

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

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Interviewee Surname:	Kirk
Forename:	Bob
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	19 May 1925
Interviewee POB:	Hanover, Germany

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. **RV239**
NAME: **Bob Kirk**
DATE: **19th June 2019**
LOCATION: **London, UK**
INTERVIEWER: **Dr. Bea Lewkowicz**

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 19th of June 2019. We are conducting an interview with Mr. Bob Kirk, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.

Can you please tell me your name?

Robert Kirk, known as Bob.

And what was your name at birth?

Rudolf Kirchheimer.

And when and where were you born please?

I was born in Hannover in northern Germany, on the 19th of May 1925.

Thank you. Bob, thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for Refugee Voices Archive. Can you tell us a little bit about your family background?

[repeat requested by cameraman]

Thank you, Bob for agreeing to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. And I should also start maybe by congratulating you for receiving BEM [British Empire Medal] recently.

Thank you very much.

Can you tell us a little bit about your family background, please?

Well, I was one of three children. My parents were quite elderly, I suppose, when I was born and my mother was forty-two. I was the third of three - or four, if you count the sister who died in infancy. My father owned a textile business and was, as far as I can tell, was very highly respected in the community. Mother ran the home and did quite a lot of charity work. She was Secretary of the local B'nai B'rith lodge. And it was- my early childhood was a very happy one. And my sister who was eleven years older than I am acted like another young mother. And my brother is only two years older than I so we were relatively close, although he was away from home quite a lot for - as far as I know - health reasons. And I started school when I was five years old. Which I loved. It was a local- the local primary school. Well, of course the temperature changed considerably once the Nazis took power in 1933.

[0:02:48]

Before coming to 1933 just to go back a little bit about your parents' backgrounds as well. Where did they come from? The grandparents...?

My father was born in a small village in Baden called Berwangen. His father and- in fact grandparents going way back, must be- and we can trace it back to round about 1700. They were cattle dealers, and *shochetim* in that village. There's- I've got documentary proof that they've been- that they'd been living there. Dad was one of six, if I remember rightly. He and his brother, or one of his brothers rather, were the first to leave the village. Evidently, he didn't think that cattle dealing was for him. And after school in Heidelberg, he went to Frankfurt to study textiles. Mother was born in Crailsheim in Württemberg. Her family had come from a place called Postelberg [Postoloprty] in Bohem- what was then Bohemia, about

thirty miles northwest of Prague. She was one of five. Why my grandfather moved from Crailsheim to Hannover I've never found out, but he was a candle and soap maker. They eventually settled in Hannover. And my mother- and my parents met, actually, in Frankfurt, in I suppose about 1912. They- no, they were married in 1912. So, just how they met I don't-

How did they...?

I've no idea.

So, they met in Frankfurt. What was your mother doing in Frankfurt? Do you know?

I don't know. And- that- that bit of family history is shrouded in ignorance on my part.

[0:05:20]

But they settled in Hannover?

They settled- well, my grandfather- my parent- my maternal grandfather was living in Hanover and they settled there. And Dad opened his business there in 1913.

And what was the name of the business?

Josef Kirchheimer. It was his- his name.

And you said wholesale textiles?

It was wholesale textiles. He eventually had two partners, both uncles of mine, my mother's brothers. But that didn't last and the fam- the business simply couldn't support three families, so eventually my father had it on his own.

And did you- do you remember your grandparents? Did you meet them?

I rem- no. My- both my grandmothers died before I was born. And my paternal grandfather lived in southern Germany I never met him. And my maternal grandfather lived with us - until he- he died, when I was about four years old.

And what are your earliest memories of- of growing up in Hannover?

Good question. A happy childhood. I wasn't a terribly inquisitive child, so, no great excitement really. Until I started school. No. That's-

What about- where did you live?

We lived in quite a large flat, overlooking a large playground and a church. It was called- the address was *An der Christuskirche*. so- and there was a large market square just around the corner, so I remember having to cross that to get to school. And twice a year there was a big fair there which was great excitement.

And you were the youngest child?

I was the youngest. My brother was two years older, my sister eleven years older. So - she didn't really enter into games.

And were there any- any other people? You said your grandfather lived in the flat.

He lived with us.

Yes. For some time.

[0:08:12]

For some time, yes. In fairly poor health. There were – there was an uncle and aunt also lived in Hanover. There was- and in fact the- the two uncles who were my brother- my father's partners, they lived in Hanover. And there were two cousins.

So, what sort of circles did your parents mix in? I know it's something probably you can't remember, but-

I don't really know too much about that, because by the time I was aware of outside influences the circle had shrunk considerably. My father used to meet his friends in the evening quite often. They used to play cards a lot, which I suspect wasn't too popular. And mother had her own circle with the B'nai B'rith of which she was secretary. And no doubt there were friends from the synagogue community.

So, tell us a little bit about this. What- were they Orthodox or what?

It was a fairly enlightened Orthodox community. We had a mixed choir which tells you something, I think. As a large community, it was at one time the ninth largest in Germany. When I was- at the time I was born it had something like 5,000 members. Of course, that shrank fairly rapidly.

[0:10:01]

And your parents were active in the...?

How active they were in the community I don't really know. My father- I know my father was a- very highly respected member of the community. I don't remember him ever- ever having any office there.

And do you remember going to synagogue?

Yeah- oh, yes, regularly.

So, what was- where was the synagogue?

In- Hanover is a com- complicated place. It was known as the new town, the Calenberger Neustadt but it was actually the old city, dating back to the 18th century. And the syna- the synagogue, our synagogue was a very imposing building dating from 1870. Interior rather reminiscent of the West London – sorry – yes, West London synagogue of British Jews here.

The same sort of- in fact it dates from the same year, and stood in a- it was a free-standing building in a square in the old city which was rather unusual for the time. With an old synagogue dating back about 350 years - opposite, which was then being used as- for young people's services and community events. Which later was not destroyed, because it was part of a row of very old houses. And the main synagogue of course was- went up in flames on the 9th of November.

And do you remember going to that synagogue for high holidays?

Oh yes.

Yes?

Yes. Yes - regularly. I had my Bar Mitzvah there in May 1938, as probably one of the last Bar Mitzvahs there.

Can you tell us about this Bar Mitzvah since we're talking about it now? What do you remember?

[0:12:24]

Being absolutely scared. You were- it was the rule that you had *leyn*. Whether you had the voice or not. So, this was absolutely terrifying. And I remember the- being addressed by the town rabbi. We had two rabbis. The *Landesrabbiner* who was a wonderful old man, and the *Stadtrabbiner* who was the more junior, who dealt with the young people. And I was most of the time absolutely scared stiff. In my- to my memory he was a tall man - I don't know whether he really was - with rather piercing eyes. All I remember of his address, because the Bar Mitzvah boy got an address all to himself on the *bimah*. And all I remember really is- were these eyes staring at me. [laughing]

What was his name? Do you remember?

Yes, Emil Schorsch. He was the father of Doctor [Ismar] Schorsch who was Chancellor of JTS [Jewish Theological Seminary of America] in New York.

And then after the synagogue was there a small gathering or party? Or was that not possible anymore?

It wasn't really - the family got together, but there wasn't a party. No.

So, it must have been one of the last Bar Mitzvahs.

I think it probably was.

What was the date, again, you said?

If I remember correctly, it was the 20th - about the 23rd of May 1938. But I'm not sure of the date.

And in November the synagogue was-

...was destroyed.

I think- I think I've seen pictures of that.

I have a picture of it in flames.

Yeah. It's quite a famous photo. I've seen that.

Yeah.

But just before Kristallnacht now, just going back to your- to your school what do you remember from your schooldays? What sort of friends did you have?

[0:14:50]

Oh, I started with quite a lot of friends at the primary school. Thoroughly enjoyed it. But in 1933 the temperature changed quite rapidly. The thing is, some- and at that point the Hitler

Youth wasn't compulsory but some of the boys did join, and it was a bit- but became rather scary that they started turning up at school, in uniform. Of course, in 1936 it became compulsory. And one of my abiding memories is getting, soon after January 1933, a lot of dictation, not from the form master but from the headmaster. We filled exercise book after exercise book with dictation. No idea what it was about at the time, but later on realised these were extracts from *Mein Kampf*. So, there was an enormous amount of indoctrination going on. And of course, every time there was a speech by Hitler or sometimes Goebbels or Goering we had to sit and listen to the loudspeakers. That was frightening.

And were there other- other Jewish children in your class?

Not that I recall, no.

This was already at the secondary school?

No, at the secondary school- started- I went to the secondary school in 1936.

Right. So, this was still in primary school, when it happened?

This was all- all primary school. The secondary school was a- a bit different. By that time there was quite a lot more discrimination in a way. It- as far as I can tell it depended on the teacher. But in many cases the Jewish boys - I think there were two others in my class - were required to sit at the back of the class. Keep our mouths shut. So, if you didn't participate, of course you didn't learn. As I say, it must have depended on the teacher's discretion because some teachers didn't act like that.

[0:17:26]

But in your case, in the primary school, could you feel the change? Do you remember?

Oh yes, very much so. Because - you got switched off. You didn't- you didn't- you- there was a clear indication that your participation was not required. And, of course I don't know whether it affected all- all the- my friends the same, because those- I didn't find that- any of this out till our- until later, of course. If your father had fought in the First World War, and

held any decorations - particularly the Iron Cross - you were exempt from some of the discrimination. For one thing, you were able to stay at school. I- if not, then you got expelled much earlier. In my case, I was able to stay at school until Kristallnacht.

