

IMPORTANT

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**AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
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:	114

Interviewee Surname:	Prager
Forename:	Norbert
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	11 January 1932
Interviewee POB:	Göttingen, Germany

Date of Interview:	30 January 2006
Location of Interview:	Prestwich, Manchester
Name of Interviewer:	Rosalyn Livshin
Total Duration (HH:MM):	2 hours 25 minutes

REFUGEE VOICES: THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE

INTERVIEW: 114

NAME: NORBERT PRAGER

DATE: 30 JANUARY 2006

LOCATION: PRESTWICH, MANCHESTER

INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minutes 18 seconds

RL: Today I'm interviewing Norbert Prager and the date is Monday the 30th of January 2006. The interview is taking place in Prestwich Manchester and I am Rosalyn Livshin.

RL: What is your name?

NP: Norbert Prager. Norbert Joachim Prager.

RL: And where were you born?

NP: I was born in Göttingen near Hanover.

RL: And when were you born?

NP: 11. 1. 32.

RL: So what does that make you now?

NP: It makes me an old man. [Laughs] What does it make me? 74? 74.

RL: Now if you can tell me first of all about your family background – your parents, grandparents?

NP: Right. My mother was born in Germany - Göttingen. My father was born in Poland – Dobzhyn, and they both lived in Göttingen. What do you want to know?

RL: Well first of all thinking of your father's family, if you can tell me about his parents his brothers, sisters, whatever...

NP: Yes my father had 2 brothers. One lived in Germany and one emigrated to America. He also had a sister. Unfortunately she was...perished in the Holocaust with her family. My mother lived as I say in Göttingen and she was born there. My

grandparents had a shop there selling clothes and also they were selling precious metals as well, yeah.

Tape 1: 2 minutes 44 seconds

RL: Did she have any siblings - any brothers and sisters?

NP: Oh yes, yes. I'll have to count them on my fingers, I haven't the head for it...one, two... 5 brothers and 1 sister.

RL: Did you know your grandparents?

NP: Yes, yes. Not for very long but I did yes.

RL: What are your memories of them?

NP: A man with a beard. My grandmother – a very clever woman, and very versatile. And that's all really I remember of them because as the Nazis took power they were moved to Theresienstadt, but as they were Polish they had to let them go and they went to Palestine.

RL: This was your mother's parents?

NP: My mothers parents, right. My other set of grandfather and grandmother I didn't know. I know nothing about them.

RL: You say your father was born in Poland...

NP: Yes.

RL: When did he come to Germany?

NP: About 19...not precisely, I don't know. I don't know, about 1920 - something around there.

RL: And do you know why he came?

NP: No, not really, no particular reason. He was ... [laughter] courting my mother then, let's put it that way. Yes, and he was quite a clever man and quite versatile. He knew Hebrew and did a lot of writing and other things. And, as I say, he was eventually, no, before, sorry, he was a traveller in wines and spirits. Though really he was supposed to be a teacher, but the reason why he had to travel in wines and spirits is because it was a light job and he was a sugar diabetic, quite, quite severe because the Nazis threatened to throw him out of the train that he was travelling on and through that he contracted diabetes.

Tape 1: 6 minutes 0 second

RL: Do you know anything about his education?

NP: Not really no. He was quite an educated man, yes. But not particularly, no.

RL: What happened during the First World War with your father? Did he serve at all or...?

NP: That I can't tell you, but my grandfather served. Yes, he served. I don't know whether it was in the German army or the Austrian army. But they gave him a medal for some...for some...for digging ditches or whatever it was, I don't know. Anyway, yes, no, as far as my father ... no, I don't think he... I don't think he served.

RL: When did he marry your mother?

NP: In 1925...

RL: And was that in Göttingen?

NP: That was in Göttingen. I might be wrong on the date but I think we should have it down...right.

RL: You said he had 2 brothers, your father...

NP: Yes, yes.

RL: And you said there was something...?

NP: The first brother was in Germany, right. He was... that was my namesake, Norbert. He was hidden during the war, and after the war when we spoke to him he didn't want to relate his experiences, but he was – during the war, hidden, as I say - and after the war went back to Hanover where he was President of the Hanover Community and he used to sort of patch, match and despatch them. And he was quite well recognised and quite well known there. And he...I don't know whether it's Adenauer or one of the Presidents at that particular time, gave him an Iron Cross for services rendered to the Community. And as I say, he didn't speak very much about his ... what happened to him during the war. And the other uncle, Max, he emigrated to America and became a Chazzan in a shul – it escapes me which one it was. I don't know, New Island or something like that. As I say, they were all quite versatile in speaking Yiddish and Hebrew and writing.

Tape 1: 9 minutes 29 seconds

RL: What kind of religious upbringing did they have?

NP: Quite religious. Yes. Formally religious, yes.

RL: You mentioned your mother had quite a few brothers. What happened to them?

NP: Yes, well, my uncle Herman and my uncle Zalli they went to Palestine, right? They went to Palestine. And sorry, my uncle Calli – they all went to Palestine because, as I say, they were all quite Zionist orientated. And my uncle Herman had to come back from Palestine because he was picking oranges in an orange grove and he

contracted some kind of disease which didn't agree with him...some kind of skin disease which didn't agree, so eventually he landed up in London – sorry – in Manchester. My Uncle Zalli had a chicken farm, and my Uncle Calli was some kind of official in Mizrachi Party. Right. My uncle Walter had to escape to Belgium where he took on a job as a biscuit maker. So, when he eventually came to England he was a biscuit maker and then he became a "schmierer", as they say, schmierer, with waterproofs, right. My auntie Clara – Clara Wagner or Clara Mayer, as she was known later on, her married name, came to England. She had to come to England on ...to have a job here. Everybody had to have a job here, you see? And she was a domestic in a family called Snibman as far as I can remember.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 23 seconds

Now, there was quite a story attached to my auntie Clara. Before she came to England they had, the Mizrachi appointed her unofficial collector, or official collector to all the JNF boxes, so she emptied all these boxes. And the Gestapo got wind of this -for some reason I don't know, they got wind of this- and were after her, or the SS were after her to ...they wanted the money, see? And they were searching for Clara. And as it so happened –and I can still remember this now; as it so happened that my... - we were sitting there, it was summer, the window was open and my Auntie came running in and hands this bag, big bag of money, and gives it to my mother and said 'Here. Hide it!' And of course it was all quite flustered and my mother got hold of it and pushed it behind the curtain and my Auntie ran out and half an hour later the SS appeared. They wanted to know where Clara was and Elsie, being the sister, said 'Don't know, I've not seen her.' And so that was our escapade, yes, and quite exciting that was, if you can call it that. Right.

RL: So have we covered all her brothers and sisters?

NP: As far as I know.

RL: Did she have another brother? Was there another brother?

NP: There was. There was another brother that perished in the Holocaust.

RL: And where did they go to live when they got married, your parents? Where about in Göttingen?

NP: I think it was ?? Landstrasse - in a flat.

RL: Is that where you were born?

NP: Yes it was.

RL: So what are your memories of that flat?

NP: Not a great deal to be honest with you, not a great deal. There was a big bedroom. I can't remember very much. However, I can remember a lot of things about happenings in Göttingen. That's another matter, so if you want me to go over that, I can.

Tape 1: 15 minutes 42 seconds

RL: Right, so how long did ... Did they move to another address when you were little, or was that where you lived all the time?

NP: Yes, yes.

RL: That one place?

NP: Yes. One place, yes.

RL: And did you have any brothers and sisters?

NP: No, I've got no brothers or sisters.

RL: An only child.

NP: An only child, yes.

RL: And what is your earliest memory?

