil for people, and as a, he wrote, you know ... he didn't live for that, he only lived to exist and so on. As far as he was concerned, I am stepping, I am spilling over. I have got here a Sefer ... you know he made a lot of Seforim, a lot of Seforim, 36, and the Mishna Brura, the five volumes, it is a master ship and so on of learning, and it has been accepted all over, in all Yeshivas, if the Rebbe wanted to know the Psak Halocha, and it is actually tremendous, it is unbelievable, the more you use it, the more you are amazed how a person with a human brain could reach such depth and such understanding, and everything, he was so logical and so quiet, so to the point. For instance, a person came to ask him, he has got a business ... I am mixing in maybe ... he has got a business and would like to start another one, should he do it or not? So he said "Are you making parnosa from the business?"

He said "Yes."

He said "What do you want another one for? I will give you parnosa, parnosa is min hashmayim, Hakodosh Boruch Hu decides on Rosh Hashona how much he gives you, you know he limited how much ... I will give you a moshel. If you have a tea urn, you know a Shabbos tea urn, and you put in another tap, will you be able to take more water, you won't take out more, it is only, it will come quicker and so on. He did say, that if but we see that if people do more business they earn more, but they expend more, there is illnesses and there is this and that, there is a way that the extra that you earn, you don't really have hanoa we do not see that rich people have hanoa from their lives, more than the ordinary person who has got just a simple living and he is religious and so on. He has a much more enjoyable life, it is imagination, a lot is imagination. Because we see that a

lot of people, if you have money, and you don't spend it the right way, then you have got no benefit by it.

Somebody came to ask him, he has got four children, and ... no, he has got three children, and he wants to make it, how should he divide his possessions, so he said, shall I intend to divide between each one, and the Chofetz Chaim said "And are you leaving yourself out?"

He said "I am only giving it away after death."

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He said "But even after death you need something for you, for after death as well."

By the way, I spoke about it on a cassette; it's very interesting about the Chofetz Chaim.

So he said "You have to prepare something for when you go there, because in the world to come you won't be able to earn any existence. The same as in this world you have to earn, if you don't earn you cannot exist, the world to come is more that you have to, it is based on what you earn here." He said "In the world to come we will all be pensioners, we will only benefit from what we have done here, otherwise you can't earn any more. Here you have got an opportunity of earning as much as you can." I have gone off the subject. So this is the Chofetz Chaim, he used to come from time to time, he used to ... about four times in about six months, when he had a feeling ... so we used to bring him to the Yeshiva and he would speak, very, very short, he spoke very short, but ten minutes was a lot, but he should leave a message, he used to leave a message. What he demands, not what he demands, what a person should do. A lasting message and it is the way, in Hebrew we call it Muat Hamasik es hamuruba, it is a little which contains a lot, he used to give a message, the Chofetz Chaim. There were a tremendous amount of stories about him, but it is not made up, it is true. He used to know ... people used to come to him for a brocha. If they were not shomer Shabbos, he always used to say ... the Shabbos itself, how can I give you a brocha, the Shabbos itself is the mekore Habrocha, the base, the foundation of brocha. If you promise you will keep Shabbos then I can add my brocha. Then somebody came, and he said he is dying, and he said "If you promise to keep Shabbos I will promise to give you" The wife said ... he will absolutely not last, by the time he will go and ask him and so on, I can assure you he will last, and he sent somebody and he gave him a hand that he promises he will keep Shabbos and now he said and he came back, now he said I will give you a brocha, you see ... he was tremendous, he was great.

RL: What did he look like in stature?

JC: He was very small, very small, and he ... really ... can I get a book?

RL: No, really, you can't get up at the moment.

JC: No Sorry ...

Well, he looked naturally very, he was small, and he, you could see the shechina, you know, the divine presence on him, but, financially, financially he wouldn't accept anything for ... only what he, only from the selling of the books. And the selling, he made a condition, that not more, he reckoned out how much it cost him, and so much are you allowed because according to Jewish law, if you ... earn more than a sixth is deceiving people, is making too much, and he reckoned out, according to din and so on, and there was a Rabbi Hillman, in the London Beth Din, and he helped, you know and he

Tape 2: 47 minutes 20 seconds

tried to sell some of his Seforim for him. People used to take Seforim to give him money to pay back, and there are two letters, only two years before he died, that his son in law, Reb Mendel Sachs, who was the Rosh Yeshiva in Radin, they wrote that he is financially, absolutely there was not a penny in the house. Can you imagine, such a famous person, and could he ... try the people who had seforim, would they please try to pay something towards it, and to send to the Chofetz Chaim, and there was another letter from another Reb from another son in law of his. Can you imagine such a great Tzaddik, and such a great man, and his whole mind was only occupied about the service of Hakodosh Boruch Hu and the world, and he should lead such a simple and it would be a question of having food in the house. He they were short, they didn't have a penny in the house.

RL: How many boys were in that Yeshiva in Radin?

JC: At the Yeshiva, about 350 boys. They weren't just boys, they were older, they were from about 15, to the age of 30, there were a few over 30 as well. Because the opportunities of settling down in Poland was not as good as it was here, so they remained in Yeshiva.

RL: And where did you live at Yeshiva?

JC: Well, we used to hire a room, a few boys together, when the Yeshiva itself was very, very short of money, very short of money. I think the understanding, first of all generally it was a world, not a world, a country crisis. People didn't have money to give the way they have today. There was no money about. That is first of all. And the little that they used to collect, he, the Chofetz Chaim, with the Reb Chaim Ozer. Chaim Ozer, you didn't do anything without him, he was a ... it was a vaad, a vaad of Yeshivas. A vaad that everybody should contribute for the Yeshiva. We used to raise a little bit of money, but it was very, very little, they, the financial situation was very, very difficult, and that is why when somebody came to the Yeshiva they couldn't accept them, because they couldn't cope with the amount of expenses that they already had. For instance, when I came, for about six months they wouldn't, the menahel, that they were the finance minister, he wouldn't entertain us at all, he said we haven't got the money, we can't, so he used to, everybody used to, you know I had the reaction to sit there for six months, he said I am very, very sorry I can't give ... I will help a little bit towards the expenses. As it happened I was very fortunate that I had my brother in England and sometimes he used

to send me ... you know a pound was a tremendous amount of money, and I used to help my chaverim out, and we used to go to the army, there was no kashrus in the army, and they had to suffer, in order that he used to help them. I have got chaverim now in Eretz Yisroel, that he tried to help them and so on.

RL: So you were saying that when you first arrived at the Yeshiva they wouldn't take ...

Tape 2: 51 minutes 26 seconds

JC: They wouldn't accept us, not only me, a lot of them, the first year that it would take six months or more, but when it could see that you are, you know determined and so on, then he would give you just a little bit towards it, towards the expense, and then he had to be very, very economical, economical is not the word ... I mean to ... you had help a little bit from home, and so on, because the Yeshiva couldn't help, they didn't have any money. It was very, very difficult.

RL: And where would you eat?

JC: Well, he, there were two, up to the kibbutz, you know what the kibbutz is now, when we were in Yeshiva Ketana we used to eat teg to eat teg is, if there is enough, we used to arrange with baal habatim that I will go one day and eat with so and so, on Tuesday and so on, and on Wednesday if you hadn't got a baal habos you had to make do with whatever it is. That is up to the, up to the kibbutz. From the kibbutz, so the Yeshiva used to give a little bit to the bochorim, naturally the older bochorim, those who learn for many years they tried to give them to be able to manage, but it was very hard, they used to give it, but they didn't have the money, it was, but those who started they used to give very little. This is how they had to sort it out, it was very, very problematic, and the Chofetz Chaim, he never took anything from the Yeshiva, he wouldn't take anything. He wouldn't take anything from anybody, only what he earned himself. And there were times, there were hard times that he himself had to suffer a lot. And I have got evidence in writing, which is unbelievable, unbelievable.

RL: Which other Yeshivas did you attend?