And was it because of your father?

Yes.

So, he fought and he had a...?

He fought he'd been wounded, quite severely, three times. And he held the Iron Cross and the Baden Medal of Merit because he was in a *Badenser* Regiment. So, there was a certain amount of exemption - for the children. Not much.

No. But you- you remember feeling the discrimination of the...?

Oh, yes, very much so.

Also, from a friendship point of view-

Yes.

Were you friends before and then...?

Friends at school were few and far between. And the- you really felt the antagonism building up.

But you managed to start in the secondary school, you stayed-

I stayed there until- these were Latin, Latin class designations: *Sexta, Quinta, Quarta, Untertertia*. You know- Kristallnacht happened during my fourth year, so. Fourth year, just- I suppose we'd had the first term of fourth year.

[0:20:14]

And in those four years, you said you had to sit in the back. What other...?

Not in all classes.

Aha-

It- it depended on the teacher.

Right. So, in which classes did you have to sit in the back?

Mathematics, which wasn't much of a loss; I was never any good at maths. [both laugh] Or, maybe I wasn't any good at maths because I didn't learn, I don't know. It could be that way 'round.

Yes. Yes,

German. I never learned any grammar. Geography, which was one of my good subjects. And a few others. And that's-

But apart from that? Was there any other discrimination going on in...?

Well, the discrimination came more in the playground. We really-

What happened in the playground?

We really- you got ostracised. And apart from getting together with Jewish pupils, there's no communication.

So other children were told not to – talk to you?

Oh, yes, there was a clear instruction. You- you don't communicate with Jewish pupils. The time when they got very difficult was in physical education. Because curiously the- the- that particular teacher, although on the face of it, very antagonistic, actually was quite helpful.

He- he might make- might make snide jokes, but he was quite supportive.

In which way?

[0:22:22]

Well, I wasn't very much good at PE, for my- my height was against me there - partly. And in a curious, I suppose as unobtrusive a way as possible, he was quite helpful. And he could easily have just pushed me aside and stopped me from participating.

So, it's very much a- it was individuals who-

Very much an individual thing.

-who made a difference or...?

Yes. I think it depended on how- on the master's standing in the school. If they were fairly senior, they could do more than if they were run-of-the-mill or junior.

And did staff- did children- sorry. [sound break]

I was going to ask you whether you noticed some children leaving? Did people start emigrating?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Tell us a little bit.

It became- became a little lonely. Yes, yes, of course. And some families – and that of course included some of my friends - left quite early. But my father didn't like the idea of emigrating. And he- he had the view that he- his family had lived in Germany for several hundred years. He was a good German who happened to be Jewish. He couldn't see why he needed to leave. In any case, Hitler was a madman; he couldn't possibly - last. So, it would all blow over. There were never any arguments in my hearing, except with my sister, who took

an opp- opposite view, because she was much older and she had a view of her own. And in the end, she said, "Well, I'm leaving." So, she went to South Africa in 1936. But- and by that time Dad probably had got to the idea that it would be better to leave, but it was too late.

How did she- what did she do in South Africa? How did she get...?

[0:25:00]

She got a job as a children's governess with a family whom I think we knew. I'm not- not sure about this. But she met her future husband there and they got married in 1938. And then, after the war in 1948, my brother-in-law was sent to Brazil by his company to start a new sawmill. They bought a forest, as one does, and set up a new sawmill. They were in timber and plywood and that sort of thing. So, she'd left in 1936, which was another blow as far as I was concerned. And, of course alone, yes, a lot of my friends gradually left. It became quite lonely.

So - within the Jewish community?

Yeah.

Yeah.

That's right. And at school. I mean, the few Jewish boys there were- gradually – left.

And your mother? What did she think about emigration?

I don't know who was the moving spirit in this. I think it was my Dad but mother al- never opposed him on any major matter. And it made for harmony. But- and, eventually of course, they did try. And I've- I know of a lot of rejections. And-

What did they try? What- what- what did you find? What did they try?

Well, they tried New Zealand - they tried South Africa of course, the States. The problem, of course, and- they didn't have anything to offer. He was a businessman, he had his business.

And although he knew a lot about textiles, that didn't- that wasn't something that was required. So, without the resources- and- one- and immigration became extremely difficult, because there was a- an exit tax to pay which started- I mean, this- this goes a long way back. It starts in- the imposition started way back in inflation days. It started at 25% and eventually rose to 90%. So, if you had to leave behind 90% of your assets, you didn't have anything to start with. And if you had nothing to start with, nobody would let you in. So, it's a vicious circle. Whereas the people who left early were sensible.

[0:28:16]

So, then things changed with Kristallnacht?

Sorry?

Kristallnacht.

Kristallnacht changed everything. And that of course created a big rush.

What do you remember from- what do you remember?

What do I remember of Kristallnacht itself? Nothing. All I knew was Dad was away from home. I had no idea what was going on. I went to school in the normal way on the morning of the 10th of November. And I was met at- in the entrance hall by the one teacher who was absolutely an independent spirit and he was very supportive. He didn't care what he did. And I've- have always wondered whether he was actually waiting for me. Because he met me in the entrance lobby and said what was I doing there. And I must have looked thoroughly mystified. And he explained that the synagogue had been set alight. A lot of people had been arrested. And I'd better go home and not think of coming back to school. Not to that school anyway. And my dad's office wasn't all that far away. So, I went there, and discovered that he had been hiding there all night. Now, how he managed to get to hide there, I don't know. I suspect he might have had a tip-off. But I mean, our- his business was on the third or fourth floor of a commercial building. Nobody ever went up there to investigate. But that- that's all I remember about it.

[0:30:22]

So, he wasn't arrested?

He was not arrested. And, you know, we were very lucky in that respect.

And his business?

The business had already been going downhill for quite a while, because he'd had- had had to get rid of his staff, except for a Jewish accountant, who later dealt with our restitution claims. But- whether he was able to make- to do any real business after that, I don't know. I used to have to- and after I left school - or was made to leave school - I used to run errands for him delivering little parcels and collecting the money. And that's how- I was doing one of those errands where I was kept waiting for a long time from- for the payment. And dad had already come out of the flat to come looking for me, as I came up the road. And slightly berated me for being so long and sort of in a very off-hand way. "Well, next week you're off to London." [half-laugh] So, very off-hand. But I don't think the business could have been- could have sustained the family, really.

And your brother also was sent- was he in the same school, or...?

[0:32:15]

No.

No.

No, he was in a different school. I'm not really sure how that worked. He was able to stay on for a little while, but this was a Catholic school. So just exactly how that worked, I don't know.

And were you sent to a Jewish school at all?

I was sent to the Jewish school, which was extremely oversubscribed of course, by then. And there were- there was very little material, and you didn't really learn anything. It was- you- you were just there. And it didn't last for very long - which is how I came to help dad.

And- so that was the first time you heard about Kindertransport, or London, it was when your dad told you?

No, I knew that I'd been enrolled. But-

Aha.

There- it's very curious. I rather- I get the impression, in retrospect, that it was really presented as a temporary measure. It wasn't a- going to be a big deal. I would go- we'd go to London, and, as I say, a temporary measure. To the extent that I didn't bring any photographs with me. Possibly in order to- not to underline the fact that this could take a long time. I didn't learn any English and once I arrived with absolutely no knowledge of English. When I think that was a bit of a problem. There was no preparation and I- the only way I can think, only reason for that, I think, could have been that - I was not to be alarmed. A slight miscalculation.

And was there a long time between you knew of being involved in- in the scheme, and then the actual journey, or...?

No, I knew I'd been enrolled in about February or March. But, no, nothing had happened. And mum decided that she really had to go and visit her sister who lived in Krefeld, on the Ruhr. And of course, as soon as she'd gone, a call came through. So, she came rushing back, and the last week was taken up in kitting out.

[0:35:16]

And, do you know, the decision your parents took to send you? I mean, you probably don't know much about it.

No.

No.

No, there wasn't any question, "How do you feel about it?"

No. It was obviously after Kristallnacht.

Well, yes. And it was the sensible thing to do, but there was no discussion.

And your sister had already left?

She'd left in '36. And my brother left in February '39.

So, he left before you?

Yeah.

But he was older?

He was two years older. He came on a trainee work permit.

And how did he organise that, or how was that organised?

As far as I know, he made some contacts when he- he came over here with a friend in 1937 or '38. And that- how- just how the contact was made, I don't know.

And the trainee work permit for- for what sort of job?

It was metal work to begin with, and then later, leather. And eventually he- he was interned on the Isle of Man, during which time he did a lot of studying. And event- he eventually got a diploma in leather dying. And after the- after he was released, he went back to his original employers, but then got a job in Nelson, in Lancashire, and stayed up there for the rest of his life. He- he also became the senior laboratory manager in a chemical works.

So, by the time it came to spring, you were the- you were the only child left?

[0:37:26]

Yep. Which must have been very hard. I mean, I came, I left a fortnight before my 14th birthday. And I was the last one to go, so, for my parents, it must have been dreadfully hard.

Yeah. But obviously as a child, you- probably didn't understand.

You don't know, you don't realise this. No.

No. So what was it like for you? Can you tell us about your- about the journey?