NP: I've got quite a lot of memories, yes. As far as I can assess, I was quiet a happy child, right? I was your typical German boy, blue eyes and blond hair. Right. Now, the first memory I have, as far as I know, was now this. Göttingen had a big barracks, a massive big barracks with sentry boxes all over the place, and obviously the Germans used to have these rallies, you see? Göttingen was quite ... I think it was near the Harz Mountains so you could go up into the mountains and it was very nice, beautiful. And there was this rally going on. I think Hitler came. I'm not sure but I think it was more or less Hitler that came. And I ran...left parent's hand and I ran into this tumultuous crowd of people that were going 'Heil Hitler' and I was amongst them going 'Heil Hitler' so I don't know whether I must have been the first Jewish boy to say Heil Hitler, or whatever. Anyway...

Tape 1: 17 minutes 42 seconds

The next ...the next episode I can remember – I mean this really sticks in your mind, as a kid it sticks in your mind, you never forget. It was the Kristallnacht as they call it. And I was woken up by my parents and we hear this smashing and banging and what have you, and we really didn't know much about it until in the morning when, again, I was out on the street there looking ...looking at the places that had been turned over by the Nazis. And it was ... well, one thing that took my particular interest – obviously, being a kid- was pencils and crayons strewn all over the place. And they'd smashed this ... I think it was called Silberklein, that was a stationery. And they'd smashed that in. They obviously...smashed my grandparents' house as well. They threw all the bedding out through the window and made a bonfire there. That I remember. Also, which stuck in my mind, was the Göttingen synagogue or shul where the Nazis –and I saw them do this- attached a rope to this building, they obviously had eye hooks in or whatever, and got a lorry and pulled it down, pulled the wall down. Now this, as I say, this stands in my memory and hasn't left me. Right. Otherwise, I would say, apart from a few things like ... I had a bad foot. I was born with a bad foot and I used to get treatments in the German hospital 'Chirurgische Klinik', as they

used to call it, and eventually they said they won't treat any Jewish ... anybody Jewish. So, that was left and the foot got progressively worse, right.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 37 seconds

Also the schooling I had ...I had no schooling. I went to ...I won't say I didn't have any schooling. I might have had a year or something like that. And again, any Jew going to a school in Germany was banned, and that was my education ...finished with.

RL: For the year that you were in school, how were you treated?

NP: Not bad. Not bad because it hadn't – what can I describe? It hadn't really gone...taken root because they -being a university town- were supposedly supposed to be more civilised, you see. So whether that had anything to do with it ...No, in all honesty, I can't say, as far as I can remember I wasn't called 'dirty Jew' or anything like that. No, it's just that these things – no treatment and no education, so called - and that was that, so far as I can remember.

RL: So how old were you when you had to leave the school?

NP: Seven - round about seven.

RL: And what did you do after that?

Tape 1: 22 minutes 22 seconds

NP: Well, as I say, my father was quite educated so he taught me. And ...that was really that, because being in and out of hospital for quite a long time, that's the only thing I can think about education ... that my father taught me. Because, as I say, we weren't allowed to go to any other school. Even a Jewish school.

RL: I was going to ask if there...

NP: Yes, I think -as far as my memory serves- there might have been a Jewish school. But even that was barred, so everything was barred really. But after that we were going to go to England, because we had permission. Everybody had to have some kind of either job or somebody who could vouch for them in England. So, in 1939 or, I think it was August 1939, or it might have bee a couple of weeks beforehand, we had permission to go to America, see? This was only a transit, England was only a transit. But being so close to the war, which it was very close -I'm not so sure we weren't the last boat out- we landed up at Harwich, and then war broke out, so that that was the end of that. So, we couldn't go to America.

RL: And do you remember the family discussions around what they should do and what should happen? Do you remember that period just before you left?

NP: No, because there were no family discussions, because they were all dispersed. As I say, all my aunties and uncles were all in Palestine or in Belgium or wherever, right.

RL: I was thinking more about your parents, you know, like the preparations and what was going on. Were you aware of any of that?

NP: Not really, no. Only slightly aware –being only a young kid, obviously- that there was a lot of packing going on, and of course you didn't really register what it was. You were all excited. Was I going to England, or America? Fantastic! If you can call it that, yea. So we landed up at Harwich.

Tape 1: 25 minutes 25 seconds

RL: Were you frightened at all in Germany? Did it frighten you or were you not sort of aware too much?

NP: No, it did not frighten me. Quite the reverse. I was quite tough about it for want of a better description. No, I hadn't come across 'dirty Jew', etc. My father had. My mother had. So I'll tell you a bit about my mother. Right, my mother ...as I said my father was thrown out of a train, or threatened to be thrown out, and he contracted sugar diabetes. Now when the Kristallnacht came and they arrested my father, they arrested my grandparents, right. Now, as far as I know, my father was thrown in clink for about 3, 4 days - something like that. I think they had to release him because he was still Polish, you see? He was still Polish or he had a Polish passport. And my mother went up the headquarters of the SS or Nazis and wanted to see a doctor, because my father had to have an injection every day. And again, supposedly they were a bit more educated than some of the other yobbos that had the misfortune to prosecute and persecute the Jews. They...An SS doctor came out and he said to my mother 'If you're telling me lies you schwein –that's what he called her- I will shoot you on the spot.' Anyway he came out and took the injection, gave it to my father in jail. And then he was released. So, there's another escapade, if you can call it that. And...What else would you like to know?

Tape 1: 28 minutes 10 seconds

RL: So he was released from prison?

NP: He was released from prison, yes, because, as I say, he still had a Polish passport, which a few months later they made all the Poles, everybody, stateless. Anybody, I think, as far as I know, anybody who hadn't lived in Poland for 3 months prior became stateless. So he was now stateless, right. So we landed up in Harwich on the 1st of August '39.

RL: Do you remember the journey?

NP: Yes. It was ...as a boy it was quite thrilling. We went on this boat. I could hear all the ... I don't know what kind of a berth we had, but whatever it was, I could hear all the sea lapping away there. Well, for me it was a thrill, right. But before that ... now, I'm not sure from ...we might have landed up before Hamburg or somewhere. I'm not sure about it. We had to take a train to get to wherever we were going and the SS were coming around saying 'Everybody's got to hand their money in. You cannot go out with any money whatsoever.' And coming around they had their revolvers out at the ready and that's ...I can remember that.

RL: Then you arrived in Harwich.

NP: Correct, yes.

RL: And what happened from there?

NP: Right, I arrived in Harwich and was placed in a school in Creasy Street in Manchester.

RL: First you had to get from Harwich ...

NP: Sorry, yes. I arrived in Harwich and came to Manchester. I came to Manchester, I think it was 400 Bury New Road –that's what it was- in a flat belonging to somebody called Sereno, who owned cinemas. I think one of the cinemas was St James's Road Cinema. Let's see if I can remember it right. And from then on we moved to 328 Bury New Road which was near the Rialto, right.

Tape 1: 31 minutes 26 seconds

Now my parents, or anybody by that time being of German descent or whatever, now were classed as an enemy alien, so you had to report to the police. Now, I can remember this 328 Bury New Road as a big, big, massive house. It must have belonged to the gentry. There were upstairs antiques and downstairs kitchen and bells in every room. And it was a huge house, huge house. Now, as I say, as you weren't allowed to have an occupation, my parents then decided that they have this 328 Bury New Road as a boarding house with the permission of the police or the Home Office. So they had this boarding house where eventually the aunties and uncles that came to England stayed there and a few others and other refugee boys that came there stayed at this boarding house.

RL: Do you remember who came? Who was staying there?

NP: There was somebody called, well his name is now Max Clark, but his name was then Max Heintz. You know Max Heintz? And who else was there. There were quite a few others. The names I can't remember. Somebody called ... I don't know he was a furrier. The name just escapes me. Sorry.

RL: How many people in all lived there?

NP: Oh, being a bit young ... I mean I didn't really take any notice, but I would say at the count about 7-10 or something like that. Yeah.

RL: So I mean ... so you arrived the 1st of August and war broke out a month later...

NP: Correct, yes.

Tape 1: 34 minutes 25 seconds

RL: So what are your memories of that first bit just before the outbreak?

NP: Before the outbreak?

RL: Mn-hnn. Have you any particular memories of what you were doing at that point?

NP: No. I can't tell you. No, no.

RL: Do you remember the day war broke out? Do you remember?