JC: After Radin, you know with a break in the house, you know with my father, as I explained to you, then I went to Grodno, to the [...] in Grodno as well, Grodno was also very short. They were all short, in fact, Reb Shimon was the Rosh Yeshiva, the one with the white beard, with bochorim. In fact there was a, a situation which was unbearable, it was a question of closing the Yeshiva, they didn't have any money. So, it was decided that the Rosh Yeshiva should travel to American to try and make some money. He was already in advanced years and really he was not strong enough to take a journey and it wasn't flying, it was on a boat, for six weeks, it took at that time, I think the journey to America took ... it was before the Queen Mary and so on. And he undertook that journey, naturally he was very famous, he was a very great famous personality. And when he came there and a lot of talmidim and so on, they helped him, and they begged

him to stay there to take on, as a Rosh Yeshiva, and they will try and help the Yeshiva. They said no, he was not parting from his talmidim, and also previous to that he was in Telz, which was another Yeshiva, and there, when Grodno was started a Yeshiva and they wanted that he should come because he would be able to build it up and the baal habatim, when they heard that it is suggested, he was the Rav there as well, he suggested to go, they were absolutely crying, they couldn't get over it, and he said on the bima, only the A-mighty is my witness, that I am not going for economic, for financial reasons, I am only going because the gedolim, Reb Chaim Ozer, and the Chofetz Chaim

Tape 2: 56 minutes 41 seconds

tells me that it is very important that he should come to Grodno to build it up as a great Yeshiva. Anyway he went there. And of course then when the war, also I was in Grodno, in that Yeshiva. When the war was about to start and the Russians came into Grodno, and you know, they forbade learning, that was the communists, they didn't ... so you could see that they wouldn't be able to carry on with the Yeshiva, so he said that they should ... Vilna was then on the Lithuania I believe, so they all ran to Vilna, and he was, he said, I can't go anymore, I am too old. You can imagine his feelings that he had to part from the Yeshiva, and then it was only about four weeks and he collapsed and ...

RL: Now this film is about to end ... so we will just stop there.

TAPE 3

RL: This is the interview with Rabbi Cofnas and it is tape 3.

Now you have been talking about, first of all the Chofetz Chaim, and I believe you have got a picture of the Chofetz Chaim here, on the front of the book. If you could just hold the book up for us to see a picture of him, and I know you had said that your grandfather used to wear a hat, you say it was very similar to the one that the Chofetz Chaim was actually wearing in that picture. Now we have got a better idea of what that hat looked like. And now if you can show us also the house that the Chofetz Chaim lived in, which is inside the book, if you can find the page, and you say that the Chofetz Chaim is actually in that picture as well, isn't he, the gentleman ...

JC: Yes, by the ... opposite the door, the Chofetz Chaim and some sons and some of his family are around.

RL: Okay. And lastly ... that's fine ... you were talking about the Grodno Yeshiva and the Rabbi ...

JC: Shimon Shkop ...

RL: Shimon Shkop ... if we can see a photo of him on the front of the next book.

Ok thanks ... lovely ... thank you.

You said that Rabbi Shkop had another name as well ...

JC: Reb Shimon Shkop, no Reb Shimon Breinsker, they used to ... that is the name of the town that he was the Rav.

RL: Right.

Tape 3: 2 minutes 15 seconds

Cameraman: Just stop there Ros ...

RL: Did you say you wanted to go back?

JC: That is a personal thing, that when I came over, I came in January, by the following year the war broke out already, it was after September, I wanted to travel to visit my brother, who was in Ireland, Londonderry. When I came over I had a visa for six months, I was given a ... and on my way ... I travelled to Ireland, and on my way back, which was already during the war, this was probably in December, November/December, on my way back to England I was interviewed, you know they have to check your passport and since I was a foreigner, I was an alien, so they stamped my passport, they cancelled my six months visa for a visit, and as soon ... and that's it. Naturally I was terribly upset, I didn't know what, what I will do. First I was allowed into England, I had no problems, but I was worried I thought that I will have to go back, I didn't know what the position is. So, then we contacted a friend of mine, actually of the Shul, who was very ... he worked with the police in various things, he was their contact with the Yeshiva and with the Shul, so he went to the alien's office and he said that they cancelled my six month visa, and they explained that I shouldn't worry, in any case during the war they won't be able to send me back, and everything will be all right and I will be allowed to stay, because then I applied afterwards, when it was possible I applied for naturalisation, so all the fear was over, but it was a very unpleasant experience at the time, thinking that I will have to be sent back to Poland.

RL: Now, is there anything else that you wanted to tell me about Poland, before we come properly into England.

JC: No, I think we have more or less covered the Yeshiva ...

RL: Was Grodno the last Yeshiva that you went to ...

JC: No, no, no ...

RL: Where did you go after that?

JC: There ... after ... while, when I already, when my brother told me that there is a consent from the executive that they would apply for me to come over as a Rabbi, as I

knew, and the papers were getting ready. So I had to get ready for coming to England, first of all I wanted to graduate to have a semicha before I go. So in Yeshiva itself, it is different now to Yeshiva, but in Poland they never allowed any bochur, anyone, to learn, the Code of Jewish Law in order to get semicha, that is the final, you know, because it seems that if they considered it as if you are looking for a profession, and the idea of the Yeshiva is to sit and learn, lishmo, because it is a mitzvah to learn and not to think of any professional arrangements.

Tape 3: 6 minutes 51 seconds

So I, because of that, I heard that in Brisk, the Dayan Malin, one of the Dayonim in Brisk, which is a very famous place, the Brisker Rav is famous all over. So, that he is starting a Kollel for hora'ah for special learning to be qualified and to get semicha. So myself and a chaver of mine, we travelled to Brisk and in fact there were ten of us and we learned in a Beis Hamidrash and we learned and also three of the sons of the Dayan also learned with us and we were there apart from, for over, over a year, nearly a year and a half or son on. And in order to get semicha. Of course we were examined by ... there was a very famous Dayan in Brisk, Reb Simcha Zelig, who was the head Dayan of Brisk and it was really a great honour that he should consent to give us his semicha. So we were examined by him and we got semicha, and then I came back to Grodno and got ready to travel, to prepare to travel to England. So on the way, not on the way to England, but on the way, in the preparations, so I went to Vilna first, to learn to become a mohel, because I would have thought it would be very useful for England. As it turned out it was a wonderful opportunity for me and it helped me a lot in Birmingham, when I was able, and I was the only mohel and I was very well known as the ... people were very satisfied. In fact I am still on the executive of the Initiation Society in London. I am a member of the executive even now, even though I don't practice any more, and this helps me a great lot in creating the atmosphere which was necessary for me as a Rabbi in Birmingham.

RL: Who did you learn under for, to become a mohel? Who taught you?

JC: Oh, it was at the time Dr Snowman. The Initiation Society they always have a proper medical man to be head of the Initiation Society. Of course we are allowed to, even if we are not a doctor, you were qualified to do the bris milah, but the head of the Initiation Society was always, as a tradition, was always a doctor. In my time it was Dr Snowman who was the medical officer.

RL: I am thinking of when you learnt in Vilna, who taught you there?

JC: In Vilna. In Vilna it was the mohel from the ... from Vilna, from town, he was a very famous mohel and I only, you know I practiced with him, for a little bit of time, and even, he told me when he gave me the certificate, he told me to go into Reb Chaim Ozer, who was the Vilna Gaon, the world famous Reb Chaim Ozer, and he also confirmed, he wrote on the certificate about bris milah for me.

RL: What was the mohel's name? The mohel who taught you, what was his name?

JC: The name was Peckler, I have got a photo somewhere of him.

RL: When you were learning in Yeshiva, how long was the day? What hours did you learn?