Well, the- my train came from Leipzig, so there were already quite a lot of children on- on board. And I was very lucky; I managed to get a corner seat by a window. How that happened, I don't know. It couldn't have been reserved. And I sat there just minding my own business for most of the journey, and... was terrified. As we stopped at the border, at [Bad] Bentheim, as the train- the border police came on board - came through checking, mainly checking- checking luggage. I mean, there wasn't much in the way of paperwork, because after all we were on a group visa. But a number of things got confiscated, including my stamp collection. I didn't have an export licence for it, so I couldn't argue. We crossed the border and we had a wonderful reception at Oldenzaal. People with sandwiches and hot and cold drinks and chocolate, was something we hadn't seen for years. And the feeling of release, and relief were quite palpable. And quite amazing. But I don't remember anybody cheering. I don't think- I don't think we were buoyant enough for that. And so we went to Hook of Holland, boarded a ferry. Don't remember much about the ferry journey. I must have slept - amazingly - till we got to Harwich. That- actually we were all up quite early, and it was a bit of a disappointment because coming to England meant going to Dover with the white cliffs. No white cliffs. [laughs] And then from Harwich to Liverpool Street, where we sat on our cases. And that [Frank] Meisler's sculpture is really very evocative. We sat on our cases like that little girl on the right of the sculpture, until we were called. And I was collected by my sponsor. So-

[0:40:40]

And you were wearing a tag, like that?

Yep.

Do you remember your number?

No – no.

And did your parents take you to the station?

Yes.

Was it the main station in Hanover?

It was the- the main station, yes. Yes, they took me to the station. And they were able to come up to the window. You couldn't open the window of course, but they were able to come up. And I think in many cases that didn't happen; people were kept away. But they were able to come up to the window just to sort of wave goodbye.

And what were you feeling at that point?

Well, a terrible mixture of- of being scared to death, and excited and apprehensive - no idea where I was going. I mean, an incredible mixture of emotions. And suddenly realising you were- weren't actually going to go back home. You were on that train, you were off.

And did you know anyone on the train or any of the people?

No – no.

No. So you were-

And there were some other children from Hanover, but I didn't know them. And we weren't in the same compartment.

And- but do you know that your parents put you on a- was it organised through the Jewish community or who actually...?

I have tried to do some research about that, how that was organised and I've never really been able to work out the exact procedure. It must have been done through the local community. Who actually did the organising, I don't know. I have the impression that the Quakers had quite a lot to do with organising on the ground. But just how, I don't know.

Anyway, you went on the train and-

Yeah.

Off you went.

[0:42:52]

And didn't know the other-

No.

People.

No – no, no. The- I mean the- the train originated in Leipzig but it must have stopped at one or two other places. And it had picked up wagons from Berlin as well at some point.

Right. So, on that particular train, you had children from Leipzig...?

And surrounds, and various other places, no doubt, on the way. And truck- wagons that had come from Berlin.

Right.

So.

And met somewhere, or were-

Yeah. Possibly in Hanover- after all there's a big hub- railway hub.

Right. And were there any adults in charge?

Yes. Didn't see much of them though. There couldn't have been very many.

So, are your memories on that- of the actual journey-?

Very hazy.

Hazy. Yes, you didn't meet any other significant people?

No. And the organisation was brilliant, because, as I say, didn't really see much of the adults. And yet it ran very, very smoothly.

So, when you came to Liverpool Street, to England, what were your first impressions? Do you remember?

Well, there weren't any. I mean, you got on the train - you got off the train, you were taken into a big hall. And for years I had the impression that it was underground without any justification for that. I don't know. [laughing] No, cause Liverpool Street has been remodelled since then; I can't even identify that place. And you sat there until you were called.

And did you have to wait a long time?

Quite a while. Yes. Whether it went by number, I don't know.

And then who came to get you?

[0:45:05]

My sponsor. A Mr.- Mr. H. Smith, who lived at number 38 Winnington Road, in Hampstead Garden Suburb. And that's all I ever knew about him, because he collected me, took me up to Hampstead and handed me over to the housekeeper - who spoke no German and I spoke no English - and went back to the office. And I used to see him at breakfast and at dinner. And at the end of the week he said, "Well, you're moving on now." Because I may have been told right at the beginning that I was there for a week. But since I spoke no Germ- no English, it- I wouldn't have understood. So-

And were there other- did he sponsor other children? Were...?

Yes, he sponsored- sponsored six of us.

But not at the same time?

No, that was the point. That he wanted each of us to stay with him as we arrived. And that's why I had- presumably that's why I had to move on to make room for the next boy or girl. I don't know.

And do you remember your first English word you spoke?

"Thank you", I expect. [laughing] I don't know. And- and from Winnington Road I went to a family in Greenford who had also sponsored a boy who'd been delayed. So, they said they'd take me in the meantime. And they were absolutely wonderful, this- the Morrisises. They had two children: seven-year-old boy and two-year-old girl. And they sent me to a local school which was an absolutely wonderful school like no other that I'd ever seen. Sort of built on the style of a Roman villa. Single story classrooms around a central green area. It was lovely! And curiously, my first lesson was English poetry. It was wonderful because- and the poetry created a sort of rhythm. And that drew me in.

[0:47:34]

And you remember that first lesson?

Yep. It was “Cargoes” by Masfield.

What was it?

“Cargoes” by John Masfield.

Do you remember the poem?

A- a bit of it. Yes. But it has- it has a wonderful rhythm.

Can you recite it?

I don't think I can now, no.

And, sort of- it's very- quite sparse language and there's something about dirty Brit- it speaks about Roman galleons bringing oil from Sheba to - I think, to Haifa. And then a dirty British coaster bringing coal and tin trays from Newcastle to London. But it's- it's got a wonderful rhythm. And that- that started me off in English.

Fantastic. But you- you liked the English language?

Oh, yes. I- once I got going with it, as I said, there was a wonderful rhythm to this first introduction. It couldn't have been better.

And those- the family- why, did you find out why they decided to take on a- a child?

They were really community spirited.

Were they not Jewish?

Oh yes.

They were Jewish?

Yes, they were Jewish. Eventually the children emigrated to Canada. Their two-year-old, little two-year-old girl became an eminent gynaecologist and the seven year became a- became a civil engineer. And eventual- the father died in 1969. And eventually mother joined them in Canada. And we were in touch until she died. That's because- although I was only with them for about eight weeks, we were always in touch. And used to go to them for- for holidays occasionally. They were wonderful.

[0:50:18]

So, you were lucky, in that sense, to be with them?

Very much so.

And did they have any understanding where you came from, or-?

Oh, yes, yes. Very much so. They came to our elder boy's Bar Mitzvah, or rather Confirmation. We didn't have Bar Mitzvah then.

And did they go to- did they go to synagogue?

Yeah.

Did they take you?

Yeah.

And what? How different was that from Germany?

It was more strictly Orthodox. Although they didn't particular- they weren't particularly Orthodox in their lifestyle. It- they belonged to an Orthodox synagogue.

In which way more Orthodox - for you? From your experience?

Well, Mother kept a kosher household but apart from that, they were quite relaxed. And they mixed with non-Jews as well as Jews, so. They were quite- well, no, it was quite a relaxed household.

And what other memories have you got from those two- from those eight weeks staying with the family?

Well-

What did you have to learn as a refugee? What was different here?

I don't think there was any identifiable way of learning. It was just a matter of fitting in with their way of life. Arthur Morris was a reservist in the Royal Air Force, and very proud of it. And so, one of the- I mean, I must have joined them... around about the 10th of May 9th or 10th of May. And the first outing, apart from introducing me to some of the family and going to synagogue, was to Northwood Aerodrome for Empire Day. [laughing] And- and this all had to be explained, of course. I said, "Very interesting." I learned a lot about aeroplanes. So- but, you know, the boy that they had sponsored turned up. I suppose that must have been about mid-June. And they- they lived in a relatively small terraced house that didn't have room for two of us because otherwise they would have kept me. So, I was sent off to a hostel at Westgate.

[0:53:17]

And how did you feel about that?

Very unhappy, because as I- I really loved those people. You know. And in those few weeks this had- this had become a home. And the hostel, well, I suppose there must have been about a 100- somewhere between 100 and maybe 130, 160 of us. That's my impression. I may be entirely wrong about this. And this was now holiday time, so there was nothing to do. It was very well meant, but... it- it was a barren time. One of the problems was that we really had the choice between getting mumps or measles. And I got measles, which really stopped any activity anyway. And by the time I was fit again, it was time to go back to London, which was- must have been about mid-August. Just in time to be sent to a- to another hostel

in Crediton Hill in West Hampstead. Just in time to join a school – Hampstead Parochial School. Just before evacuation.

And just tell me, who ran those hostels? Those two hostels?

[0:55:00]

I don't know who organised that, and they must have been under the control of Bloomsbury House, but who actually ran them, I don't know.

Who were the house masters or who were the adults in charge?

I don't know. We really had very, very little to do with them. This was the strange thing about these places. And Crediton Hill was a small hostel; there was a housemother. Westgate must have been run by a group of ...responsible adults, but I don't remember seeing too much of them.

And the other children? Do you remember some of the other children? Who were they?

[Bob sighs, trying to remember]

Also...?

Also, Kindertransport children, yes.

Kinder. Was it all Kindertransport?

As far as I'm aware they were all Kindertransport, which is why I assume it was run by Bloomsbury House.

And there was no- you couldn't go back to the family?

No, no. No, because – they- once I was in London, back in London, as attached or sent to the school, who got evacuated to Whippsnade at the beginning of the war.

Right.

So, although I was always in touch with Morris, there was no question of going back to them. It would have been wonderful.