NP: Oh, that's famous ...I do. I remember the day war broke out, yes... Not really because it really didn't convey much to me except I went to school in Creasy Street, and from there on I was shipped immediately with one of these tickets that you have on you been written 'Refugee Boy' or whatever it's called, with my name on it. And I was shipped immediately to Fleetwood. Now it must have been near Hanukah because I ...My father or I wrote and I was complaining. Sorry, when I got to Fleetwood I wasn't taken in by Jewish people – family. I was taken in by a Christian family and they were very nice about it and extremely quietly happy to try and serve what I wouldn't say kosher but to keep off whatever, and the only memory I've got of that escapade is that I complained to my father that there's no Hanukah-Licht, or light. However, having said that, they were very nice and I used to be taken punctually every Sunday to Sunday school. I got quite known how to sing hymns and what have you. But they were a very nice family and I must say, they got this –if you can believe that- they got this reward of being so nice and what have you, because their son was on the Ark Royal – the ship, the aircraft carrier, which got torpedoed and went down with -I don't know- about 1,400 people. And one of them, their son, was saved. So I don't know whether you can call it, whether G-d interfered, or as they say in Yiddish, 'mida keneged mida' [Measure for Measure].

Tape 1: 37 minutes 54 seconds

RL: How did you manage with the language?

NP: Well, we'll go back to that. I managed ...I couldn't ... I didn't know. Not a word of English. Not a word. However, as I said before, my leg got progressively worse. And when I was shipped to Blackpool - Fleetwood it got so bad that they had to rush me back to Manchester for an emergency operation. And while I was in hospital, I can't remember but I suddenly picked up English. Yes. And, well, I'm speaking English now, so I don't know - must have been brilliant!

RL: How long were you in hospital for? Were you there a long time?

NP: Yes, I was there 6 months at least and after that I used to have treatments. Time out, time in, and again, straightening, not straightening. They wanted to operate but, as I say, the Germans, when I should have had the operation the Germans said that it wasn't allowed, so that's why it got progressively worse and eventually I had to be rushed back to an emergency operation.

RL: Which hospital were you in?

NP: The Jewish hospital, I don't know what it was called, Memorial Jewish hospital. And that was Blitz time as well. It's I was pretty lucky actually, to be perfectly honest

with you. I think it was about a year or 6 months later that part of the hospital got a direct hit with a bomb and I think nurses were killed and what have you. But anyway, that's where my English picked up for some reason, I couldn't say. I was entered for a scholarship. I was entered for a scholarship and obviously I failed because I wasn't versatile in English. Everything else was all right but the English, no...

Tape 1: 40 minutes 56 seconds

RL: So when you came out of hospital did you go back to Grecian Street School?

NP: No. After that I went to Broughton Modern, Broughton Modern, it was called.

RL: And how did you get on at school with the other children?

NP: Quite...quite good, yes. I wouldn't say...It wasn't too bad. A bit of bullying going on but you sorted that out with fists rather than knives and yeah, it was ok. We had to put on ... were training, and gas mask training, which was –well, we thought it was- a bit of fun, but it really wasn't. Nevertheless you know you had to get the gas mask on very sharpish and evacuate the school and go under the shelter. And, yeah, we got on all right – quite, yeah. I didn't have any problems. It was quite a big school. It was 500 boys and 500 girls or something like that. It was a very modern school, extremely, or very modern building, let's put it that way. And some of the teachers were sadly lacking, well obviously being the war so they brought out some...G-d knows where they brought them out from, but so-called teachers. Then they had some gym teachers that had just come out of the army and commando types, you know. Bend over – bang! What have you. And...very tough, but in the main it was quite a happy childhood, or school days.

RL: Were there other refugees in the school?

Tape 1: 43 minutes 16 seconds

NP: Yes, that's when it really started because ...this is '45, '46. There were a lot of DP's kids that had come out of camps and that, and they were placed in the school and there was a lot of -well you know kids– 'dirty Jew' and all the rest of it, and all that. And one kid in particular had a really, really rough time. Got this kid who called him that and beat the living daylights out of him. But what can you do?

RL: Why do you think that started at that point?

NP: Total ignorance, total ignorance. They didn't know what it was all about. They heard it from the father or from the mother. They heard it from the last generation; they heard it from the next generation. That's how it is. Unfortunate.

RL: So when you arrived in Manchester, what did you think of the place?

NP: What did I think of the place? Compared to where I'd come from it was all grimy – very grimy. I remember my father saying 'My g-d these English people are very, very, very, extremely educated that every dinner time they've got a paper and they're reading the paper!' But what he didn't know was that the paper was like the 1 o'clock

– the race horses. So, no wonder it was quiet. But, as I say, compared with where I'd come from it was very... grimy, very grimy, but not bad. Not bad.

Tape 1: 45 minutes 33 seconds

RL: How did the people compare?

NP: How did the people compare? Quite friendly, most of them, yes. Quite friendly, I mean in England, I'm not talking about Germany. Yes, they were very friendly. They were quite friendly and quite jovial. Obviously you had to get used to a new way of living. That obviously had changed. But I didn't have any trouble or anything like that, no.

RL: Now you mention the Blitz. What are your memories of that?

Tape 1: 46 minutes 30 seconds

NP: Not good. Anybody that's watching a war film and sees these bombers coming over 'bang, bang, bang' and all the rest of it and never been experiencing it ...when you hear the bombs whistling and ... you think 'where is it going to strike next?' Experience was, near the Rialto which was a cinema, near the next block, I don't know exactly where but somewhere around there, there was a factory, although it was Fords' and they were building lorries for the war and the Germans thought 'Right. Good. It's full of lorries there, so we'll have a bash there.' As I say, I was at 328a and when the Blitz started, the big Blitz, we were outside because we were very green, weren't we? and we thought 'fantastic, we'll go outside and see all this banging and searchlights and flames and what have you and bombs falling.' And we saw this parachute, big parachute and we could see it dangling away. And my father said to me 'I don't think we ought to be here.' And this 328 had a big cellar and about half an hour later there was this almighty bang and it was a landmine that had landed in Strangeways prison or round about there and just like decimated the whole blocks and the prison and what have you. So that was pretty frightening. So, as I say, it's all right watching it on television, but when you hear these bombs whistling down or you hear a little like a plop – and you know that the plop means that there's an incendiary bomb has landed in the garden and fighting it there with stirrup pumps...yeah.

Tape 1: 49 minutes 10 seconds

RL: Was that what you had to do?

NP: I didn't but I watched it. I watched every night and they got this bucket of water with a stirrup pump going, pumping up and down. Against a bomb like that it's about as much use as ...as headache. No.

RL: Were any of your windows blown out?

NP: No. We got this tape and we had to tape the windows, every window and it must have been a very, very posh house because it had wooden –how do we call it– wooden shutters. So if a window was blown out it would have prevented it. But no, not really, but all these happenings ... a bit further on I remember all the bombs

missed. All the bombs missed except this big landmine. Yes ... some very unhappy experience about that.

RL: So was Strangeways Gaol itself damaged?

NP: Yes, yes. And the block – there was a block opposite Strangeways Gaol that was just completely flattened. And as I go older, as I got older, and the raids were still continuing, there was ...I used to go when the raids were over collecting shrapnel, collecting big chunks of shrapnel. I must have been stark raving mad but I thought it was fantastic collecting big chunks of shrapnel and went down further New Bury Road probably opposite Horners. Opposite Horners was a little side street and this was Ramsgate Shul. It was '?? Synagogue', or Romanian Shul. And the surrounding area was completely flattened except this shul. I used to think as a kid it was fantastic collecting these shrapnel shell cases and g-d knows what.

Tape 1: 52 minutes 0 second

RL: So besides the boarding house, did your father do anything else at this time?

NP: Yes. As I said, my father was quite severely diabetic. He eventually started a bag manufacturing business. Now all enemy aliens as he was still called, he was an enemy alien, had to have a partner ... an English partner. So he had an English partner and then he started this bag business and the partner's name was Solly, and my father's name was Herman, so they called it Hersol products.