Tape 3: 11 minutes 49 seconds

JC: In the yeshiva, first of all one has to come to daven. That is, that is the first thing, the first duty, it used to be say 8 o'clock davening, davening itself took about an hour, because in Yeshiva we don't daven quickly, we daven, you take your time, to mechaven sein. Then after davening for a quarter of an hour it is the duty of every boy or every bochur to have a few together to learn the dinim for a short while, for a quarter of an hour. Then we used to have breakfast time. I think, I don't remember exactly, I think the seder, the started, about half past nine, nine thirty, until one o'clock, one o'clock was mincha, of course the whole time apart from learning from the Gomorrah, there was a lot of time taken up with discussions, so you feel, you know, you don't feel that you are sitting in one place and so on. You are about, and, that was, and then there was in Radin, there was a special arrangement, for physical exercise and so on, that the Yeshiva, immediately after mincha, mincha was one o'clock, after mincha, the whole Yeshiva, 350 bochurim and the Rosh Yeshiva used to go for a long walk into the fields in Radin. Of course, we would spend about half an hour, three quarters of an hour, and I remember when I travelled to Radin, when we came about that time, we could see from afar, all over the Yeshivaleit were all over, around the town, because the town itself was very small, it was all countryside and fields, so this was a very good arrangement. And even the Rosh Yeshiva said, and I remember Reb Moshe, Glandinsky, Reb Naftoli, and all the rest used to go, and when they go, they also shmoozed in learning and so on. They used the time also for religious, for learning, but at the same time it was a great help for the health of the Yeshivaleit. Then in the afternoon there was another seder, I think about two o'clock, it must have been after two, I don't remember the times now, and then we used to learn until about, near seven, and then there was ma'ariv, and a lot of bochurim used to come back at ten o'clock, again for study, a lot of bochurim used to even stay until the very early hours of the morning, and the Chofetz Chaim himself objected for people to be up later than 12 o'clock, because he was very practical, he said "We never gain from being up very late, because the next morning, first of all they are very tired, they didn't have a good sleep, and also in addition to being tired they are wasting more time than what they are gaining by being up." And I was told that in the earlier years when the Chofetz Chaim was more healthy and vigorous that at 12 o'clock he used to come into the Yeshiva and all the lights had to be put out, you know, to know that they had to go to sleep. That is more or less the seder of the Yeshiva, except some used to stay up on Thursday night, you know to go over what we have learned during the week and so on, Thursday night they used to stay over until the early hours of the morning, and that was quite acceptable. Then for Friday, Friday was only half a day, and then prepare for Shabbos, and then of course Shabbos. That is the seder of the Yeshiva.

RL: And on Shabbos did you all eat in separate homes?

JC: Yes. On Shabbos we ate ... because in Radin there was no communal place, a communal kitchen for the Yeshiva, the same as in other places, Grodno already had a communal kitchen, but only for dinner, not for breakfast. So in Radin the arrangements were that a few bochurim used to hire a baal habos, they used to eat with a baal habos,

Tape 3:17 minutes 12 seconds

and pay him for it, he used to cook for about ten or twelve bochurim, because there was no communal place for the Yeshiva. In Grodno there was a communal place only for dinner, and in fact the communal kitchen was in town, the Yeshiva was like a Vorstadt, like a village, dividing the village from Grodno, it was the River Niemen, and there was a long very long bridge over it, so we had to go from the Yeshiva, a long way, again it was good exercise, we used to come absolutely frozen in the winter, the cold was ... this was the arrangement we had in Grodno.

RL: So you were just taking me through your preparations before coming to England and how you have got the certificate for practicing as a mohel. What happened after that? That was in Vilna.

JC: Yes.

RL: And after you got that certificate? What happened next?

JC: Eventually, when I came to England, and first of all that ... I found the situation, as far as I was concerned, very, very difficult, because I came away from the Yeshiva, on even ... wherever I was, I was brought up, the whole atmosphere, I was brought up in a religious atmosphere, I had never seen anything different than being true observant, to Hakodosh Boruch Hu and suddenly I came to England, and I found myself, it was near, communities are completely different. I found that a lot of Jewish people are mechalel Shabbos, they don't keep anything, shops are open, which I had never seen before, and it was a tremendous shock to me. And also, when I came over, naturally I didn't know, not a word of English when I came over, and this by itself was a cause for a lot of hardship for me. Financially it was also very difficult, because I didn't earn anything from the Shul yet. I was not ready, although they gave me permission to come over, I was not ready to take an active part in the Shul, so it was only officially that I belonged to the Shul, but in actual fact I didn't receive anything from them, although I used to daven and sometimes help give a shiur, because my brother before used to give shiurim there, sometimes I took over, but then I started getting into it, which was very, very difficult, very difficult, I found it very slow. And I remember my dear sister in law, zichron Ivrocha, she started to teach me English and then the practice of English and so on. It was all so ... if you were not in a high spirit, it gave me cause for not being very happy generally, and it took a long time until I was able to settle down, to learn the language, and then be able to start off with the community. Although in the beginning it was a

small, very small community, but then the war broke out and it was even worse because a lot of people were evacuated during the beginning of the war. My brother, because of the fear of bombing and so on, they moved from the centre or Birmingham, and the Shul was also in the centre, to the outskirts of Birmingham which was in Harbourne, it was about an hour and a half walk to the Shul. So on Shabbos, of course we had to walk a very, very long way. And there were ... this is how I had to get into the situation. Incidentally it reminds me that when there were a lot of soldiers were stationed near Shrewsbury and there was a camp there, in the outside of Shrewsbury and I was asked to come and do a

Tape 3: 22 minutes 45 seconds

bris there, because one of their, I mean the wife, had a baby, so I travelled there, I came about 11 o'clock in the morning, it was about two hours from Birmingham. I came in, the lady was there, the mother was there. So I told her that I am the mohel, I was asked to come and do the bris. "Oh" she said "very nice", so she said "I will be back soon, just a minute." So she went out. I was waiting about, nearly an hour and waiting with the baby. And then she came in. "Have you done it already?" She came back. She said "Have you done it already?" She thought that I would come ... so I said "I can't do the bris on my own. Somebody has to hold the baby, and the father has to be and so on and so on. And anyway, as it happens she said that they don't come back from the camp until about 6 o'clock, or 5 or whatever it is. So the time she told me, and it was still time to do the bris, because you are not allowed to do it at night, it has to be done during the daytime. So, some of the soldiers came, and we did the bris, I managed, and I got on the train and I was coming back to Birmingham. Coming back to Birmingham, in the meantime there was an air raid. [phone rings in the background]

RL: You were telling me about coming back to Birmingham...

JC: So, I was on the way, on the train and there was an air raid, and you heard the planes coming over and so on, it was all blacked out and the train, I believe the train had to stop. It didn't travel, and when it was clear they travelled again. Eventually I came into Birmingham, it was about half past eleven at night ... I was an alien at the time and I wasn't allowed to be out after ten o'clock, so my first thing ... and of course, all the streets were deserted, I came into Snow Hill Station, and I couldn't see anybody in the street, I had to walk myself, it was very frightening. Then I walked to the police station, to tell them what I have been doing, that I am just coming on that train and I am staying in Harbourne which is outside Birmingham, and it is from there another hour to ... and he told me it is quite in order and I can go ahead. On the way there was a lot of ... I heard from afar a lot of bombing from aeroplanes and so on, which was very, very frightening and eventually I arrived at my destination in Harbourne that was some of the experience that I had in Birmingham.

Then I had to start with the community.

RL: Can I just ask you about the war and did you actually witness at close hand any bombing raids?

JC: Well, there were a lot, there was a lot of bombing in Birmingham itself. But naturally, thank God, if you see the bombs, we only heard it and so on, and it was very close around us, but we used to be in shelters and, but of course we used to experience the coming in and it was very, very frightening.

RL: Where did you used to shelter?

Tape 3: 27 minutes 20 seconds

JC: There were special shelters made in order to shelter. Of course if you had a direct hit it was too bad, but generally from splinters and so on it was a protection, you used to protect yourself.

RL: How often did you have to report to the police?

JC: I didn't have to report at all. It was only that there was a curfew that aliens should not be out after ten o'clock, and if they had to be out they had to give a reason or get permission, that is why I went to report myself that I am an alien and I am out. And ...

RL: In terms of rationing and so on, how did you manage?

JC: I must tell you, that everybody complained and so on, and I couldn't understand why people complained from the experience, that I had in life, and also in the Yeshiva, even in the Yeshiva everything was naturally rationed, I mean we couldn't afford anything better, so to me it seemed to me that people are complaining for no reason at all, I couldn't understand it.

RL: Were you still living with your brother?

JC: With my brother. Yes.

RL: Yes. And did you only learn English with your sister in law teaching you?

JC: Yes ... I went to night school for one year, and then I think after 18 months I had already addressed a Bar Mitzvah boy, of course, partly I had it written down word by word and so on, and I started learning ... and feeling more comfortable.

RL: Asides from the Jewish aspect when you came over here, what did you think of England itself, and Birmingham as a place.

JC: As a place, Birmingham itself, as a town, and as a Jewish community, it is a lovely, lovely community, very friendly community, especially if you know how to get along with the people. And I, from nature, I feel that I am very easy to get on with people because I have got a built in nature of whatever happens I will look at the good side of the people instead of accusing them of ... so therefore it was very easy for me, and I must

tell you, that my wife and myself, we were very, very, we were very, very famous ... not famous ... we were very acceptable, we were very known in the community and really very friendly and we couldn't have better than what we did. And this was part of the reason that I didn't move from Birmingham.