So, in Whipsnade, again, you were in a different group situation. So, it was evacuated with all the other children from that school?

From that school. Yes, including probably about six refugees.

So was that better for you than-

In a way-

...a hostel, or-?

Yes. Bec- the arrival at Whipsnade was a little bit of a- of a rerun of Liverpool Street. We were taken to the village hall. And the evacuees were one side of the village hall and the villagers were the other side. And gradually, we got... married up. And in the end, whether this was deliberate or by accident, but three refugees were left. And there was a pair of sisters who ran a chicken farm who had agreed to take two children. And then there were three of us, and they said, "Oh, all right, we'll take three." And so, we were- we got billeted on this chicken farm. They were very kind. We had a large room between the three of us. And we- we lived there and attended school in the village hall. And we went there with three teachers, two of whom got called away, in short order. There was one poor woman teacher left with the whole school. Because we absorbed the local children. There hadn't been a school in the village until- until then. And she had to deal with infants right up to school leaving age.

[0:58:30]

So how many children were there altogether?

I'll try to think- about- there must have been... about thirty, about thirty there... probably about seventy children in all. And we had a curtain down the centre of the village hall. The infants and juniors one inside, and seniors the other side.

And one teacher?

One teacher.

For all of you?

For all of us. Well, the only way she could deal with that was to recruit the two eldest, which included me, as teaching assistants. [laughs]

So, you were- you were one of the teaching assistants?

Yeah. By that time my English- my English was quite good enough to- to do that, so. I taught a bit of geography and a bit of arithmetic. I enjoyed myself. [laughs]

And that's less than a year after your arrival, basically.

That's- well, by the time we started school that was November, because we weren't allowed to start school without a- an air raid shelter.

Right.

So, we had to wait for that to be built. We started school in November and in December the air raid shelter sprang a big crack. Nobody took any notice. You know- "That's all right, you've got an air raid shelter." So, by November my English was quite good enough for that.

And who were the other two refugees- the two other refugees with you in the- in the chicken farm?

[1:00:18]

One was Henry Löwenstein from Berlin. A very clever boy who- and- I have to explain this. During all this period that happened when we came, we didn't- couldn't have school. Of course, we had to occupy ourselves somehow. And we worked in the zoo, and then the local farm, for pocket money. And Henry liked the farm work so much that if- when he left- after he left school, he worked on the farm. And then in '47 his- his parents actually came out. So, he joined them in the States. The other one was a Czech boy, Harry Titera, whose mother was in London - he was not a Kindertransport child - and who eventually removed him. He- he was there for a couple of years and then left. I was at the school until 1941 when I turned 16. I was then directed into a factory in Dunstable to do war work. It was quite hard – twelve-hour shifts, producing glass com- components for optical instruments for the Navy and the Air Force.

And who made that decision? Was there a refugee committee in charge of you? Do you know who was in charge of you at that point?

Well, Bloomsbury House were in charge. But-

Did you have contact with them? Do you remember going there?

I never- I never went to Bloomsbury House, as far as I'm aware. We had a- visits from somebody from there two or three- two or three times. There wasn't ever any discussion of what I would do after I school- left school. So, school leavers came under the Ministry of Work - and were directed. So, this- this, this was compulsory, unless you went into further education.

[1:02:56]

Right, and there was no option.

And that option didn't arise. So, I mean, it was quite interesting work, but – bit of a dead end.

Yeah. And just to – sorry – to come back. So, in the Whipnade, there was already a zoo? There was the zoo?

Oh, yes, the zoo dates from about 1925.

Was that part of the London Zoo or was that then already?

It was the country home of the London Zoo. Yes.

So, did- as children that- quite nice. Did you- did the children go there, or...?

Oh, yes. We were- we had the run of the place. We were allowed to go in whenever we liked. And, you know, occasionally worked there. I mean, I- I worked in the elephant house from time to time [laughing] and feeding the monkeys and that sort of thing. Yes. There's- the superintendent was very kind. He was- Captain Beal, was very reminiscent of- do you- do you know – oh, what on earth is the programme called now? I've gone blank. The Home Guard programme. [*Dad's Army*]

Oh...

My mind's gone blank on it.

We'll come back to it.

Yeah. He was rather like Captain Mannering in that programme. He was self-appointed head of the local Home Guard.

Right.

Actually, he was quite good at it. And once I finished school I joined- I joined the Home Guard, actually under-age for it, but-

You joined the Home Guard in- still in Whipsnade?

Yeah.

Right.

I became the sector signaller.

What does the- what did you have to do?

[1:05:00]

Well, normal Home Guard duties. Guard duty and that sort of thing. But I- I took an interest in signals. So, my superior who was a Corp- Corporal- Signals Corporal and I put up a lot of telephone lines. And learned to use the radio.

In case you need to?

Just in case.

Yeah.

And I remember standing up in the Dunstable Downs - with an unloaded rifle – keeping watch.

So that was when you were doing the war work? War work?

Yeah – yeah.

In the- in the time in Whipsnade did you have any contact with your parents at all?

I had contact until late 1941, and via the usual Red Cross message- twenty-five-word Red Cross messages. But that stopped in- at the end of '41. And later, of course, I found out my parents were on the first transport out of Hannover to Riga on the 15th of December '41.

But you didn't know that at the time?

I didn't know that at the time.

And what did they say in these messages, the ones you received?

They were very- anodyne, if you like. They couldn't really say anything. "We're alright."
"Don't worry. Do your- study well." They were- of course, I was also in touch with my sister
and I saw some of those messages later and they were much more concerned that this is- that
she should look after us. You know? That they're very concerned about us, boys. But they
couldn't say that to us.

And were you in touch with your sister? Was there communication?

Oh, yes, we were always in touch.

Right. Because that- from South Africa, she could?

Yeah. With difficulties. But, yes, the communication was there.

Throughout?

Yes.

*Right. And so, your time in Whipsnade, before you did the war work, how were you feeling?
Were you sort of just accepting the situation, or you felt quite part of the school, or?*

[1:07:30]

I suppose I'm one of these people that takes life very much as it comes. I don't go in for
introspection very much. So, whether that's a function of not being at home, or whether you
just learn to accept things as they are, I don't know. But- I just had- accepted life as it was,
and make the best of it. Of course, there was always the worry at the back of the mind, but-

*And did you find- were the refugee children treated differently from the other children? Was
there...?*

No, I mean, we entered into the life of the village.

Yeah.

And school.

And the two sisters who you stayed with?

Yeah. And one-

Was there close contact, or was it more a sort of- that you lived there and...?

We lived- we lived there. They fed us extremely well within their possibilities. And... they didn't take too much of a personal interest in our concerns. I don't think they knew how.

Yes.

But they were very kind and materially looked at us- after us, extremely well. We were probably a bit bolshie. We must have been very difficult children to look after.

And as you were sort of one of the oldest, so were you one of the first people to leave then after sixteen?

Yep, yes. And also, the first to leave the village to go in general- to go into the Army. And Henry stayed on the farm. And I don't know what happened to the others, because gradually, the older ones drifted back to London.

And when you were sent to the factory, did you have a feeling- did you want to stay in education? Or you knew you just couldn't, that it wasn't a possibility?

Well, the- the option was never discussed. I'm of these very dim children who just accepts what is given.

And was it hard to adapt then to this- to the factory? You described that it was physically quite hard work.

[1:10:16]

It was physically quite hard work. But you adapt.

And where did you live?

Oh, in Whipsnade. I used to cycle from Whipsnade.

Oh, you stayed in Whipsnade?

Oh, yeah- yes, yes.

Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't understand that.

Yes. I stayed there until 1944- until I went into the army.

So, you cycled from Whipsnade to the factory?

To Dunstable, yeah.

While the other children were still continuing with the schooling? So, you...?

Yeah. Yeah. Five mile ride each way – it was very nice.

Well, so that was good in terms of continuity, at least that you didn't have to change place again.

Yeah.

So, you could-

That's right.

Continue. And then you joined the Home Guard?

Yeah – yes.

In Whipsnade?

Yes.

And were there any other- do you remember any other communal activities or- from that time?

There wasn't that much social activity going on at the time. You had the occasional dance. And occasional whist drive. But- no, I mean, social events were few and far between.

And in that time did you ever go to London or mostly not?

Well- no, because there was nothing to go to London for. And in any case, there were restrictions, travel restrictions on aliens. If you wanted to move five, I think it was five miles out of the district, you had to report to the police. What made that a little bit easier was that Dell Farm, where I lived, was also the police station. [with laughter] And the local policeman lodged there. That - from that point of view - is very much easier.

And so, you had to register with him there?

Yes.

And what did this mean? You had to- what did you have to do?

Well, you had an alien's identity card, and you had to get it stamped.

How often, or...?

It was all so informal. I don't know whether he really knew what he was supposed to do either.

[1:12:40]

But you were too young to be interned? You missed the internment.

I missed that. Yes.

Because you turned sixteen.

I was sixteen in 194-... '41.

Right.

So, yes, I just missed that.

But your brother, you said?

My brother was interned. First- first he went to Lingfield Racecourse, and then he went, I think, to Huyton and then to the Isle of Man.

And how was his experience of that? How?

Pretty poor. Although he always told me that the- the intellectual life on the Isle of Man was probably better than he would have got had he not been interned. And he knew the Amadeus Quartet. In fact, he always regretted that somebody made a drawing of one of the members of the Amadeus and gave it to him. And he got rid of it and later on [with laughter] he was very sorry about that. And, you know, I mean, intellectually this- there was a lot going on, and-

How long was he there for?