RL: And did they have a place?

NP: Yes, eventually they had a place off Smedley Lane. I don't know exactly where, but ...and then it was ...when I took over it was at 39a Bury New Road which was approximately...at the bottom end of Waterloo Road, near Locket Street.

RL: What did your father know about manufacturing bags?

NP: Absolutely zilch. Absolutely nothing. Both of them didn't know anything. But one sort of, like ... I don't know... got hold of a bag and copied it somehow or another and tried to sell it and sometimes succeeded but at other times, no. But as time progressed one started picking up expertise for want of a better description, but it was quiet hard. It was quite hard.

RL: Who was this Solly?

NP: His name was Zucker, and that's all I care to mention, thank you.

RL: Right. But he was English born?

Tape 1: 55 minutes 5 seconds

NP: Yes.

RL: Did you ...First of all did your father belong to any... did he join a synagogue?

NP: Yes, when we first came, he joined Ramsgate Street and was a member all the time he was here before he passed away.

RL: Have you any idea why he joined that particular shul?

NP: No, but I suppose it's because my Uncle Walter and Uncle Herman who came to Manchester had joined this shul. I don't know why. Well, let's say he didn't join. He went to the shul, yes. I don't know why he chose that because some of the so-called Germans, the real German want to go to Jekkische shuls. No, I don't know but he stayed there quite a while with the Romanian shul.

Tape 1: 56 minutes 34 seconds

RL: And did he join any other organisation? Did he become involved in anything else?

NP: No. He was too ill. He was too ill for that. I went to Bnei Akiva and later on TVA.

RL: How old were you when you joined Bnei Akiva?

NP: I was about 14, 15.

RL: So that was sort of like after the war?

NP: After the war, yes.

RL: What other memories do you have of the war years in Manchester? Was there more bombing?

NP: Oh, there was more bombing, yes. There was quite a lot of bombing and there was a shelter just opposite the Rialto in the wall. That was bombed. A bomb went off in George Street off Leicester Road. That was something of a direct hit there, it was quite bad. But then the raids stopped, you see. The raids stopped, so everybody got complacent -I don't know from when it stopped- and everybody got complacent. And sirens sometimes used to go and nobody took a blind bit of notice. But at this particular time I contracted the measles or mumps or whatever and the siren went and nobody took any notice and that was the start of -we didn't know at that time- that was the start of the Doodlebug. One Doodlebug landed up in Oldham Moor or something like that and gave one big almighty bang and we all ran to the shelter. This was me with my measles or mumps or whatever. And that was the last time more or less, certainly London got it worse or Liverpool, but that was the last memory of being in the war.

RL: Well just stop here because this is about to end.

Tape 1: 59 minutes 39 seconds

End of Tape One

TAPE 2**Tape 2: 0 minute 13 seconds**

This is the interview with Norbert Prager. And it's Tape Two. I was just going to ask you – you know you were talking about the school you were going to. What about Hebrew education?

NP: Right, are we talking about in Manchester?

Well, if you had any in Germany...

NP: No I didn't have any in Germany. I had a Hebrew education in Manchester but as I say it was quite a long period of time when I suffered with my foot so really the education didn't really start till a long time after round about 1944 or something like that. Yes, I went to the Machsichadas Cheder. And after that I went to the Yeshiva only at night.

RL: So, at the Machsichadas Cheder, who taught you? Who was in charge?

NP: A ...well I won't give any names, I'll put it that way. Whoever was in charge, the so-called rabbi, didn't really know how to teach properly. It was a matter of "If you don't know it, you'll get a 'Flask' across the 'Ponim'" as they say in Yiddish [(a smack on the face)]. And it wasn't a bad education, lets put it that way. As I got older it was quite intensive, but yes, it wasn't faulty in any way. I wouldn't exactly say that some of the people who taught were up to scratch – let's put it that way.

RL: Where was it, this Cheder?

NP: Oh, this Cheder was held in Northumberland Street, where the old Machsichadas is now, I'm sorry, the new Machsichadas, on that ground, it was there. It was a huge ground, massive ground. It must have been some of the landed gentry because at the back they had horses ... err, stables. Stables and Rhododendron bushes and pear trees and it was quite ... and I think, I'm not sure but I think that there's a street called E Street now - yes it is - and opposite E Street there was a big house and that's where the Moseley party were, right... but as I say, yeah, it was quite a big house and it was quite...quite good.

Tape 2: 3 minutes 49 seconds

RL: How many children would attend?

NP: Very hard to say. I didn't particularly count them so I don't know but ... 50 maybe, possibly. I mean, I don't know because there were various classes, right. Various classes, but it was quite a frum Cheder, very frum. Yes.

RL: What about your Bar Mitzvah?

NP: My Bar Mitzvah? Oh yes, we missed that bit. Bar Mitzvah, yes, was taught by the Bar Mitzvah teacher in the Cheder and it was 1945. And yes, I've got some escapades to tell you about this Bar Mitzvah. Just after the war -no, the war hadn't finished yet-

but I went to the school and I was taking off this Friday cause it was my Bar Mitzvah and told by my mother to go and get some cakes for the Bar Mitzvah. Right, now there was in 328 Bury New Road - where there's a bus shelter, opposite the Rialto there's a bus shelter- there's shops and one of the shops was a bakers called Sief, right. And I was taken off to buy these cakes, you see? My mother had neglected to, or forgot to tell anybody that I was going off and it's my Bar Mitzvah coming up. So I went out to get these cakes and as I'm coming out of the shop I hear a voice shout 'Oy, you!' And I looked around and said, 'Oy Vey!' And it was the school inspector. Of all the times the school inspector's roaming around I've got to find him. So he says, 'Where do you come from?' I told him, right, ok. 'So why are you off school?' And I had to try and explain to him why I'm off school.

Tape 2:6 minutes 58 seconds

He said 'Well, better get down there sharpish and explain to the headmaster, and explain why you're off school'. So my uncle had to run down there, go to the school and explain. Right, ok – that's that aspect over. Now, it was January, right? And January ... well it wasn't as mild as this, oh no, no, no. I had to be special you see, it couldn't have been a nice sunny day. It had to start snowing, you see, and it snowed and it snowed and it snowed and it snowed all afternoon, all night, and it snowed the next day, so, absolutely knee deep in snow. I'd never seen so much snow in my life. So that's my Bar Mitzvah, so I'll never forget. Never. The cakes came in quite handy because that's all there was. And got a few presents like books, and –what else did I get- a wallet without any money in it 'because that's what they're giving away', wallets now, but otherwise it was quite an exciting moment. And it all went off very nicely, thank you.

RL: What exactly did you have to do?

NP: How do you mean?

RL: In the synagogue, what did you have to do?

NP: Well, I read my seder, which was Parashat 'poh', and said that. And that was it. That's all I had to do. Sing it.

RL: And then what kind of celebration was held?

NP: Not a lot. Not a lot, no, because, as I say, it was still rationing. As far as I can recall it was in the house – quite a few people invited. As I say, these cakes came in very handy. They used to call it Chelsea bun, but big brown Chelsea bun it's called for the price of about 6 pence, that's like 2 and a half pence in old money - and it was massive. Certainly they went round but there was no fancy-shmancy cakes or anything. No. there was still rationing.

RL: As a child what would you do in your spare time, you know if you wanted to go out or do anything?

Tape 2: 9 minutes 57 seconds

NP: Well I'll have to tell you another tale then. Fine. Might as well. As a child I used to play a lot of football. Well, try and play football with a damaged leg it wasn't really feasible but ... Well, at that particular time there was no clubs or anything available, right, but as I was going to the Machsichadas Cheder, you see, and me – I wouldn't say limping along, but not being very versatile with my legs. We'd come out of Cheder and my friends were banging the ball about as kids will do, and it was Northumberland Street, a very quiet street, and one kicked the ball to the opposite side and the other kicked the ball to the other side and what have you. It got towards the end of Bury New Road. They'd come round the corner of Bury New Road – all my friends had – and kicking the ball about, which is not a good occupation to be kicking the ball about in the main street, but nevertheless. Right, so they're kicking the ball about and they kick this ball and somebody lofted it up into the air and the ball came down and lo and behold it hit this woman on the head. The woman didn't like it, but which was even worse, the communal bobby was ... just happened to be turning around, you see, and sees this woman being conked on the head, and didn't take too kindly to it. So he comes up and says, 'Right. I'll have your name and I'll have your name and I'll have your name. Ok. Fine.'