I had a lot of opportunities when my brother came to, when he came to America, he wanted me, also to travel to America. I went there and there was a vacancy near Richmond, I can't remember, near, no ... near Washington. Richmond was the name of

Tape 3:-31 minutes 27 seconds

the place, and I was there, and they, well, they were ready to take me on, and they said, are we able to start, next week or the week after? I said "Next week! The week after!" When I went I told my community ... that we have to come back. We have to give notice. Notice, in America as far as you know, you take on a job and finished. But I found that the situation was not for me, a family man, with my brother, he didn't have any children, he had a son in Yeshiva, but otherwise he didn't have a family to care for, and he himself was very, very capable in a lot of ways. But I felt that I couldn't take the responsibility. Because people there, the Rabbis they used to take on for a year, and what happened afterwards? Well we will see after the year. Either they give you a contract or they tell you that it is finished. And as it happened I met the Rabbi there in Richmond, a very, very nice person, and really he was, I was taken up with him, and he said in a couple of month his contract is finished, and he knows that they are interviewing candidates and they hadn't even mentioned it to him. So I said I wouldn't be able to exist under such conditions. I would very ... you have got no confidence, you are unable to lead a community. And this was exactly the problem with that Rabbi, but because he was so good and he was outspoken and so on, so they wanted to get another Rabbi who will not be so outspoken, who will not be so strict. So I said that I cannot, first of all I have to go back, and I have to give notice, and then I thought I will consider it. So they agreed to it, they agreed, and then when I came back, I gave notice. I had a very uneasy feeling about it and I withdrew my notice and I didn't want to go to America. I had also opportunities in London, in London with the Beis Din and so on. But really for that time I was settled very well in Birmingham.

Spiritually there are a lot of problems in a provincial community especially, and things are not the way, I mean comparing Manchester with provincial communities there is a lot of problem of intermarriage, and it is very difficult with communities that marry out, then they have the children, who are, if she is Jewish the children are considered Jewish, but if she is not then the children are not considered ... but even if she is Jewish, and the husband he wants to come to Shul, and he comes. There is always a very uneasy situation, as far as generally, it is concerned, you come to Shul, and some of them who are married out and wanted to try to learn and to see how good they are, they are more anxious than those Jewish people. And it causes a lot of difficulty, they would like to be recognised, and a lot of problems. And this way, even in the community, we had a lot of problems, so other Rabbis, they just say to you, but a blind eye, don't look, but that was not my nature. Because since we had a problem that in the hall, socially there was Jewish

children and non Jewish children and so on, and we can't let it go like that, it is not right, so naturally we had to, in the constitution make it that we cannot allow them to come to mix with the children, and that caused a lot of hardship, because members, I mean if she is a member, and he is not a member, and then she would resign and so on. It caused a lot of problems all the time, and this was a very difficult situation to deal with.

I had once a case, a boy who was at Carmel College, he was being prepared there for Bar Mitzvah, and she booked our hall for the Bar Mitzvah celebration. The Carmel College was in the ... you know, outside Birmingham, and they booked our hall. The letting

Tape 3: 37 minutes 26 seconds

officer happened to be related to that family. So he made himself like a nitvishindik, and he booked the hall for that child. The mother, the grandmother of that child was a convert of the reform, which we do not recognise. It was about three weeks before the Bar Mitzvah, somebody told me, "Rebbe, you know you booked that hall, you know that he is not ...". You know they always come and tell you.

So I said "I didn't know." So I ring up the letting officer, and I said "I didn't know anything about it." So first I had to ring Carmel College "How do you happen to prepare a boy for Bar Mitzvah who is not really Jewish."

"No," he said "It's only school ..."

I had a whole meise with there with the Rabbi there, and then I contacted the Beis Din, and they said they can't do anything, they take it as a school and they don't take any notice. So, I said to the letting officer will you tell Mr and Mrs so and so that the hall cannot be available, we cannot allow the hall ...

So he said "I cannot do that now, we made a contract, we can't ..."

So I said "All right, I will do it."

So I rang up the grandmother and I told her that I believe you have booked the hall but unfortunately according to the conditions we are unable to ...

Oh, within half an hour she came with the invitations and so on and so on. To the house, and you can't do it, I said I am terribly sorry, I will try and get you a non Jewish hall, whatever you want, but you can't do it. Anyway the fact was that she got her solicitor, because we signed the contract, and there was a whole meise. The end was that the Shul paid them a couple of hundred pounds fine for not honouring the contract. Generally people would blame the Rabbi for making such a fuss, and so on ... especially no Shul, especially the executive, wants to pay out money, that is something which they hate, and yet it was accepted in such ... my executive, my baal habatim in a very, very nice way, because they knew that whatever I did, I did honestly and for no politics and so on. And I had many, many other similar situations, which were very, very unpleasant and so on, but you have to ... if they know ... if they are convinced that you do it for, I mean this is how it is, so they accept it. I think that people like to know that you are honest enough and that you are not overlooking things, because otherwise you are criticised.

There were family problems, a lot of family problems with people, and I was ... I mean I could just mention one case, a person who used to come to daven, and he was in the Chevra Kaddisha and so on, everything, marvellous, wonderful. Really he was my right hand, you know, because in the provinces it is difficult to get these people. In

Manchester there is no problem, but in the provinces it is difficult. And his wife came to tell me that something that, something which is not right, and he warned her that “Whatever you do, don’t tell Rabbi Cofnas ... whatever you do ...” And she told me that you know very often he leaves her and he goes ... and I know, you know, somebody who was divorced at the time ... you know, yes she was ... I don’t know ... Anyway I had to speak to him, because when I could see that it is no use going, that he was telling me one that and she was telling me another. So I told her that I have to come and I have to tell him and so on. So I told him that I know what is going on and I was on the way to Israel for a holiday, I said I am going away for a holiday, and in the meantime I am not going to

Tape 3: 42 minutes 40 seconds

give you an Aliyah and I didn’t tell, I didn’t give any reason to the president, I just said that there is some reason that I can’t. So he said, he promised faithfully, that he would do teshuva, and absolutely when I come back everything will be all right. So I said “If you promise that, then I won’t tell him to ... he will carry on and he will call you up” and so on and so on. When I came back I heard from the wife that he is carrying on just the same as before. I told him, I called him and told him, he said that he had tried his best, he is very sorry but he can’t change his ways and so on. So I told him that in this case you cannot, you will not be called up, I don’t want you to be a member of the Chevra Kaddisha and so on, and he was really very, very useful to me, but it had to be done. Eventually he joined another congregation and as it happened they, he, he got married later on, he divorced her and got married later on.

And many other situations similar that you have to deal with, but you have to deal in a nice way, even if you have to tell them things which are not pleasant, but if you, you know you find a way that, you find a way that is not abusive and so on, but eventually it is accepted, the same as we had Shabbos problems in the congregation. Not personal, but in the congregation itself, catering and so on and so on. So, in the end I always ... I was given ... I was always given that I had done right.

RL: You have mentioned your family, but you have not said anything ... How did you meet your wife?

JC: Oh ...

Wife’s voice in background: That is going to take another week ...

JC: Well, my wife, I met her, it was much easier than what they do today.

Wife’s voice in background: Was it?

JC: Yes ... I was in Birmingham, my wife was in Manchester and it was a friend of ours who lived in Manchester who suggested ...

Wife’s voice in background: A shidduch ...

JC: A shidduch, and I came for the weekend and I said it is not worth coming for one, so there was a whole string of arrangements made ... so anyway we met, at a late hour, I think it was about seven o'clock, about sholosh seudas time, because I was busy the whole day, and after a couple of weeks we decided to, you know to get engaged, and I found that, I mean I didn't look any further, and I found my late father in law was a very wonderful person, he was a very wonderful person, he was very ... he was poor, but he was very ... a great man, a lot of ... emes ... the truth, and I really took to the family and to my wife and so on, and Boruch Hashem, we had a very happy life together, my wife helped me a tremendous amount in the Rabbonus, because really she has got a

Tape 3: 47 minutes 6 seconds

tremendous record on her own, what she has done communally in Birmingham. She was the chairman of the friendship club for 25 years, with the lot of involvement with thousands and thousands of pounds and so on, she used to send people on holiday and the house was absolutely like the, with phoning for advice and so on, and Boruch Hashem in this way we brought up our children, of course it was this way was another problem, a difficult problem, with friends and Shabbos they couldn't meet with these people and so on, but Boruch Hashem after all this we managed to bring up the family in a very happy, wonderful atmosphere.