About eighteen months. And he did a lot of studying while he was there.

And what did he do once he came...?

He went back to his original job for a while, and then through my cousin, he got a job in a tannery in Nelson in Lancashire. And then went on from there. He- he was particularly interesting dying- first leather and then other things and went into colour chemistry.

So, he stayed in the sort of cattle – not cattle business, but basically- [Bob laughs]

In a very peripheral way, yes. Well, you could say I did, because the job I eventually got was with a company that dealt in- in automotive and marine materials, including textiles.

Right.

So, there was continuity to do with my father's business there.

[1:15:18]

So, your war work- how long did you work in that- in the factory?

I went there in May '41, and left late in '44, so-

It was quite a long time.

Yes. Too long.

You didn't like it?

It was a bit soul destroying. It was very monotonous. And I would have left earlier if the company had been prepared to release me.

But they didn't want to release you?

Well, I'd acquired some skills by then and this was very important stuff. I mean, we were providing optical precision instruments for the Navy and Air Force.

And what was your specific job? What did you have to do?

Originally making precision mirrors, and then later on, lenses. And- I think it was a fairly restricted occupation.

But you wanted to- what was your aim? What did you want to do at that point?

If I couldn't have further education, then I wanted to go into the Army.

Why did you- why did you want to join the Army?

Well, I- I was pretty angry. And whether one- I mean, you couldn't fight the war on your own, but maybe one could contribute. And now- then my company took the view I was contributing anyway. Which was quite a complicated argument.

Because at that point you didn't know what had- what happened-

Of course not, no.

To your parents or anything?

No. Of course not. No. There was just- it was- there was just no news. And you couldn't assume that no news was good news. Because- I mean, we didn't know about the camps. Although it was known, apparently, but we didn't know.

[1:17:32]

So how did you manage to join the Army?

Oh, I enlisted. Trouble is, it took quite a long time for that to work through because I, I put my name down in- I think must have been about February or March '44. And I wasn't called until - November. And that- that was irritating.

Then in November then what happened?

I was sent to Glasgow for initial training. Usual- the usual sort of eight-week training. And then, as a volunteer, you're asked what you'd like to do. So, I said, well, I, I'd been sector signaller in the Home Guards so I said, "I want to go into the Royal Signals." "Well, you can't do that. You're an enemy alien." So, I said, "Well, Royal Artillery Signals?" "Yeah. All right." The fact that, on that, in that position, you'd have quite a lot of power. You- if you transmit in- information the wrong way around, the guns are facing the wrong way. [both laugh] But I didn't go into signals, I went into gunnery training. And so, I did my- did all that. And I was in a holding battery in- in Suffolk. And from there I was transferred to prisoner of war camps as an interpreter. So, as a staff sergeant, so it was straight from private to staff sergeant. Because that was the establishment, you know, you were either a staff sergeant or a captain. Well, we did have an interpreter officer at the camp, who only spoke Italian, because we'd had Italians in that camp to begin with. But because the CO rather liked him - he was rather good at getting supplies out of the local farmers - he was kept on. So, I couldn't become a captain. I was the staff sergeant.

[1:20:04]

Can I ask you- and at what point did you change your name?

Oh, that was right at the beginning in- in- during basic training in Glasgow. It was- I- I followed my brother who'd been there just before then. He had been ordered to change his name so I followed him, and changed to Kirk.

And tell us, why was it, Kirk from Kirchheimer?

Well, this is him- my brother was in the same barracks eight weeks earlier. He was called in to the office the first day he was in barracks and told to change his name. He asked why. So, it was explained that if he went- if he went on active service and was unlucky enough to be taken prisoner, he would have great troubles with a name like that. So, he asked for guidance as to what to change it to. His CO who was Scot, wanted to know what the name meant. He explained - Kirchheimer. The first part of the name is- is Kirch, Kirchheimer. "*Kirch* is a

church.” “Okay, *Kirch* is a church. We're in Scotland. A church is a *kirk*, so therefore your name is Kirk.” So, I decided I better follow suit.

How did you feel about changing your name?

Oh, I had no problem with that. You blended in a little bit more. But many years later, our granddaughter asked if we could go back to Kirchheimer because it was more romantic. [laughing] And we said no.

So, working as a translator, the question I want to ask you: Did you keep your German? How- how did you? Do- do you remember your German?

[1:22:06]

Oh, ye- well, thereby hangs a tale. I had been intended to go on a draft to Nigeria. And I really couldn't see the point of going to Nigeria in about March 1945. I had a- an amazingly understanding commanding officer, and I explained this. He said, “Oh, alright. We'll take you off the draft. But now what are we going to do with you?” And at that time, the Control Commission was just in course of being formed. And it was his suggestion, not mine, that I might apply to become an interpreter on the Control Commission, you see? “Good idea.” “I thought you'd say that. I will get the necessary forms for you.” So, he did that. And I applied. And I was sent to London for an interpreter's test - and failed abysmally. Not really surprising. I mean, my command of ordinary German was alright, but I had absolutely no vocabulary for politics or economics - anything like that. So, not really surprising. But I was then- the transfer to a prisoner of war camp came after that without the usual war office test, which I understand was rather harder than the Control Commission one. So that's how I got into that job. [laughs]

So, they didn't mind, or they didn't know that your German- that...?

Well... It was a bit of a problem because the first day I was in camp, the usual routine kicked in. Small offenders caught and this was the- any prisoners of- prisoner of war who had offended in any way was marched in front of the CO. And the interpreter was handed the charge sheet. “Read that.” Well, the charge sheet was in English. So, you had to read it out in

German. Impossible. I hadn't- didn't have the vocabulary. The CO says to me, "I thought you spoke German." I said, "Yes, Sir. But..." "You have to explain. Clear the room." And he says when I came back, "What's this all about? You speak German, but...?" So, I explained, you know, "I- I came over as a boy of thirteen. I don't have this sort of vocabulary." "Ah, yes." He said, "I understand. No problem I'll teach you." So, this very English regular officer taught me the rudiments of military German. After which it was fine.

[1:25:40]

So how come he knew military- he could...?

He- as I say, he was a regular officer. And after the First World War, he had been the military commander of a small territory of Germany. So, the triangle between Poland, what became Czechoslovakia and Upper Silesia, he'd been the governor. So, he had learned German. He didn't really need an interpreter. [laughs] But he was such a nice man.

And where was that?

In- this was in Thirkleby Camp- Camp Number 108. It's near- just south of Thirsk in Yorkshire.

And how many prisoners of war were kept there?

Well, we had a main camp with round about 900 men. And then about ten or eleven hostels dotted around North Yorkshire with probably another 500 or so men.

And how many Italians, out of that?

Oh, the Italians had gone.

Oh, they'd gone by then.

[1:27:06]

First, we had Austrians and then Germans.

And so, where had the prisoners of war come from?

The- the Austrians I didn't- they left within months of my being there. The Germans were mainly Afrika Korps, who were a particular type of man. They were- I never had any problem with them. They were- very easy to deal with. And- and the point was that on the whole, none of them had ever served on the Eastern Front. So, there was a- a distinct difference. And I- I have visited some camps where there were others, and the atmosphere was different

So, were there some convinced Nazis, or...?

Oh, yes, of course there were.

There were?

Yeah. Yeah. And we didn't deal with the intelligence bit. That was the job of the Intelligence Corps. But of course, I got to know the men. So, I had a fairly good idea of who was a Nazi and who wasn't. And some very convinced anti-Nazis, including the man I had as my clerk. [He] was a very interesting man. And eventually became Secretary of Deutsche Bank in Germany. And – yeah, and, a mixture. But-

So, what was it like for you? I mean, you know, being a German refugee, suddenly to meet-

Well, I decide-

...these German POWs in such circumstances?

I decided my- the only way I could deal with it, was to explain very clearly that I was a German born Jew. I was in British uniform as their boss. But I was a Jew. And I think in a way that helped to- well, it cleared the air. They knew whom they were dealing with. And I never had any problem.

And was part of their stay, was that- because I know there was a person who did a lot of re-education.

Yes. Oh, they ran their own programmes. I went to talk occasionally. But the Army Education Corps dealt with most of that - including my cousin, who was a captain in a Czech- in the Czech Army.

And what was- what did they try to re-educate? What...?

[1:30:00]

These were courses on – well, some technical stuff, but largely on citizenship, politics... economics quite a bit. And it- it wasn't always that sustained. These men had to work. They went out to work on- on the farms-

Right.

But you got a visit about once a month, maybe, or once every six weeks.

So, you became quite friendly- friendly. I mean you were, as you said, you were the boss.

I was the boss. Oh, and I never became friendly with anyone. No. That wouldn't have done at all. And in any case, I wouldn't have wanted to.

Right.

And I- there was- had to be a very clear line. I was in charge, and no question about that. And that was understood. So, when- and we- we didn't have officers. We had non-commissioned officers and other ranks. Officers went elsewhere. And there was one occasion where a sergeant came up and addressed me as, “*Du*”. And it so happened that the camp leader was right by there. He jumped on- he, “You can't do that. That's not your place.” “Oh, but he's also a- a sergeant.” “It doesn't matter.”

So, did you speak German to them? When you spoke to them?