Tape 2: 12 minutes 18 seconds

I'm coming around the corner saying 'Hello!' He says, 'Come here you.' So he comes here. 'Right, what's your name?' I said, 'Why do you want my name?' He said 'Were you playing football on the road?' 'I was just coming around the corner.' He takes everybody's name. Right, and he ... he takes the first name. He can't pronounce this name. He's called Yitzhak but he calls him 'Itchy, Hochhauser and he calls him 'Hokenhauser', he can't pronounce it. He says, 'Where do you live?' 'Quite near.' So, the Nebech [pathetic person], he goes and knocks at the door. And this woman comes out, 9ft tall 9ft long and 9ft wide and says "Wus hast du getin'" (that's Yiddish for 'What have you done?'), Itchy!?! And Itchy says 'Ich hub gurnischt getin' [I did nothing]. And before you know it he gets yanked in. Bang, the door's shut and the copper's left standing outside, minding me own business. That's it. Finished! So he comes to my house you see. My mother wasn't all that versatile in English. She could speak, but very broken. And he gets round to my house, as I said it's a big long drive, gets up. And as soon as my mother sees the police, panic, and I'm standing by my mother's side, 'Don't take any notice.' The policeman says 'Your son Norbert was playing football in the street', you see, 'Playing football in the street'. Now if a bus would have come along, the ball could have hit the bus driver, smashed the window and killed half of the people.' And she thought 'a broch'[a curse] - 'What's he done?' So she gets hold of me and she gets a broom out and starts laying into me – the murderer. Terrible it was. No it was quite funny that.

Tape 2: 15 minutes 10 seconds

RL: Did you read any books at all?

NP: Later on, yes. I read quite a lot, yes. Not till later on. As I say, education was sadly lacking to start with. Used to listen to the wireless like Dick Barton Special Agent.

RL: What about the cinema?

NP: The cinema? Yes. Yes, I went to watch 'Gulliver's Travels' 4 times because every time it came towards the end, the beginning, there was an air raid and the siren went. So every body had to go out. Cinema – yes, I think it was called The Empire which was a really, really clapped out cinema where the sirens didn't start but the film broke down in the middle. Playing a cowboy or whatever, the film would break down. And it was quite funny...yeah.

RL: Is there anywhere else you would go?

NP: No apart from later going to Bnei Akiva and the TVA.

RL: What would you do at Bnei Akiva? Where did you meet?

Tape 2: 17 minutes 16 seconds

NP: Right at B'nai Akiva we met in Bariutz as it was called in....oh gosh...escaped me.

RL: Was it where it is now? Singleton Road?

NP: Where it is now? No, no. It was at the top of Singleton Road, top of Singleton Road, where there's a bungalow. That's where we used to meet, right. To start with, I think it was at the bottom of Singleton Road. Big huge house. And then it went down to where it is now, and that yes, used to be quite a lot.

RL: What kinds of things would you do?

NP: Oh, everything appertaining to Chalutzik and ... we used to play table tennis, and go to Shiurim, and the usual, go to summer camps and...yes. Quite good. Got to the stage where going to summer camps was extremely good.

RL: Where were they held?

NP: Right, where were they held? All over the place. All over England. The one really which orientated you towards Israel was Thaxted, right. And there was also...later on there was a farm in Cheshire - that was where people... that were orientating towards going to Israel, were training there. But I used to go to Bnei Akiva camps every year and particularly used to work in the fields for my sins like or 1 and 6 pence an hour or whatever it was, picking potatoes. Every potato ought to have been worth 5 quid because it was back braking and then picking, them, stacking corn, and picking fruit. Between 1 and 6 was good - a shilling an hour or whatever. But I used to go every year, so I used to enjoy that.

RL: Whereabouts would you do this potato picking? Where would that happen?

Tape 2: 20 minutes 23 seconds

NP: Down South somewhere I cannot...I cannot... We did do one farm in Yorkshire. And where we picked potatoes they gave us a basket, and this basket had holes in, right? Wire basket in other words, and that was alright for big potatoes you see but

this Yorkshire farmer thought 'Hold on, I've got a right load here.' And 1 and 6 an hour is dead cheap labour and not only that he wanted the potatoes picking which were small potatoes called chip potatoes -used to feed them to the pigs- wanted them picking as well. And as they were putting these potatoes in as we put them in the basket they fell through the hole. Well, we're not having this caper. Now he had to get all his potatoes into the basket and get them into the middle of the field where there was ... this was a big, huge sack. Well the Yorkshire farmer got very stroppy you see, 'You're not getting paid because you haven't picked these little potatoes up.' And we told him in no uncertain terms what to do... Yep. (Drinks) Cold cup of tea but it's good for the complexion.

RL: Did you ever think of going to Israel yourself – being a member of B'nai Akiva and...?

Tape 2: 22 minutes 17 seconds

NP: Do you know what, I wanted ... Yes. But I wasn't going to go on a kibbutz. Didn't want to go to a kibbutz, you see? No, I never got round to it. I wasn't brainwashed that way, let's put it that way. Yeah. So the life of being on the field I think it must have worked in the reverse way. I wasn't very happy with it.

RL: Who were your Madrichim?

NP: Oh now that's...oh gosh. I don't know...that's going back a bit. Lonza? Don't know. Can't remember.

RL: Did other refugees belong to B'nai Akiva? In terms of membership, who was going?

NP: Eventually, but when they first came to England, they belonged to the Yeguda and then ... to be perfectly honest with you, I can't recall any refugee boys going to B'nai Akiva. In the main, I don't think so, though they did come. And as I say the Yeguda took them.

RL: Did you ever go to Yeguda?

NP: I had that experience yes. Yes. Yes.

RL: And then...how old were you when you left school?

NP: 15.

RL: What did you do after that?

NP: I went to Lorwin College. Yes.

RL: What was that? What did you learn there?

NP: Oh, I got a much better education than I got in the other school. I was a bit older and the teachers were much better, so I got a good all-round education there.

RL: Did you get qualifications from there?

NP: No ... no.

RL: How long were you at that college?

NP: Must have been about 3 years, I think.

RL: So this was after the war?

NP: Yes, but then I had to take over ... help my father out because he wasn't well and his diabetes was such that I went into his bag business.

Tape 2: 25 minutes 36 seconds

RL: Just going back a little bit, do you remember the day that war ended?

NP: Yes – g-d they're all saying it, 'Do you remember the day that war ended?' Yes, I remember the day the war ended. I was, believe it or not, going to London for ... don't know where I was going, I think it was a Bnei Akiva camp or something. Yes, and it was all jubilation and that kind of thing ... fantastic. Yes, quite good. Quite a joyous occasion.

RL: Did you celebrate in any way?

NP: No. No, no...no, I don't think so.

RL: You say you joined your father in the bag business. What exactly was your job? What did you have to do?

NP: Right, my job was ... nothing to start with. I was the schlepper, as they say. Eventually I just observed and I then learned how to cut with a machine. And some of us used to lay out the cloth you know to cut it out and I eventually got quite versatile in doing things like that which obviously took quite a big burden off my father because, as I say, at that time he was quite ill. And then I was designing the bags. So eventually I landed up quite good.

RL: Was your father still in partnership at this stage?

NP: No. We won't go any further into that. No.

RL: So this was your own business now?

NP: Yes it was. It was still, believe it or not, at 328 Bury New Road because by that time everybody'd moved out so there were quite a lot of rooms. It was converted into a so-called factory but then we moved into 39a I think it was called Hackett Street. Hackett Street, yeah.

RL: So had the boarding house sort of finished?