RL: When did you get married?

JC: We got married January 13th.

RL: In what year?

JC: '43, 1943.

RL: And where did you get married?

JC: We got married in what you call the ... here ... it is a McDonalds, do you know there was a hall there?

RL: The Rialto?

JC: What was it?

RL: The Rialto?

JC: No, not The Rialto.

RL: The Higher Broughton ... Higher Broughton Assembly Rooms.

JC: Yes, there. But it was on the same spot. That was where ... and there was Rabbi Feldman, was the Rabbi, at the time he was the Rabbi of Machzikei Hadass. There was

the Rosh Yeshiva, not the last Rosh Yeshiva, his father, was at the Chuppah, and of course it was wartime and everything was reduced according to the situation and ...

RL: What was your wife's maiden name?

JC: Sternberg.

RL: And where was she from?

JC: Manchester.

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RL: From Manchester ...

JC: From Manchester, yes. Wellington Street East, number six. Yes, that is where ...

RL: And what family do you have?

JC: You mean on my ...

RL: No, in terms of children.

JC: Oh yes, yes ...

RL: And when were the born ...

JC: Family, we have, we have, we have one son and two daughters. The son is the oldest and the two daughters.

One is Julia Warshavsky, and he is the headmaster of the ... of the, I keep forgetting the school. He was 26 years in Stamford Hill, he was the headmaster and now he is in Menorah, he was in charge of the Hebrew education, and now he has given it up, he doesn't want any more responsibility, and he is exceptional in chinuch. He is very ... when he retired from the head mistress, from the ... head ... of the school he had six schools apply to him where he should go, and he is well known in education and he is really a very find young man. Very fine. So that is Julia, she is married to him.

And then we have got Sylvia, who is at the moment she is single.

RL: And your son?

JC: My son is the Rabbi, he is the senior Rabbi of Liverpool. He was ... his first position was in Pinner in London and then he was ... then he was ... after Pinner he went to Car ... no not Cardiff, Sunderland, he went to Sunderland, and then from Sunderland he went to Cardiff, and from Cardiff he came to Liverpool. He had offers in Manchester

as well, but he preferred to take Liverpool. He is very, very happy in Liverpool, he has got no, I mean all the, what shall I say, the baal habatim, the executive and so on ... he doesn't have to, he is not like an employee, whatever arrangements he makes it is accepted, but in addition to that he does a tremendous amount of work, he keeps the community going. He has a programme for the whole winter, every month, you know, a melave malka or this and that and so on, guest speakers and chazonim and concerts and so on, and shiurim, and they have got Seed every fortnight, for men and for women, and really he has, he is very, very busy, catering under his hashgocha, the caterers are accepted in Manchester, they cater in Manchester under his supervision, of course with the consent of the Manchester Beis Din. So he is enjoying a very wonderful situation of the Rabbinics. And naturally there is sometimes it is not all holiday, sometimes you get a

Tape 3: 53 minutes 30 seconds

problems to deal with and so on, but Boruch Hashem, I know a lot of congregations and you have to look far and far wide to find a, I mean due to himself as well, to find such a situation. In spite of that he had times, he had ... he closed down one butcher, he wasn't happy. I don't mean not happy, he found something which was serious and everything was settled very nicely and so on, so really we are very, very proud, he is a wonderful son. He comes very often with his whole family.

RL: Who did he marry?

JC: He married the daughter of Reb Moshe Schwab. Reb Moshe was the mashgiach of the Gateshead Yeshiva, his daughter, and she is very good, very good. And he has got four children. One ... the oldest one is in Canada and he does a lot of kiruv work, he is very, very successful, and the only thing is he is not married yet, he is still picking and choosing. The next one is in Eretz Yisroel, he has got four children and he himself is very, very exceptional, an exceptional young man, he learns well and is honest and frum, and very dedicated, beautiful. And the children are marvellous, and he married his father in law has got a Kollel, his grandfather by marriage is Rabbi Schneider, who is a world famous ... and so on ... he has got a daughter here as well, Miriam ... and he is the administrator in Sharei Torah.

RL: What is the name?

JC: The name is Cohen. He learned in Yeshiva in Gateshead, he has got an LLB and he is a very capable young man, very capable.

RL: And she married him ... who was it who married him?

JC: Miriam.

RL: Miriam. And do they have family?

JC: Yes, they have four children now, lovely children, kneine hora, and the youngest one of my son, Gila, she got married before Pesach last year, she has got a baby and she teaches, she is a lovely girl, she is very artistic, and the boy, he is a very, very fine young man, we are really proud and happy with him.

RL: Who is he?

JC: His name is Katanka, and his grandfather was a chazzan in Liverpool. Grandfather, his father lives in London and he occupies a position, and he is a very, very fine friendly wonderful ... Boruch Hashem ...

RL: Where did your son study to become a Rabbi?

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JC: My son, first he studied in London, Yeshiva Chayei Olam. He studied there, and also, and afterwards, he went to Gateshead, he was in Gateshead, and then he was married ... he was four or five years in Gateshead.

RL: Did he get his semicha from Gateshead?

JC: Yes ... yes ...

RL: I think this film is about to end so we will just stop here.

TAPE 4

RL: This is the interview with Rabbi Cofnas and it is tape 4.

Can I just go back a little bit because it just occurred to me that during the early months of the war you were getting letters from chaverim in Vilna, and can you just tell me a little bit about those letters and what you were hearing at that point.

JC: Yes. At that time, at the beginning when they ran away from Grodno, it was not only the Grodno Yeshiva that went to Vilna, but practically all the Yeshivas, Mir and Kletzk and from all over they all went to Vilna, because they thought that at the moment, at that time, it was on the ... no, it was still under Poland, it was still under Poland, yes ... and Poland was, there was an alliance between England and Poland, they were running away from the Russians, and also from the Nazis, from both. So they thought at the time, that Vilna is the most safe place for the time being. So therefore they were able to write, Poland was a friendly country to England. It is described that there were about, over 3,000 Yeshivaleit in Vilna, the suffering that they had gone through was tremendous because there was no room where to be. There was no food, there was no shelter, they had nothing, nothing at all. And they went through a very, very difficult time. But in spite of that they were not there just as individual but they were together as a Yeshiva, and the first problem, the first problem was that a Yeshiva has to have a Rosh Yeshiva.

Because without a Rosh Yeshiva there is no-one to keep them all together, that is the only, the only person, that can unite, can unite the whole Yeshiva, and can advise them what to do, to advise them what to do and what not to do and so on. And in addition to that he wanted to hear the Daas Torah, the opinion on the Torah on a certain circumstances what they are to do and what they are not to do. For instance there were times when they had to be mechalel Shabbos, in order to hide themselves and so on, all this they had to, they wouldn't do, because they want to run away, they wanted to do it according to halocha, according to din, so they were, the mashgiach at the time, I believe he was Reb Shlomo Harkavi, he was the mashgiach in Grodno and he was the mashgiach as well in Vilna, the question was who should be chosen as the Rosh Yeshiva in the place of Reb Shimon. Reb Shimon was one of the greatest Roshei Yeshivas in Poland. So Reb Chaim Ozer who has really, who was really the great authority, and Reb Chaim Ozer, suggested that there was the Lomza Rav, Shatzkes was his name, and at that time he..

Tape 4: 4 minutes 29 seconds

... earlier ... he was a talmid of Reb Shimon, so Reb Chaim Ozer suggested that he should take the place. The chaverim wrote to me, that when he came, and when he had to give the first shiur, so he came and he said "How can I stand in the place of my great Rebbe, Reb Shimon, to take his place." And he was so great, he was so learned, and he was, he was full of Torah and chochma and he said how can he allow himself, but he has to fulfil the wishes of the Gedolei Hatorah, Reb Chaim Ozer was one of them, and the other Gedolei Hatorah, and he started to give his shiur. And it was a tremendous impression, everybody cried and so on, to know that Reb Shimon was not with them, I don't know, I don't know whether he was already, I think he was already nifta, and there is a different story about his ... about the time of the levaya, so this is how they were there for some time. And then until the Nazis were coming nearer and it became dangerous to be in Vilna. But during the time, they were sleeping in one place and another in order to avoid being caught, and no food and no shelter and no ... just like, until, I don't know the exact programme, the way they went to Shanghai and so on, on ... in order to be rescued, but this is as far as I know.