Yes. Yeah. And we had a very strange event. If there was a new draft in, you had to set up the whole organisation: camp leader and all the rest of it. And of course, part of the job was to select the camp leader. That was left to me to do. So, the simplest thing was to select the probably three most senior men, and talk to them, then make a decision. And on one occasion I did that. And the man I selected turned around and said, "Do you think that's wise?" "What are you talking about? That's an order." "With all due respect, do you think that's wise?" And I said, "What are you talking about?" "You don't recognise me?" We'd been in the same class together.

In Hanover?

[1:33:08]

I did appoint him, and he was the best camp leader I ever had.

He was from your school in Hannover?

Mn.

But he recognised you?

Yeah. How, I don't know.

So how was the structure of a camp? How was that organised? So, there was a camp leader?

Camp leader, who had two deputies. And of course, they had their own cooks and things like that. Each barrack had a man in charge, but that they had to organise themselves. I was concerned with the leadership.

And in the time there- that's when the war finished, while you were there?

Yeah, well the war had just finished when I arrived.

Right - okay. So that- the end of the war, was that important for you? Or did that have any impact on your life?

Well, it did have an impact in that in '46 we got a letter from a survivor of Riga, who couldn't tell us anything about our parents, but did expl- describe the place in rather graphic detail. And he was never right again afterwards; he went into a sanatorium. But that letter is – pretty grim.

And was it a relative, or how did he...?

[1:35:04]

No. He- he had been an admirer of my sister's. In fact, I suspect had things been equal he- they would have got married. I've got photos of him. But- and he survived but-

Ended up in a sanatorium. Where? In?

In Sweden. So that's when I found out about the camps. I think they were known about before. Well, in fact, I know they were known about before, because members of the LJS [Liberal Jewish Synagogue] went in there - into Belsen - right at the beginning.

And at that point, had you hope that your parents were still alive?

Well, until you had evidence to the contrary, there was always the hope. So- and then I went back to Germany in '49 for the first time, because by that time I knew what had happened, but I wanted more information.

And where did- did you go to Hannover?

I went- yes, I first went to Krefeld. My aunt was still there, and she- she had married out. Her husband had died before the war, but his family hid her right through the war. So, I went to visit her and then we went to Hanover and to Hamburg where my cousin was living.

And what did you find?

A heap of rubble. And Hanover was very, very severely bombed. And- but - after Krist- after Kristallnacht, there were probably about two and a half thousand Jews left in Germany- in Hanover, most of whom were deported to the east. And probably about one hundred or so, came back. And so, they had to rebuild the community, which they did pretty successfully.

And how did you feel when you- you were already demobbed in '49, so you came as a civilian back to Germany?

[1:37:37]

Yep.

And what were your feelings at that point?

Well, it was the first time I'd seen - apart from London, of course - a city so thoroughly destroyed. And it- it was horrendous. So, it was sad, I mean, this was my childhood.

But your aunt was in Krefeld and that was your- through your mother's side, or...?

My sis- my mother's sister. She's the one she'd gone to visit when my call came for the Kindertransport.

And how long did you stay? Just-

About ten days. Because, Ann and I had met- well, '49- we- we'd met earlier that year. And we'd already decided we were going to get married. And her aunt insisted that we took our separate holidays because we'd been in each other's pockets [laughing].

Ann Kirk: It was a different life then.

So, she went to Switzerland with a school friend and her parents. And I went to Germany. And the edict was that if we still felt the same after we came back from our holidays, we were permitted to get engaged. So that's when we got engaged.

I think before we start talking about you, I think I just want to come back a little bit to the POWs and then we'll take a break.

Okay.

I'm very aware of the time. Is there anything else you want to add about your time as an interpreter, because obviousl...-?

It was fascinating work because, I mean, it wasn't just translating. You really- first of all you really ran the camp under- under the control of the officers. You had to get to know people.

And what were the concerns of the prisoners of war and what- what...?

[1:40:07]

Conditions at home. Where the next lot of cigarettes was coming from. How long we were going to keep them. Occasionally there was a little rebellion: "It's about time you sent us home." "Not within my gift. As far as I'm concerned, I'd like to get rid of you."

And how long were they kept there? When- when did this camp close?

Well, we started repatriating in late '47. And it was in stages. The Category C- in other words, the people who were considered to be reliable, went first. And so, went on through that.

So, were they, in the categories, were the- the Nazis sort of A Category?

Mn.

And in terms of proportion, were there- how many were there sort of...?

Oh, the A's were relatively small. The B Category was clearly the biggest. And they were certainly a group whom one could rely on. It was quite clear that they had nothing to do with

the regime. There was one poor man was graded 'A' - and this was done by the Intelligence Corps - who came to me after his interview, absolutely in pieces. He says, "That man has given me an 'A' and I'm not a Nazi!" I said, "I know you're not a Nazi. What happened?" Well, it turned out that the man, the officer from the Intelligence Corps, was actually a Nazi. He- he was an Austrian and had recognised this POW as coming from the same village. Somehow, during the invasion of Norway, he'd got himself into Norway and he'd come over here with the Free Norwegians. I had to-whether he assumed somebody's identity, I don't know. But my chap was quite right; he was a Nazi.

[1:43:12]

And what happened to him?

He was arrested. What happened to him afterwards, I don't know.

And did anyone ever- did you ever have any discussion about your own family's fate, or that you were Jewish or did that...?

Oh, I discussed it, yes. Of course, I couldn't tell them what had happened to the family, because I didn't know. But- oh, yes. I mean, no secrets. In fact, on the contrary.

And what reaction? What did they say?

Well, you could more or less tell who was a Nazi and who wasn't, from the reactions. If the reaction was sort of, well they wouldn't have- have sort of quite enunciated that way, was a "serve you right" kind of thing. Some were concerned, some were very concerned. One night a letter from [a German POW] when he- when he was repatriated, and he says, "You know, you should have hated us, and yet, you didn't seem to. In fact, you helped." And my brother had something very much on the same lines.

Why? Was your brother also...?

Yeah, it was a fam- family business.

Oh, where was he?

He was in Cheltenham.

Also, with...?

First- first in Carmarthen, and then in Cheltenham.

In a prisoners of war camp?

Yeah - yeah. As I say-

So that's interesting. Both of you-?

Well, it was a bit of a- an occupation for refugees. You know? I know several refugees who became interpreters.

Yeah. Okay, is there anything else from that time you think is important?

Not really.

Okay, in that case I suggest we take a break now.

Okay.

And shall continue-

[1:45:26]

Yes, so we got towards the end of the war time,

Yep.

Where you worked as an interpreter for the prisoner of war camp. How- after how many years did that come to an end?

Well, I was demobilised in Jan- January, February '48. So, I was at the camp for - what is '47? So, two and a half - two and three-quarter years.

And what were your plans then?

Find a job- come back to London. Somehow, I couldn't visualise living anywhere else. I managed to then find a job. And that's about as far as my horizon went then. I did get a job with a- a friend who'd been my club leader in Hanover, as assistant manager in an electroplating works. Not that I knew anything about electroplating.

How did you get in touch with him? You knew he- you were in touch?

Oh, we'd been in touch. He was actually more my brother's friend than mine. So, the contact went through him. And we visited several times. So, we were talking about me trying to find a job and finding it quite difficult. "Well, I could do with you." And I took it from there.

And how had- how had he come to England?

Same as my brother, you know, he'd made these contacts when they were over here. And he- he'd made contact with two brothers who wanted to start an electroplating works. Why particularly that, I don't know. But Kurt already knew something about that. And so, they took him on, as manager and they- we took it from there.

[1:47:38]

And where did you live when you came back to London?

I was in lodgings in South London. And their- their- the work was- the job was in South London in West Norwood. And at the same time, I joined a club for young refugees, which had been set up by Bloomsbury House.

And what was it called, that club?

Achdut – Achdut.

Achdut?

Yes, 'togetherness'. And the chairman was a friend of mine. He'd been in- in the same- one of the hostels together with me. And he was articled to a solicitor who was a member of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. And at that time, the LJS together with West London used to send solicitors to the Bernhard Baron Settlement in East London, to provide poor man's lawyer duties. And the solicitors used to take the articles clerk- the article clerks with them, and a volunteer secretary. And Geoffrey Kahn had a volunteer secretary called Hannah Kuhn. And that's how Ann met George Jonas, his article clerk. And George explained that he was chairman of this club for young refugees, wouldn't she like to come along sometime. Show them what an emancipated and integrated refugee could do.

Ann Kirk: Snooty.

So, she did come along. And didn't partic- I was pursuing another girl, who didn't want to know. But I was more- [laughing] very interested. And then she- I- six months later, I was running a play reading, in a private house. And because I was running it, I got there early. I was sitting in the kitchen, stuffing my face, and in comes Ann. George had told her we were running this play reading. She said alright, she'd come along. He said, "Oh! She does come sometimes." And Ann says her response was, "Oh, he remembers me!" Well, it took me three mon- three weeks to pluck up courage to ask her out. And after that, was with- within months, I think, we decided we were going to get married. So, thank you Bloomsbury House! [laughs]

[1:50:30]

Achdut. When and where? Where were the meetings for the...?

At that time, in a rented room in South Kensington. Then later on, we- we had to leave there- whether Bloomsbury house didn't want to fund it anymore, or- I- I don't know. But we then

met at a school in Windmill Street next- almost next to the Windmill Theatre. How we got that, I don't know. [laughs]

But the idea was to- for younger refugees to...?

For young refugees to be able to get together and socialise.

Because there were different clubs going on at the time.

Oh, yes, yes. But- and I got to this one because I knew chairman- the chairman, George, and he asked me to come and help.