NP: Oh yes, yes.

RL: How long had that gone on for, taking in lodgers?

NP: A few years. 2-3 years. Yes. But it wasn't really a paying proposition to be honest with you as far as I know. But I suppose it kept the wolf from the door because you're not allowed to have ...because you're an enemy alien. Stupid as it sounds but enemy alien, you know. Everybody was a spy.

RL: Did your parents ever take out naturalisation?

Tape 2: 29 minutes 33 seconds

NP: No, my father died before he took out naturalisation. My mother didn't take out naturalisation, no. So she had to go and travel on this travel document which, try as you might convince ... it's absolute rubbish. But she wasn't allowed ... She wanted to go to Germany. She wasn't allowed, she wasn't allowed. You could go anywhere else on this travel document if you had a visa, except Germany. So, no she never took out naturalisation. My father passed away before he could take out naturalisation.

RL: What happened to your grandparents?

NP: My grandparents – as I say they were in Theresienstadt, right. And as they were Polish, they were let out. By that time ... as I say my uncles – a few uncles had gone to Palestine, so-called then- got them out. So they went to Palestine and landed up in 92 Ben Yehuda Street. Yes. Right. My grandfather died there, but my grandmother came back to England. Now she was a very, very, very smart woman. Extremely – she might not have known a lot of English, but she was all there – all there, as they say, with the lollipops. And... she came - she came back and she looked after my 2 cousins called Wagner. One is Arnold Wagner, and one is Professor Wagner, yes, he was the dean of Leeds University or the Executive. She looked after them because my auntie had died and there was nobody to look after my two cousins. So she looked after them – we looked after them ...and so quite happy relationship with them. I'm still talking to them.

RL: What did you do for a social life?

NP: When?

Tape 2: 32 minutes 39 seconds

RL: As an older boy. You know you said you were working for your father and ...

NP: What would I do as a social life? As I say social life was B'nai Akiva and after that as you got older you went to TVA, Torah ve Avoda, right, and there one went all over England to meetings, get-togethers, even overseas to Ireland and it was quite...we used to have a meeting every Shabbas in Mamlock House. I can assure you that a lot of shidduchim went on there, and that marriages came from that, but it was quite ...social life was quite good there because one didn't need clubs and clubbing

and pubs and pubbing and what have you. You could make your own life there – it was quite good.

RL: Where did you meet your wife?

NP: In TVA. Actually I met my wife ...I'd just lost my father. So after a year of, like, a bit in the doldrums to say the least, and a friend said 'How about if I introduce you to a young woman, and go to a dance?' I said 'That sounds feasible.' And so - there we are, still together more or less. I think so.

RL: What was her background?

NP: Her background was, she was a teacher. A Hebrew teacher. Yes, used to work for the Talmud Torah.

RL: Where was she from?

NP: Manchester.

RL: And her name?

NP: Doreen – Doreen Ash. Called Doreen Prager, née Ash. Her father was Isaac Ash, who was quite well known. He did quite a lot of work for the Jewish Hospital. Yes. A hell of a lot of work for the Jewish hospital and also an honorary –what's it called- he helped the Central Synagogue quite a lot. Had a lot of time for that, the Central Synagogue.

RL: And when did you marry?

NP: 1962. The 26th of June 1962.

Tape 2: 36 minutes 2 seconds

RL: Where did you go to live?

NP: 29 Breeze Mount. Here, where I am – still sitting.

RL: And in terms of work – if you could take me through the different work that you've done.

NP: Oh, in terms of different work I've done. Ok. So, after finishing with the bag business. Right. The bag business finished me because I was in premises and the fellow down below was making shirts, you see? Now... This fellow was manufacturing ... sorry he was selling shirts - quite a lot of shirts and these shirts came in big boxes. Cartons, long elevated cartons. Him owning the property, thought he, or thought he did, have access to my yard. And he threw all these boxes in the back yard. Not being very salubrious area where I was, somebody took it upon themselves to chuck a match in the garden wall or as they say over the back door and Puff it went up in smoke. So I'm coming home and the next thing you know my wife phoned me and says 'You'd best come down, your place is set alight.' And I thought,

'Oh, Very nice!' And so I landed up eventually ... by the time the insurance company paid up one could have bought whiskers. So, I landed up and went into the retail business – sweets, tobacco and toys. So was there in Leigh – Leigh, Lancs. - I was there for 15 years. Yes.

Tape 2: 38 minutes 38 seconds

RL: It was a shop?

NP: Yes, it was a shop. Yes. It was hard work especially didn't have a motorbike at that time. You had to go along the East Lancashire road each and every single day – come out at night, it was quite late nights. But we managed to get through that obviously, and then I sold that. So the next thing after selling out, I worked for Massie Gadas – butchers.

RL: Who was the butcher?

NP: Bertie...Bertie Sadler. Bertie Sadler. Right, I was a ...well he was a bit green in business –don't tell him I said that- and he wanted to deliver to Blackpool, so we set up –I mean my wife and myself set up- this route to Blackpool we expanded on it eventually became a good round in Blackpool. After that, what other escapade can I tell you? I had quite a lot of escapades but this was not bad. Eventually after that finished, I joined this Newman's leather people in Derby Street. So we –leather skins, had 4 floors of leather skins– not jackets or anything like that, leather skins. Now you're going to ask me: What did I know about leather skins? Absolutely zilch, but I learned, very quickly. I learned the hard way. And it was quite, well as I say it was 4 years...5 years till they decided to move to Rochdale which was a ...they bought a finishing plant for making leathers – painting leather skins. And by that time I wasn't included in the move 'cause I'd reached old age.

Tape 2: 41 minutes 54 seconds

RL: And what were you doing for them?

NP: Quite a lot. I had one floor of complete leather. Each one had a department you see. Now I was in charge of leathers and leather skins for jackets and I was doing quite a big turnover. I got quite adapt to that. I got expertise, I would say, let's put it that way. A very sorryful tale, which one couldn't tell, and that was that.

RL: And after that?

NP: After that I went from one club to another, let's put it that way. After that I worked for a chemist, picking up prescriptions, and delivering, and ... which was all fantastically well and good until the job that I was supposed to do ... went a bit further field, you see, the further field being schlepping up, schlepping oxygen cylinders, which is fine and good if you are twenty five, or thirty, but when you reach my age and you ... long enough oxygen cylinders, with no lifts, it doesn't bode very nicely, thank you, so I was out of that. So that was it and I started wondering, 'Are you up to these things? Are you losing it or what?'

RL: Did you work after that?

NP: Sorry?

RL: Did you work after that?

NP: No...no.

RL: When you moved to Breeze Mount...which shul did you join?

NP: Well, I was till capable of walking, so I used to go every Shabbes to the Romanian shul in Ramsgate Street. But as one gets older, or lazier, and looks at the weather, and says, 'Oy vey, it's raining, it's snowing – I'll go down...' So I went to the Shrubberies. Right.

Tape 2: 44 minutes 51 seconds

RL: And have you joined any other clubs or organisations in Manchester? Jewish or non-Jewish or refugee, or...?

NP: No. I've just been a member of the AJR. I go to Yiddish classes. We...My friend Shaun Kovac, he approached me and says, 'Hey, you can speak Yiddish. Well, how would you like to attend, in my house, to a girl that wants people to speak Yiddish?' So, we go every Wednesday speaking Yiddish. Quite good it is as well. Yes.

RL: What children do you have?

NP: One son called Michael.

RL: When was he born?

NP: He was born April 1970. April

RL: What school did he attend?

NP: He attended Jewish Grammar - down the road here - Jewish Day School.

RL: And after that?

NP: After that, what you're talking about schooling, or...? Schooling he went to Liverpool University.

RL: What did he study?

NP: What did he study? He studied IT, micro...microwaves, yes, and he got a BA Honours.

RL: Did he belong to any youth groups or clubs as a child?

Tape 2: 47 minutes 26 seconds

NP: He also went to B'nai Akiva, yes. He...Youth clubs ... no I don't think clubs, no. He used to do Camp America every year. That was quite an experience.