RL: How many letters did you receive?

JC: I had two letters from my friends and as a matter of fact I have got a copy of them, and just ... just so ...

RL: Did you hear anything from your father at this time?

JC: I didn't hear anything from my father, you know after ... I heard from him when I came up to the war, from then I didn't hear anything. I only know that we wrote to the Red Cross and we said that they are not there any more. I did hear from a relation of ours, that my sister, she was in Vilna at a time, but until my older brother, he used to send her something that was able to exist and so on. And then we lost contact, but I believe that she was in Vilna as well.

RL: You mentioned that your father remarried ...

JC: Yes ...

RL: Who did he remarry?

JC: Yes, my father, it was after, I think it was a year and a half, nearly two years, I remember he asked me, he said you can see the situation and there is a suggestion, should he marry or not, he didn't want to do it. So I told him that definitely, he couldn't look after himself, he had to have somebody to look after himself. And he married, and unfortunately she only lived about 18 months, she had cancer and she went away very ... and then he married again, another one, but she was ... the first one had children, not with her, she only had a girl with her, but it was very, very, very sudden that she passed away. And then there were suggestions about somebody else, a very person,

Tape 4: 9 minutes 24 seconds

very frum and so on, and he married her, and there was only ... I remember an incident, my father, you know there were a lot of poor people who used to travel from town to town, to collect ... they didn't collect money, they collected bread and so on, because food, there was a shortage of food as well, there was a shortage of food for them, especially for them. And Friday night, my father, when he was in Shul, he used to come with kachavas [?], you know a lot of, twenty, fifteen and so on. So in Shul on a Friday night he used to arrange baal habatim, that they should take some orachim with them home. And he always used to be the last one to leave, and if anybody was left he would take them home. My mother, Oleh Hashalom, that was her life, she wouldn't ... but the second ... she was very ... she used to get very upset, excited and so on, she didn't feel that she could cope with it, he used to come with ten people and so on, and there was not enough to ... and sometimes we used to finish whatever it is, Friday night for Shabbos, and so on and so on. So I remember the father used to say to me, if he had quite a few people, he used to say "Yerachmiel, you go first, and tell her that I am coming with a lot of orchim", so by the time I will come, she was ober kochen. He used to do it ... this is how it was. He was very kind and very hospitable and so on.

RL: Who was his second wife? What was her name?

JC: I don't remember now.

RL: And the third wife?

JC: Only ... the first was my mother ... you call it the third ... yes ... it was somebody we knew from the family, she was not far away, I don't remember her name.

RL: Did she have a family of her own?

JC: I don't think she ... she didn't have any children, the second one had children and we used to be in contact with them, even after she was nifta.

RL: Did the third wife? Was she still alive when war broke out?

JC: Yes, yes, I left and she was still alive. And I only had one letter from a friend of mine, that when the Russians were in, they came into Ostryn, although he was a religious man, and they didn't like people of religion, and they wrote to me that they respected him very, very much, and they used to take over the house for soldiers to ... and they could either stay out or whatever they could, they could, whatever they could, they looked after him. That is all I heard from my father.

RL: And then back in Birmingham, coming back to Birmingham now. Was there just one orthodox Shul in Birmingham?

Tape 4: 13 minutes 21 seconds

JC: No, in Birmingham there were three. There were three Shuls, one was anglicised, you know but they were still under the Chief Rabbi, that was Singers Hill. There was the Central Shul, and there was the New Synagogue where I was, there were three altogether. In addition there was a reform Shul and strange enough we used to work together for the community and in fact theI was more, we were more together with the Rabbi of the Central Shul, he was unfortunately was retired and he didn't live for very long after his retirement. In fact his Rebbetzin passed away two weeks ago, she was here in Beenstock House for a short while and then ...

RL: Who was the Rabbi of the Central Shul?

JC: It was Rabbi Singer. I don't know whether you have heard of him. He was ... now what was her name, she writes a lot, the wife of oh my memory. No I don't remember. She has got a daughter in Gateshead. Dansky, the name is Dansky, Miriam Dansky, do you know her?

RL: Yes ... yes ...

JC: Well it was her parents and his mother, her mother died two weeks ago. She was here for a short while in Beenstock House.

RL: When you had the children, which schools did they attend?

JC: Well, in Birmingham there was one Jewish school, but unfortunately, although it was the, although it was under the Hebrew congregation, the fact was that it was state approved, you see, and therefore if the school was not filled they had to take in non Jewish children, and in fact, all our children all went to the school, but at that time it was only about maybe 20% maybe 10% not Jewish, but lately the community has declined and also a lot of people, a lot of people who could afford and so on used to send them to

private school, so until it came a situation that the non Jewish people were a majority and they used to get all the prizes for Hebrew, for religion and so on, the schwartzes and so on, and the situation was very, very difficult. It is now the same, still the same, so that is the way, it was very, very difficult educationally, so because of that we tried to take away the children as early as ... until we found an alternative. My son, he left Birmingham, of course he was not in a school, he was in a public school, but he left for Chayei Olam when he got, and he had to work for his O levels and so on when he was in London, privately ...

RL: He went to school in London did he?

JC: No, no ... he went to the Yeshiva, but he wanted to do his O levels and A levels, he did it outside the school.

RL: When did he leave? How old was he when he left Birmingham?

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JC: Well, he was about fifteen and a half, sixteen. Yes. He was in London.

RL: And what about your daughters?

JC: Sylvia, they were in Birmingham. Julia left, she was head girl in a ... in Queensbridge, a big school, it was a non Jewish school ... after a while, because the Jewish school was only until 11, so she was in Queensbridge Secondary. And Sylvia also went to Swansea to another non Jewish school afterwards.

RL: And after they left school, what did they do?

JC: After they left school Sylvia was tied up with Bnei Akiva and she went to Israel, and she was in Lavi, Kibbutz Lavi and so on. And Julia didn't go anywhere, she, Julia ... I don't remember now, yes, it was ... no I think Julia was at home. She was in Queensbridge and she got her A levels there.

RL: And what ... you mentioned just now Bnei Akiva, I was going to ask you what youth groups they belong to?

JC: Well, at that time it was only Bnei Akiva at that time. Julia and Sylvia, they both belonged to Bnei Akiva, it was nothing, there was no alternative. When I came over originally I ... I didn't belong to mizrachi at all. But I did, I myself organised the young mizrachi, I called it, because they were, that was the only opportunity, the only alternative that we could have in Birmingham.

RL: Did Lionel belong to ... ?

JC: He was away from home from 15. He was in Yeshiva and then he started teaching in London and then he was in Chayei Olam, in Yeshiva. Later on he went to Gateshead.

RL: Did the children attend cheder in Birmingham.

JC: Yes, there was a cheder, there was a communal cheder in the Central. I was teaching there as well. And naturally it didn't, it was not possible to learn with them as far, the same as they did in Manchester, because it was only an hour or so in the evening, which was on my time, it was five times a week, but we learned whatever we could we learned Chumash but then it went down to Sunday ... and I think they only have Sunday there now. It is very difficult now, the education ...

RL: When did you first visit Israel?

JC: Well, we, I don't know. Once ... once we won a raffle, strangely enough we were going to a meeting, it was not the first time, it was the night, there was a shaliach

Tape 4: 22 minutes 13 seconds

who came to speak, from the Ministry of ... Ministry of, you know for, to ... what do you call it, to come to Israel.

RL: Aliyah ...

JC: Not exactly Aliyah ... not absorption, tourism, yes Ministry of Tourism. So he came to speak about going to Israel and tours and so on, and on the invitation it said if you bring the invitation there would be raffle at the end. So we were going to the meeting, and my wife said you forgot to take the invitation. And I said "Oh, its nothing." No she insists I went to take the ticket and then at the end of the meeting, he said, it was in Cardiff, yes it was in Cardiff and we asked, and the first ten tickets they would put in a raffle in London. Then he said strangely enough in Cardiff we asked the Rebbetzin, in Cardiff, to draw tickets, and she drew her own ticket. So they asked my wife to do it, he said "I hope you will not draw your own ticket." It was a joke. As it happened she did, and then all went to London and all the tickets that were drew from all the meetings, so we won a trip, a free trip, with hotels. The Kings Hotel for three days, in Tel Aviv, in Herzliya and so on ... that was what we won, it was very, very interesting.