Yeah. So, it wasn't- it was not affiliated to a synagogue or anything?

No

No

No, no. Purely secular.

And what- say, on that day- what were you doing there? What? What play or what- do you remember?

I don't remember, I don't remember. [laughing]

And what sort of people came? Everyone...?

Oh yes, we had quite a good group. Mn. So-

So, Ann came there through the Liberal route in some way, or...?

No, this was purely the contact through being the volunteer secretary for the- the solicitor.

Right.

And pure chance, his article clerk was the chairman of this club. Pure chance.

And did you find- were there other Kinder as well in the group, or...?

It was all- all the- all Kindertransport.

All Kindertransport.

[1:52:20]

Except for one or two. There was an English girl who married one of- one of our friends. I suspect she was the only non-refugee. She was there from Bloomsbury House.

And did you find you had things in common with each other?

The background was the same. Yes, of course.

And do you think that was important when you- when you two met? Was that important, that...?

Yes, I- yes, I'm sure it had- has a lot to do with it. And I'd like to think there was chemistry from the beginning.

But you had to then go on your separate holidays?

Oh, yes, yes. Yes - yes. That was- well, they'd been on holiday- the aunts had been on holiday when we met. So, Ann had been farmed out to friends. And the control wasn't as tight as it would have been otherwise. So, we were able to meet quite often.

But in principle were they agreeable to you? Were they in favour?

Well, they didn't oppose, but they were quite- and they- they were Edwardian. And fairly, I wouldn't say stern, but certainly very correct. So, "Who's this Bob you keep talking about it?"

We'd better meet him." So, I went a number of weeks for Friday night dinner. And when we announced we wanted to get engaged as well- "Here, hang on a minute. We're gonna have to have a talk with him first." So, I was invited for an interview and Ann was sent out of the room. And I was grilled as to: Prospects? None. The future, well, that depends our prospects and - we have to work on that. And they - there's nothing on offer. And I must say they were very good. They, sort of, they didn't even discuss among themselves first. So, Ann- and Ann was then called back into the room. They said, "Now children, you've been in each other's pockets for weeks and weeks. You are going to take your separate- this is the condition: You are going to take your separate holidays. And when you come back, if you're still of the same mind, you may get engaged."

And on your side of the family, were you in touch with your sister?

[1:55:34]

Oh, yes. Yes, of course.

And your brother?

Yes, yes of course. And- and some cousins in Reading.

And what did they think about you getting married?

Delighted. And my brother didn't have much to say about it anyway. My sister- my sister was very supportive.

Do you think you wanted to get also married because you both didn't have family?

Well, we had- there was- put it this way, there was nothing to wait for. If we were going to make anything of ourselves, we were going to do together.

Ann Kirk: Could I speak?

Yes, you can. You're not in the picture, but we can hear you. Go on.

Ann Kirk: They said, "You can either have a big wedding or a small wedding, and a check. Since we had nothing, we had the check. So, it took us years to get our home together. Cause a small wedding - and it was small - no presents!

Right. Where was your wedding then? Where?

At the LJS.

At the Liberal Synagogue?

Yeah, and then a very, very small reception - about thirty people - at their flat.

And so how did you then start your married life?

Well, they helped us to get a flat. And at that time, you still had to pay key money. In other words, a commission to the agent, which was quite hefty. And they provided it. And we found a flat in Maida Vale on the fifth floor of an apartment block without a lift. And that's where we started. And then when- when we decided it was time to start a family, we had to move from there because you couldn't have a baby up there with the- with the pram in the corridor downstairs.

So where did you move then?

[1:57:53]

Then we moved to a small house in Neasden, where the- both the boys were born there. We were there for sixteen years, and then we- Neasden acquired an underpass under the North Circular Road. And we worked out that we would be having the tractors and diggers outside our house - we were five from the end - while the boys were doing their exams, and we didn't want that. So that's when we moved to Kenton. So, we were in Kenton for thirty-one years, and then we moved here.

And tell us a little bit professionally what- what you did.

Well, when I first came out of the army, I wanted- I had no education, but really none. None to speak of. So, I enrolled in what was then the Regent Street Poly. And for some godforsaken reason I enrolled in a draughtsman's course. I really don't know why. I think it was available. So- and I started. And a fortnight later I was called into the office. "Mr. Kirk, we've been looking at your records. You don't have matriculation." I said, "No. When would I have got that?" That's- Matric- it's a bit like A-levels, I think. "Sorry. Can't keep you." I said, "Look, I- I've been in the army for three years. Well, how do you think I would have acquired that?" "Sorry, can't keep you." And that's when I got the job with my friend in West Norwood. That was a bit of a dead-end job. So, when Ann and I got married, we decided we had to do something about that. Through an introduction by somebody at the LJS, I got a job with a City firm as second bookkeeper, not knowing anything about bookkeeping. And then spent the next nine years - has started in '51, the next nine years - doing correspondence courses in order to qualify as a Chartered Company Secretary. I couldn't do accountancy because for that you still needed articles then, which we couldn't afford. For the Chartered Secretary's exams, you didn't need articles. And I qualified in 1960, at which point I got transferred to the head office. Still in a dead-end job. And I was passed over for promotion. So, I left. And I was really, you know, really taking a chance. And from there I had a couple-about three short-term jobs, which weren't going to lead anywhere. And then, through the employment exchange of the Chartered Institute, got a job with a company dealing with automotive materials, as Company Secretary and Chief Accountant. And I stayed there for thirty-six years. And I became Finance Director four years after I- I joined them.

[2:01:44]

What was the name of the company?

Boyriven Limited. It was originally a French company dating from 1850 or thereabouts, who just shortly before the first war, sent a junior associate over to start a- an English branch. And that was set up as a separate Limited company with him as Managing Director. When I joined them, his- his two sons had inherited and they were Managing Directors. And at the same time - it was just about at the same time - I'd been elected Honorary Secretary of Leo Baeck College, the progressive training college for rabbis. So, I explained in the second interview, I said, "I've just been elected to this post, which means I've got to be out of the office from

time to time.” “That's fine. We know exactly what you're- you're talking about. We are each of us very involved in our church.” They were French Catholics. “We wouldn't have it any other way.” Fabulous. So, I was Secretary of that college and then went through all the offices - Treasurer, Vice Chairman-

[2:03:08]

So, tell us a little bit, talking about Leo Baeck College, how did you originally become involved, and your involvement also after your wedding at the Liberal Synagogue? Did-

Well, Ann was at- at the LJS, Ann was already involved in teaching.

Right.

I didn't really get involved very much except as Treasurer of the Syna- what was then the Synagogue Society, the general social organisation of the synagogue. And did that for a few years, but I didn't really get involved until our elder son joined the religion school. And I got drafted to help run the school. And I became the administrator. The administrator had to also act as supply teacher, so I decided that I better learn something. And I joined the Evening Institute that- of what was then the Union of Liberal Jewish- Liberal Progressive Synagogues - was running. And I became Registrar of that. And when the Liberal Movement went into joint sponsorship with the Reform on Leo Baeck College in 1965, we put the Institute into the College. And I- I was taken over with the furniture. And a couple of years later, I became Secretary of the College and then went through all the various offices as the Secretary, Treasurer - it was very much Buggins turn [on rotation] at that time - Vice Chairman and then I served four years as Chairman. And I think I was an officer for about seventeen years one way- one way and another.

[2:05:06]

And how do you see the role of the Liberal movement, Progressive movement within the German Jewish refugee story?

Their- the College was really, as close as possible, the successor of the- my brain goes dead. I can never remember titles. The Berlin *Hochschule*- the-

Für Jüdische Studien?

Für die- für die Wissen- Wissenschaft des Judentums. A number of our original lecturers trained there and were lecturers there, including Leo Baeck himself, of course. And so, it became the focus of sort of reviving Jewish learning in that sense. And Jews' College was very focused on Orthodox Judaism. So, Leo Baeck College was the only institute of- of learning for the progressive movement. It's changed now of course. There's [Abraham]-Geiger-Kolleg and there are various other places. There's one in Holland and one in France. But at that time, the Leo Baeck College was the- *the* place for Jewish Studies. And, I mean, it started in 1956. Since then, I suppose we've- we must have trained about 200 rabbis who serve worldwide.

And some of them go to Germany?

[2:07:10]

Yes, indeed they do. Yes.

...progressive rabbis.

Yeah. Yeah.

So that's interesting in a way.

Well, they- they've done a great deal to revive Jewish life in Germany. I mean, a very dear friend of ours, Willy Wolff, was *Landesrabbiner* of Pommern and Brandenburg. In fact, I think he still is, although he's retired.

Yes, he was commuting wasn't he from here to...?

Yes, he was. That's right.

Yes, I've heard about him. We want to interview him. We want to speak to him.

You should interview him. He's an absolutely wonderful man. He'll keep you occupied for a week if you let him.

So, there is a sort of reconnection, in a way, to Germany?

Yes. That's right.

And also, there is Lily Montague, who helped Belsize Square Synagogue.

Lily Montague was very concerned about Jewish life on the Continent. And she was very-very much instrumental in helping German Jewish rabbis to come over here and continue the work.

So, in fact, there was quite a number of German Jewish rabbis who came?

Oh, yes.

Such as? Do- do you remember some of the names?

Werner van der Zyl, who started Leo Baeck College. Curtis Cassel [Kurt Kassell], Rudi Brasch...I would go on except my memory is not as good as it was.

[Georg] Salzberger.

Sorry?