RL: What does he do now?

NP: He's working in London as a consultant.

RL: Is he married?

NP: Yes, he's married.

RL: Who did he marry?

NP: A girl called Rachel Moss.

RL: And where was she from?

NP: She was from Cheadle.

RL: Do they have children?

NP: Yes, two children. One granddaughter and one grandson. The grandson is called...yes...

RL: We'll look at it later.

NP: Sorry, my grandson is called Oliver. Oliver.

RL: And your granddaughter?

NP: Charlotte. Amy Charlotte. I'll get into real trouble doing this you know...

RL: And they live in London?

NP: They live in London, yeah.

RL: In terms of your religious beliefs, do you feel you have changed at all in your level of belief or in your level of observance over the years?

NP: Not particularly, no. No. As regards ...what do you call a level? You mean I've gone less frum or more frum?

Tape 2: 50 minutes 10 seconds

RL: Yes, what do you keep? Has that changed in any way?

NP: I've got more tolerant, let's put it that way. Yes, I've got a bit more tolerant.

RL: How does that come out in practice? What does that mean in terms of...?

NP: In practice...if somebody does something, let's say once upon a time I might not take a good view to it, right. But now I'm a bit more tolerant, right. Whether it's for the better or not I don't know, but yes. So in other words I've mellowed with age.

RL: In terms of identity, how would you define yourself?

NP: How would I define myself? As an ordinary man who's gone through life. I don't know compared to other people that have suffered, I think I've done not too bad really to be honest with you.

RL: What about in terms of nationality?

NP: Now in terms of nationality that's a different kettle of fish... In terms of nationality I think I've been really, really badly done to, right? First of all, going back to the German aspect. All I got... other people used to get tremendous amounts of money. All I got was £800 for loss of education. I put in years ago for compensation for my leg because they completely, completely neglected it. Didn't want to treat it. Nothing doing. Don't want to know. So I'm not too happy with them. I don't know how other people get money but I certainly didn't get anything out of them. I felt I was really... Not that I haven't tried. I have tried, but you get the guys, oh 'First of all you're only stateless.' you see? You've not really got any comeback. Or, 'The reason why I'm stateless is because my father was Polish, my mother was German.' 'Oh, no.' they say, 'No, no. You have to take your father's identity and you're stateless so you've got no comeback. Thank you very much.' So this must have occurred not only to me, but to thousands. Right.

Tape 2: 53 minutes 51 seconds

RL: Did you take up British nationality?

NP: Yes.

RL: When did you do that?

NP: Just before I got married.

RL: Do you feel different to the British in any way?

NP: No. Why should I feel different? No. I think I identify myself with British. I'm Jewish British, but I'm still British.

RL: Do you have any kind of German identity at all?

NP: No. No I haven't. I don't want to have an identity with Germany. I tried to have an identity with Germany once upon a time. I applied for dual citizenship which was feasible at that time. They said, 'No, you can't do that. You have to either become German full stop and give up your British citizenship or do nothing at all.' I said, 'Well, I'll do nothing at all.'

Tape 2: 55 minutes 16 seconds

RL: Why would you have wanted to have dual citizenship?

NP: Because people were getting paid out, do you understand? And I wasn't getting paid out. And I certainly had a good case to answer when other people didn't have any case to answer. So it was put to me that 'Why don't you apply for dual citizenship?' I said, 'Fine, I don't mind being half German half English.' Or whatever, or full German – no, I said 'I can't have that.' No. No... No... So I told them about my uncle and all of this – didn't make the slightest difference. No.

Tape 2:56 minutes 6 seconds

RL: When you first came over here, how did you fit into an English way of life? How did you find adapting?

NP: How did I find adapting? Well to be perfectly honest with you I think I slotted in quite nicely. I didn't find it alien, but -I suppose I must have only being young- found it a bit strange, but no, not really. I adapted quite well. Yes. But only -being young, obviously- I hadn't taken up too much of an identity but I slotted in quite nicely.

RL: Is there anything that you did find strange at first?

NP: Not really, no. As I said when we came here, as I say, my feet didn't touch the ground before I was shipped off to Fleetwood and Blackpool and what have you – so, no.

RL: How did you find it there, just coming to the country and being put in a non-Jewish family and away from your parents?

NP: As I say I complained quite bitterly to my father that, 'Here I am' it must have been Hanukah because as I said, 'I'm here, but I can't see any Hanukah Licht.' My father explained to me and said 'You're not in a Jewish house. You're in a Christian house.' I don't think it particularly worried me, to be perfectly honest with you. There I was singing those hymns as you like. Well, thank you very much.

RL: This tape is about to end so we'll stop there.

Tape 2: 58 minutes 22 seconds

End of Tape Two

TAPE 3**Tape 3: 0 minute 12 seconds**

RL: This is the interview with Norbert Prager, and it's Tape Three. Just coming back to this question of how you feel in England...

NP: Yes, right.

RL: Have you come across anti-Semitism here?

NP: No, not a lot. The only time possibly I came across it was in school, not a lot, where - being a frum lad at that time- I wore my cap and they used to say, 'Why don't you take your cap off?' and what have you. So it was all sorted out with fists. It didn't last very long because the headmaster didn't take kindly to any of the boys fighting. But if you had to fight – as I say it was quite a modern school – quite a modern gym. So if you wanted to have a scrap you put the gloves on and you scrapped so it cured it. Cured it quite nicely. Yeah. Yeah.

RL: And you continued to wear your cap?

NP: I continued to wear my cap, yes, as I say, had no problems with it. Because as I say anything sorted out...that couldn't be sorted out in school was sorted out in the schoolyard which... No, I haven't really come across any anti-Semitism. I did have a few blips when I had the shop in Leigh, but that was in the main like they used to say 'Don't you Jew me.' Right? And they'd say, 'Oh sorry Mr Norbert what I said about...' Right? Or the next thing they'd say, 'Don't you Welsh me.' Which is, right... so if I was a Welshman I'd take umbrage, if I'm a Jew I take umbrage but otherwise no, they were quite civil and nice - very nice. I suppose you come across ... nowadays it's a bit worse. A lot worse. Yeah.

RL: In what way?

NP: Well, I think people are not tolerant enough and I think ...I think the Jews are targeted again. And they might find out that the Jew is not a target again. A Jew doesn't like to be a target. I mean once upon a time but I don't think so any more.

Tape 3: 3 minutes 12 seconds

RL: Have you experienced anything recently?

NP: No. No...no. Well I hope that I don't experience it but...no.

RL: How secure do you feel in this country?

NP: Not as secure as during the war or even after the war. No. Some quite a lot of lunatics about who would cheerfully, shoot you, stab you or blow you up for the blink of an eyelid which doesn't bode good at all. And...I don't know if the government's doing enough. It's alright blaming the government and blaming the police and all the rest of it, but there's some absolute crazy people about now. As soon as they rob you they stab you. Before they used to knock you down, now they don't bother with that. No, 'We've gone up a peg – we'd like to stab you' – or what have you.

RL: How do you feel towards Germany?

NP: Do you want an honest answer? Indifferent. Indifferent. I can't get overexcited some people would call it in German 'Mein Heimatsland'. I feel ... no I can't feel very much for them. It's just too unbelievable for words what the Germans did and I suppose in my generation it'll take a bit more to forgive and forget.

RL: Have you ever considered going back there?

Tape 3: 5 minutes 43 seconds

NP: No...no. I got an invitation from Göttingen that's where I was born and bred that they were building – re-building - the synagogue there and there's going to be a lot of attendants and would I like to go and attend this inauguration or whatever they call it. And I said 'No, thank you.' I didn't feel - very happy with it. ..yeah.

RL: Have you visited Israel?

NP: Yes.

RL: When did you first visit?

NP: About 1980 I think it was.

RL: How did you feel going there?

NP: Quite nice. Very nice. I had some illusions which were shattered. One illusion was that people on the kibbutz are quite poor, that they hadn't got two pennies to rub together and I got a faint – quite a big shock. And the next thing – that people in Israel were very poor as well, and got another shock because there were a heck of a lot of cars roaming around. And I felt it was quite a nice land. Yes, it was nice.