RL: You said that wasn't your first ...

JC: No, I don't think, it was not our first visit, but we went several times, but lately before I retired, the last five years, I used to, I used to go to Israel twice a year, because the community, when I was already thinking of retirement, and I didn't know whether to retire in Israel or elsewhere. At the beginning I wanted to retire in Israel. So they ... my community, they didn't want me to go yet. They always thought that if I go away the community will, you know ... will collapse and so on. It was not a very big community so they offer, so they gave me eight weeks holiday, in four weeks at a time with pay,

providing I stay on. So, for the last five years we were eight weeks in Israel, they are, for the last five years. But then we even brought a flat, we had a flat in Israel, and we intended to settle, as it happens it turned out that it was not practical as my wife couldn't take the heat and it was too much for her and then we came back and we could see that we wouldn't be able to settle in Israel, so I thought the next year we will settle in Manchester, so we made arrangements to come to Manchester and we are very pleased that we have done so. In actual fact now looking back I don't think we would be able to manage, because I was thinking at that time, it was about £20 a week, £25 a week, something like that, and it was absolutely impossible to exist on that. So Boruch Hashem we managed and we came to Manchester and settled ourselves and are very, very happy, I am very happy indeed. We do a lot of learning and study and are occupied all the time, as far as ... I have never been as busy as I am now.

RL: How long have you been in Manchester?

JC: Now it is 16 years. We came in '89, '89 we came.

Tape 4: 27 minutes 4 seconds

RL: What opportunities were there for learning in Birmingham?

JC: Well, we, you know ... strangely enough, there are the arrangements of Seed, you know which is all over. Birmingham was the first place, it was somebody, a Rabbi, I forget his name, my memory is ... for names is ... He rang me up and he said that in America, this is an American idea, in America we have like a travelling Yeshiva for instance, and you know when it comes a holiday a few Yeshivaleit come with a leader, with ... and they learn and they also invite baal habatim to learn and so on, so he asked Reb Avraham Gurwicz who could he contact in England. Reb Avraham said he should ring me, and when I heard about it I said it's a deal, you are coming. So myself and Rabbi Singer we arranged, we took over Hillel House and they used to eat in our Shul, you know we had a new hall, and learn in the central, and we arranged with a car dealer, that he gave a ... altogether there came about thirteen/fifteen with a ... what is her name ... Yossi ... the leader or Seed. Anyway, I have forgotten. He came with them and we arranged with a car dealer that he gave them four or six cars, after he used to learn in the morning, and then they had about four hours free, and then there was the insurance with everything, and they had the time of their lives and so on. And they are sleeping in Hillel House and they are eating everything we have ordered from Frohweins and so on, and on Shabbos we used to have our Oneg Shabbos, it was absolutely wonderful. So it was going on like this ... and the baal habatim used to learn, for six years he used to bring from London and so on, to teach them. But he couldn't carry on any more, he could see that there was no possibility, it didn't catch on. So we had to leave it. But we were the very first who started with Seed.

RL: What organisations did you belong to?

JC: Organisations, there was no official Mizrachi. You know as the Rabbi you belong to everything, I mean that is the ... whatever is going, as far as the congregation is concerned. And of course we were very occupied with the congregation itself, there were no ... sometimes there is a Mizrachi speaker, you supported it, but whatever, the Yeshiva and so on.

RL: But I mean in terms of like ... you mentioned that your wife was busy with the Chevra Kaddisha and the Friendship. That was your wife ...

JC: Yes ... yes ...

RL: Was there anything else that ...?

JC: Yes, yes ... I am on the Chevra Kaddisha ... we had to have a Beis Hakvoros, our Shul, there were two one Singers Hill, Central and Singers Hill were together and we had one, as it happened the baal habatim bought it originally, they bought it, a tremendous amount of ground for £500, it is absolutely, it is worth a lot of money now, and there was a contract between our congregation and Singers Hill, that any non member had to be

Tape 4: 31 minutes 36 seconds

buried on our cemetery, and if they wanted, because they have got relations there, they had to pay a fee to us. And then there were non members, poor people who couldn't afford anything, I dealt with it, and there were a lot of ... fortunately we were getting on very well with the treasurer, there were certain cases we couldn't charge at all. And you know, some Baal Habatim when it comes with money, they are very, it can be very hard with money, they could be very nasty. But we were very, very fair and I dealt with it, which is again, something, if you do a favour to people and so on they never forget it, absolutely years later, they remember you helped us and so on and so on. I was in that situation, you know I had the full authority, because I used to get on very well with them, and I told the treasurer "Do you mind can I ...?"

"Yes, I will leave it to you." And so on.

So it was very, very good, I had a lot of pleasure of being able to help people and so on and being able to help people.

RL: What about the supervision of kashrus in Birmingham?

JC: That is ... the supervision of Kashrus was a difficult one. Especially as we had one butcher which we, I used to have a lot of trouble with him. I knew him and he knew me, so we were in charge of the kashrus. If I used to come in to see he used to say "Hello Rabbi" because he wanted the people in the back, to know, "Hello Rabbi." I knew him well. And we had a lot of problems with him, a lot of problems. Several times I practically caught him handed, you know, red handed. I remember I came once, it was a Friday, winter time, when Shabbos was coming in about 4 o'clock, 5 o'clock, and I suspected him of everything, he couldn't, he was not reliable at all, and I could see, I came in to have a look, and see the way it is laid, the barrels and this and that, which I

thought that what is he going to do, when he pickled the meat he is going to put in the ... and, so I said "What are you busy with?"

"Oh" he said "We are going to kosher all the meat and so on, because ..."

"Oh" I said "very nice."

I said "Why did you leave so late, it is so late"

"Oh, we were busy", and so on and so on.

Very nice, and I went away. I came half an hour later ... so he said he is going to kosher it, you know to kosher it, it has to be in the water for half an hour, and then you have to salt it for an hour. I went away, I came about half an hour later. The shop was locked. And next door was a grocery shop, you know. I said "Tony ... where is he?"

"Oh Tony is here."

So I said "Have you locked up already? Let me have a look at what is going on."

"Oh yes, Rabbi, we have got everything in the water and I am going to salt it."

I have a look and it was in the fridge. I tasted the water it was salty. I said ... you put it in ... and if I remember I rang Dayan Krausz and so on. Several times he was practically, but unfortunately the board itself, the shechita board, they were lacking, you couldn't get them to be strong enough and so on. And they were the baal habatim, they would always give him another chance and so on, and this was very, very problematic, very problematic, we used to arrange, because of the situation that he, even the mincer we had

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it under seal, he wasn't allowed to, but a person who is not reliable, it is very difficult to deal with, we had a lot of problems with him, a lot of problems.

RL: Coming on to how you felt ... how do you feel towards England in terms of identity ... where do you stand?

JC: Towards the country itself? Well, I think it is a malchus chessed, I mean, you can see the amount of money that is being given to the Yeshivas, not the Yeshivas, but to the Kollel jungerleit people are helped and they are able to sit and learn, only because of the help they get from the government. And it is really a malchus chessed, it is wonderful, wonderful. And generally, to be so free, the way we are here. Boruch Hashem, we have to thank God for every minute, you don't get it anywhere, especially coming from Poland and everything, it was so restricted and everything was so ... without any difficulty, if you had to get a paper signed you had to go to fifty officers and this and that and it was absolutely ridiculous. Here, I mean it is a mechaya, it is wonderful, wonderful, we should be able to carry on and see that the golus is ended and the situation of the, of klal Yisroel, things which are happening today it is, it is unbelievable. I mean in America and in Israel and all over the world, we must believe that it is really the time of the complete redemption, because the world cannot, it cannot carry on in the circumstances that we live today., and the tragedies that we hear today, it has never happened, I mean personal tragedies in the community and so on, with the Yeshivaleit and we heard all sorts of things, certainly in Eretz Yisroel. How long can it go on? We are in England, we have to believe that Hakodosh Boruch Hu can bring an end to the tzoras, because Klal Yisroel, the people of Israel, we have suffered enough for thousands of years and it is

really time that we should be redeemed and we should be in our own Eretz Yisroel and there should be shalom and shalva to be able to lead a life completely dedicated to religion and to the fulfilment of Hashem.

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

JC: How do you mean?

RL: In terms of ... Jewish, British, Polish ...

JC: Well I am British by naturalisation and I am very, very grateful for citizenship. I am Jewish at heart and I am dedicated to Torah and to religion and to serve Hakodosh Boruch Hu to the best of my ability. We have to every one, we have to try to...learn Torah, Yiras Shmayim, and that is the solution for the whole world. The whole world was created only Bereishis Bora, Hakodosh Boruch Hu created the world only for the purpose of the Torah. There is a wonderful word that the Chofetz Chaim says, he says if a person makes a business, if you make a business, so if you intend to take out of this business, say £1,000 a month, so you will invest £10,000, £50,000 and so on. So what happens if you invest millions and billions and so on, so I

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suppose you expect to get a tremendous profit, otherwise it is not worth it. Hakodosh Boruch Hu created the whole universe, all human beings, and everything with it to serve us, everything is only for the service of human beings, and the human beings is to serve Hakodosh Boruch Hu, so we can't imagine ... what for? And the Chazal say that the world was created because of the Torah, so the profit which we have to get out from this, from the whole universe, the whole, from the whole existence is the purposes, is the purposes of the Torah. So you can imagine that all this vast universe and creation and so on, is only a purpose for the fulfilment of the Torah. So we can imagine how great is the plan of the Torah itself, it is tremendous, tremendous.

RL: Coming back to this country. Have you ever experienced any anti-Semitism here?

JC: Really, personally, of course you meet nasty people. There are some real nasty people. But otherwise I am not, I was not involved in a situation to be able to feel it. I don't think so.

RL: Have you ever ... belonged to a ... been involved with any refugee organisation or holocaust organisation?

JC: Well, we were only involved at the time when there was a lot of refugees coming over, to try and help them. There were such lovely people coming over. They were nebech broken down, broken down. And in ... they had families who had relations left there, and then when we heard, when the curtain was up and we found out what was going on, on the continent, and so on, so of course, every Jewish person was involved

with it. Hatzollas Nefoshos and so on ... and the miracle, the miracle is to believe, to see, a new Jewish people growing up with a youth of learning, I mean young men and women and, the emunah and bitachon that they used to take, it has not been such a time. In Poland, at the best of time Radin was a very frum place, but the average people, they didn't know much. Nowadays if you talk about the ... the Chofetz Chaim has become so famous, and well know, shmiras haloshon and so on, ordinary people in the street are saying "Loshon Hora, you mustn't say it". It has never been a generation, such as it is today, and therefore I feel that really it is one of the signs that it is really Moshiach zeit because they say that, there is a Chazal, "Ein ben dovid bor eleh bedor shekoola zakai ookoola chaya", Moshiach will only come in a time that the generation will be all guilty or all good. It is impossible for the whole world to be good, it is impossible for the whole world to be weakened, it can be, it says that every person, there will be no half and half, it will be either that you are frum, or you are not. And we see today that people who are frum, it is absolutely wonderful how serious they are about it, you see young people, chosen and Kallah, the way they observe, and the dignity, the way they carry themselves and so on, it is absolutely Moshiach time. There has never been such a time of a great spiritual height that we have today.

RL: In terms of the Holocaust, how did you feel ... how do you feel towards Germany?

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JC: Well, it ... I, I, ... it makes me ... the word of Germany is repulsing and so on. Although they say but they try and so on, it is impossible that a country can produce such wicked people, the way they were. I don't, I don't know. You ... I don't know if they could be forgiven, it is definitely something wrong if a country could produce such wickedness ... I don't know if I am ... if I am naïve and so on, it could possibly happen in other places as well, we don't know. But it was ... it was ... I mean, if I see today a German car, I can't stand it. I mean, it's repulsive.

RL: How do you feel towards Poland?

JC: Poland, they were ... I mean there was no ... I mean there were times in the past, years and years ago, not throughout Chmielnicki's pogroms and so on of course, Hakodosh Boruch Hu has instilled in a person a sense of forgetfulness, because otherwise you couldn't go on, you couldn't exist, the world couldn't carry on. The greatest enemies have to make shalom and so on. But the fact is that for our ... the time of our existence, we knew that they were anti-Semites, so we didn't expect much from them. We didn't expect much from them. Unless when there is an outbreak ... but a goy has to be a goy, a goy has to be anti-Semitic. There is a lot of jealousy as well. I mean, from their point of view, the way they are looking, the ... it is a fact. Chazal say, there is a saying "The sword and the sefer came down from heaven wrapped one with another." In other words, on one side is the sefer, the book, the Torah, for the Klal Yisroel, and on the other side is the scythe, the sword, the alcharbacha tichyeh, unfortunately they are two ways of complete contradicting ways of life and you cannot, you cannot expect that they should love each other. You cannot, we are different cultures, and different ideas, and

then, and then they are not brought up, what ... I don't mean education, of mathematics, science and so on. You need education to educate their heart. Of Lev Tahor, to have a pure heart, a heart of rachmonus, to have mercy, to care for somebody else. Taka ... why should a goy, first of all, Chazal says the food, the neveilos of treifus that the goyim eat, that creates a very, what do you call it, a very ... what is the word ... not ... opposite of kindness, a very brutal way of dealing. This is how ... that is why the Torah prohibited it. If it wouldn't be like that the Torah wouldn't prohibit it. So really it comes naturally to them not to love, and to hate. And then there is a lot of jealousy. The fact is that wherever you are, the Jewish people they manage to, to ... to come to the top. They are always the leaders and so on, because they are, fortunately we are a people with some great qualities, and the world doesn't like it, and that is why it causes a lot of anti-Semitism as well. And you can't, you can't blame for it, of course we are not talking about to annihilate a whole nation and so on ... that is different, but to hate is quite natural I think.

RL: Now to finish off I realise that I didn't ask you about your daughter's family. What children she had?

JC: My daughter has got, Julia has got a son and a daughter, and ... and her daughter has also got two children.

Tape 4: 52 minutes 53 seconds

RL: Where do they live?

JC: They live in London, they live in London. And, Boruch Hashem they are very nice, they have got some, they are ... they were handicapped from birth, but Boruch Hashem they are coping with it very well. I will show you a photo ...

RL: You can't get up at the moment ... nearly ... nearly ...

JC: Yes ...

RL: Ok. Is there anything you feel that we have missed out that you would like to mention?

JC: Erm ... I cannot think of anything else at the moment.

RL: Is there any message, any message that you would like to finish with?

JC: Yes, well I would like to finish with what I said, that we are facing a new year, nearly, we are before Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur, and we are, we had a lot of tragedies in Eretz Yisroel, such a lot of Jewish blood, absolutely spilt, with the ... from the Arabs and so on, and we should only be aware that Hakodosh Boruch Hu himself, Ribbone Shel Olam, meracheim sein he should have mercy upon the Klal Yisroel and indeed to bring geulah shleimah, the complete redemption of the Klal Yisroel.

RL: Thank you.

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JC: This is my grandfather, his name is Yehuda Leib Friedman and this photo was taken in the 1920s.

RL: And the place?

JC: In Manchester.

This is the photo of my parents and it was taken in about 1925 in Poland. My father is called Kalmon Tzofnas, and my mother Basya Ettel.

This is a photo of myself with a friend of mine which was taken in Radin in 1935, in Poland.

RL: Which side are you on as you look at it?

Tape 4: 56 minutes 10 seconds

JC: As I look at it ... I am on the left. Yes.

This is a photo of Reb Boruch Feivelson, one of the Rosh Yeshivas in Radin, and it was taken in 1936, in Radin.

This is a photo of myself and my wife at the wedding which took place in January 1943, January 13th 1943.

RL: And the place?

JC: In Manchester.

This is a photo of my son's Bar Mitzvah, Lionel Cofnas. I am on the right of his side, and a little further is my late brother, Hershel Friedman.

RL: And your daughters/

JC: And in front are the two daughters, Julia Warshavsky and Sylvia Cofnas.

RL: When was this taken?

JC: This photo was taken in 1956, in Birmingham.

This is a photo of my son Lionel Cofnas and his wife, Lisle, with his children, his four children, Dovid Cofnas, Yoel and Miriam and Gila. And it was taken in 1998 in Liverpool.

This is a photo of my daughter Julia Cofnas to Chaim Warshavsky, which was taken on, in 1967 in Birmingham.

The second on the right of this photo is my daughter Sylvia, Shoshanna, and on her right is my wife, taken with some friends in 2005, in Manchester.