RL: If you hadn't been forced out of Germany, what do you think you might have become? Did you have any ambition to be something or do something, that if you'd had your education...?

Tape 3: 8 minutes 3 seconds

NP: Well, I would have had this thought in England. I wouldn't have certainly in Germany because I was too young, but yes, I wanted to be a chemist – right. But unfortunately it didn't turn out that way. It didn't go that way. Yeah.

RL: How did your parents settle into this country?

NP: Yes, all right. Yes. They got on quite nicely again. As I say my mother spoke with broken English but otherwise they settled quite nicely. No, they settled quite nicely. Yes. Obviously they had friends and... they were quite happy here – yeah.

RL: When did your mother pass away?

NP: In 1994. A good age, 90. Yes. With all her faculties - yeah.

RL: What was her social circle? Was it mainly other refugees or was it English people as well?

NP: Mixed – mixed. Relations as well, yeah, yes. Relations. But unfortunately those relations have passed away as well.

RL: Do you think your experiences affected you in any way. I mean like, psychologically, or in any kind of way?

NP: Experiences?

RL: Having to leave and to come over here and...

NP: No. No. I'm not psychologically mixed up or anything like that. No. I'm quite straightforward thinking. I might be a bit biased against the Germans. I might feel aggrieved for what they haven't done for me but otherwise no.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 28 seconds

RL: Is there anything that you might have missed out that you would like to say – to speak about?

NP: If you as the interviewer will ask me I'll try and tell you. I think we've covered everything.

RL: Is there any message that you'd like to end with?

NP: Any message that you'd like to end with? Yes. Peace. Peace. That's all. Peace in this world. And I hope this has been a good interview. I hope you've gleaned anything from it.

RL: Thank you very much.

NP: A great pleasure. A pleasure to do this.

Tape 3: 11 minutes 31 seconds

End of Interview

Photographs

Tape 3: 11 minutes 32 seconds

NP: This is a photo of my grandparents, one Marcus and Nettie Wagner. The photograph was taken round about 1946 in what was called Palestine before it became Israel.

NP: This is the house of my grandparents the Wagners' house in Göttingen, Germany taken approximately in 1936, '37 or something like that.

NP: Right, are we going from left to right. And it's my grandparents shop. You can see the lettering N Wagner across it, right. And this is where they were selling clothes and suits and what have you. The 1st one from left, I don't know who he is. The 2nd one is my grandfather, the 3rd one - he's marked but I don't know who he is. The 4th

one is my mother and the last one on the right-hand side is one of my uncles but again I don't know. It's rather indistinct.

Tape 3: 13 minutes 12 seconds

Where was this taken?

NP: This was taken in Göttingen – in Werner Landstrasse I think. Anyway I'm not sure this – take it as Göttingen. I'm not so sure about the correct address.

RL: And the date?

NP: The date was taken I would say... 1918, 20.

NP: Right this is street Göttingen. It's taken probably about 1938. Göttingen there is quite a quaint town, (inaudible)...structures and what have you, and it was quite a clean town.

NP: This, the exterior of the synagogue in Göttingen which was built between 1896 and 1897 and it was further extended in 1893. And it was destroyed the 9th of November 1938.

RL: (inaudible, but RL corrects NP's reading of dates on the photo)... because it was extended in '93, so it couldn't have been built in '96.

NP: You're right. Start again.

RL: Let's do that again. So it was built in...

NP: '69...

RL: Let's start that again.

NP: Right. You're there! You're there! This, the exterior of the synagogue in Göttingen which was built in 1869 to 1870 and it was further extended in 1893. And it was destroyed the 9th of November 1938.

Tape 3: 15 minutes 46 seconds

NP: This is the same building - the synagogue in Göttingen - the interior of the synagogue. As you can see it was quite lavish and quite nice.

NP: Right, this is a picture of my parents, Herman and Elsie Wagner as she was and Herman Prager, obviously both together married they became the Pragers. And the photo was taken in 1930 - round about that time.

RL: And the place?

NP: And the place was still Göttingen.

NP: This photo from right to left is Grandfather Marcus Wagner, and right behind him is Uncle Walter Wagner. The little one with the white hat is Herman Wagner, behind him is Zalli Wagner, in front of Zalli Wagner is his wife Betty Wagner. Behind her, Auntie Zeller Wagner, behind Zeller her is Wolff Schwinger. Coming to the front is Grandmother Nettie Wagner. Right at the back is Clara Wagner, and incidentally Clara Wagner and Uncle Walter – that's the one with the white hat - were twins. In front of Clara is Elsie Prager, my mother, and finally on the left is Calli Wagner. This was taken about 1930 in Germany.

Tape 3:17 minutes 56 seconds

Showing now is my birth certificate, Norbert Prager, born the 11th of January 1932 as depicted, with a German (GAP) stempel on it and as you can see I was born.

This a picture of my later Uncle Norbert Prager, same name as me, Norbert Prager, who was president of the Jewish Community in Hanover after the war. He was...I think he died 6th July 1963 or '64. Also you can see round his neck is a medal - The Iron Cross of the First Class awarded by him by President Adenauer or somebody for services to the community.

This is me, me alone in this pram looking all innocent and what have you taken at 9 months, me being Norbert.

RL: And the date?

NP: The date...sorry, 1932.

RL: And the place?

NP: And the place, Göttingen. You want all that do you?

NP: And this is a photo of my parents and myself taken in Göttingen February 1937 and I was standing there...now it's the station - Göttingen station - which they had very exotic plants round there as far as I can remember. Anyway that's me and my parents.

Tape 3: 20 minutes 14 seconds

NP: This is a photo of my Uncle Max Prager – Max Prager. This was taken in America approximately 1945 onwards. He's a Hazzan and shoigt and Rabbi in a shul. Now I don't know which shul he was in, I'd have to have it translated somewhere in the back there's some writing. Thank you.

NP: This is a wedding photo of my wedding, Norbert Prager, marrying my wife, Doreen Prager neé Ash taken on... 1962, the 26th June 1962.

RL: In?

NP: In Manchester.

NP: Right. Right this is the aliens' book of my late mother, showing all the particulars and as you can see it's self-explanatory.

RL: Where was this book? Where was she living at the time?

Tape 3: 21 minutes 53 seconds

NP: She was living in Manchester, Salford.

RL: Salford.

NP: Salford. Same book. Same book – the aliens' book, where you can see the endorsement and remarks: 'Leave granted at Harwich, on the 1st of the 8th, 1939 on the condition that the holder will emigrate from the United Kingdom and will not take any employment or engagement in any business or occupation in the United Kingdom.' Because this was...we got a pass to go to America, right? 'The issue of this Certificate does not entitle the holder to establish himself or see employment in the United Kingdom.' - With a stamp on in 3rd of August, 1939. Also it's got where we lived to start with on 400 Bury New Road, Broughton, Salford on the 1st of the 8th, 1939.

Tape 3: 23 minutes 8 seconds

NP: Right, this is another page fro the Aliens' book which shows that my parents had landed in England but were only passing to go to America. But however as the war broke out they weren't allowed to...they couldn't leave the country. But as you can see I think it was the Home Secretary that gave them permission to open a boarding house at 328 Bury New Road for the duration...and... but either the police would check who was at the boarding house. Yes, the police, as far as my memory is concerned, the police would check who was at the boarding house every week or something like that.

NP: This is a photo of my son Michael with his wife Rachel with their newly born son, taken ...2003 and the son's name is Oliver.

RL: And the place?

NP: The place was London.

NP: There is a picture now of my new addition into Prager family called Amy Charlotte. And then ...oops.

NP: Right, ok, take it from the top. Go. This is a picture of my new addition to the Prager family. My granddaughter called Amy Charlotte with her father Michael Prager and the other one is my grandson Oliver - Oliver David, taken in London of this year. Taken in 2005...actually...

Tape 3:26 minutes 0 second

End of Photographs

End of Tape Three