Dr Salzberger.

Salz- Georg Salzberger, certainly. And, oh, there are a number.

Italiener-

Yes...

Rabbi Bruno Italiener.

Yes, I didn't know him. I knew of him. Albert Friedlander, John Rayner. John was our particular guru and one great friend. And yes, there's- it laid the groundwork for continuation of Progressive Judaism.

And how, for yourself- I mean you were not raised sort of within the Progressive Jewish faith. How did you do this journey, or how...?

[2:09:42]

Well, I was in no man's land for about ten years. Because although the Morrises were very kind, they took me to synagogue, there was really no connection. And, while I was evacuated and in the Army, there was practically no contact with Judaism. It started again when I met Ann. And I, of course, got drawn into the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. And that made sense. This was something that I could understand, because you could participate. You weren't a bystander. And in an Orthodox synagogue you can really only participate if you- if you've got sufficient level of Hebrew knowledge, which I didn't have. So, this made very good sense to me, and I was able to get into it.

I just wonder whether one, you know, whether one could say actually that the Progressive synagogues did more to integrate the refugees than the-

I don't think one can generalise, because a lot them went Orth- remained Orthodox. So, they were integrated within their own communities. I think it's more a question of community rather than what type it is. And if you were inclined to accept the status quo, you'll probably be quite happy to remain in the Orthodox fold. If not, if you were more questioning, or you- you wanted to understand more then you probably went Liberal or Reform.

No, because I'm thinking you know, some of the German Jewish refugees, they felt that they were not so welcomed by the English Jews in general. There was that-

Oh, there was that issue certainly. And as- exactly as at the turn of the last century. And, yeah, and the- the so-called “indigenous Jewish community” were very wary about an influx of new-

Yeah.

And different people. And-

Yes, so that's what I'm wondering, that, you know, if you were active within the Progressive Jewish community, maybe there was more commonality in some way, you know, that-

[2:12:21]

Oh, that- that- that- that may well be. It may well be-

But I don't know. I haven't [inaudible] researched it, but-

No, neither have I. I mean, many Orthodox communities had their own organisation for welcoming refugees, so I'm not sure that one can generalise. I know there was a considerable problem about non-Orthodox children being accepted. Because the Chief Rabbi's office was very concerned and there was- actually, there were quite a lot of selection. Well, we talked about it at the conference at Lancaster House, didn't we? That- there was a great fuss about Orthodox children being sent to non-Orthodox homes?

Yeah.

Or even being selected for the trans- Kindertransports. You know, they- they had to be - kosher. Which was a little bit of a terrible attitude to take at the time. But- and Dr. Schonfeld-

Yeah.

...had the same problem. I mean there was- he did an enormous amount of work. He really did concentrate on the Orthodox community. It doesn't detract from the amount of work he did, but there was that distinction.

But I guess the question, you know, that comes up whether, you know, for the Kinder that they should have- should they have gone to non-Jewish homes? Or should they have been kept together somewhere?

Yeah-

I don't know whether you have got a view on it. On that particular issue, whether-

I think, there- there needed to be safeguards, because there were- unfortunately, there were a lot of children sent to non-Jewish homes, who did have problems. And- and whether ac- whether due to active intention of conversion or neglect. And you can argue that [inaudible in every] problem, different approaches.

Yeah.

But the children had to be saved. They had to be looked after. So, which- which was more important? But there- there was- the problem was keeping enough safeguards to make sure those children retained their heritage. And of course, a lot- a number of the younger ones didn't, because they were too young to understand what was going on.

Correct- and some were also taken by active missionary. A few were just- I'm going to do an interview with somebody who came in on a- The Barbican Mission for the Jews.

Yeah.

You know, who really tried to-

Oh, with the intention of conversion?

[2:15:39]

Yeah.

Yeah.

Which is an interesting- interesting side story, really. But coming back- so, coming back to the Progressive movement-

Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums.

That's right. So, you're saying that Leo Baeck took his-

It's- it's really the success. I mean, we had- we got a lot of their graduates and teachers. Dr Teicher, Italiener was one of them. And I find it difficult to focus on- whenever I want to remember something, I can't remember it. There were quite a number of lecturers who had been rabbis in Germany.

And so, when you had children, your own children, you wanted to send them to the Liberal-Synagogue?

Of course. Yes. Yes. Well, they were dragged to our religion school under protest. And at that time, we didn't have Bar Mitzvah. Dr Israel Mattuck, our first rabbi, had been- was an American - well, Lithuanian, but - grew up in- in the States. He was very much against Bar Mitzvah. His argument was that at thirteen, a child is not sufficiently developed to make ethical judgments, and hasn't got a full sense of history and that sort of thing. They can't yet make a commitment. So, he refused to have Bar Mitzvah. In any case, he objected to the kind of celebration that used to go on around Bar Mitzvah. So, we imported the American Confirmation in the sixteenth year. And our boys had Confirmation. Of course, later, we had to relent. So in about 1982 we did institute- institute Bar Mitzvah.

But still at the later age? That's funny.

No, at thirteen.

Oh, at thirteen.

But we've retained *Kabbalat Torah*, which is the replacement for Confirmation in the sixteenth year. So, they have their solo ceremony at thirteen, Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and there's a requirement. If this a girl in the family she has to be offered the same. And there's no question of just having a Bar Mitzvah and the girls not being considered. It has to be absolutely equal. So that children have their Bar or Bat Mitzvah at thirteen, with an undertaking to continue their education un- until *Kabbalat Torah*.

Which is that sixteen?

[2:18:36]

Yep.

And your children did that?

Well, they were before we bought- brought in Bar Mitzvah, so they just had their Confirmation.

So, was it important for you to give them that Jewish identity?

Yes, absolutely. That has to be continued in- they have a family history. They never knew that grandparents. In fact, it's one of those problems, because we never spoke German to them. We never spoke German to each other. We never talked about our history to them... under the possibly mistaken view that we didn't want to burden them. We wanted them to have as normal a childhood as possible. But of course, they knew we'd come from Germany as children. And they knew we were different. I mean, they had a birthday party, there's just us, and the two aunts - and maybe a cousin. When they went to other children's cele- birthday celebrations, there were the grandparents, and the aunts, and the uncles and the cousins. They didn't have that. So, of course they found out what was going on, but not from us. And in fact, the first time we spoke, which was at Northwood here at the invitation of Rabbi Andrew Goldstein for Kristallnacht service, David our elder son was in- in the audience. And a friend

turned around to him after and said, "Of course you knew all that." He said, "No." And it- it may have been a mistake, but that was our choice. Our decision.

Did you make a conscious decision together? Or did it...?

No, I think we fell into it. I think we- we just had the views that they needed a normal childhood, simply because ours had been so turned upside down. And we didn't want to burden them with anything.

And did you talk to each other about the past?

[2:21:09]

Of course, yes. Which was, I think, one of- one of the strengths of our marriage, that we were able to support each other.

And your sons- but then they find out. I mean, they-

Oh, yes, of course. Now they know. Yes.

Yeah. So, when do you think was- when did you start talking more in public, or to them or-?

Well, we – in '92.

And was there anything- what triggered that, or what?

Well, it was being invited to speak at Northwood. That sort of opened the floodgates. Haven't been able to shut us up since.

But did it coincide also with- you were- were you retired at that point or...?

Oh, no.

No.

No, I didn't retire till 2004.

Right. [both laugh]

No, it was just the normal way. I mean, Andrew knew about our story of course, as did various other people, but we'd never spoken about it in public. It needed a catalyst.

Right.

And the invitation was the catalyst.

Yes, and was there maybe, more interest also in- in general, in society or more- you know, the...?

Oh, the interest I think had come before. And there's such a- this curious phenomenon known as the "forty years syndrome". [sic] I don't believe it exists myself. I- it's more like twenty years. But certainly, immediately after the war, for most of us, it was much to be painful to talk about. And in any case, people who'd gone through the war, they'd got their own problems. Enough already. They didn't want to hear of any more- anybody else's problems, really. And things like analysis and psychotherapy didn't exist. We wouldn't have gone for it anyway. And who knows what sort of comes out of the woodwork once you go that way. So, we- we wouldn't have gone down that in any case. But in the late 60s, people started listening. I think it's- I think the catalyst was really the '68 war. Somehow after that, there was much more focus. And then we started getting books and films. That's when we started hearing much more of the detail.

And when did you start? Because you did quite a lot of research about your parents, and when- when did that- did that start at the same time?

[2:24:15]

Well, I went, as I said, I went back to Germany in '49.

Yes.

And I knew they'd been sent to Riga. I had a certificate from the local community to say they had- that they'd been sent there and they hadn't come back. That's - all I knew. And sort of over a period of time, I tried to do a bit more the research. I couldn't ever find anything about Riga, until we went to Washington and we went to the Holocaust Memorial Museum there. And we were speaking to the- the librarian. And I said, "You know, I know they were sent to Riga, but I can't find out anything about it." He says, "Yeah. Don't look for Riga, look for Rumbula Forest." And it suddenly all came out. Because of course Riga was a ghetto. And the action took place elsewhere. And that's really when I started finding out what went on.

[2:25:29]

So, what did you find out?

Well, there were a lot of mass executions when people first arrived. The men, in particular, were marched off. The ghetto had been divided in two. There was the Lithuanian ghetto and - which was cleared for people from Germany to be put in there. And they found horrendous circumstances when they got there. What happened to my mother? Well, I don't know what happened to either of them. But with Martin Mannes' letter of 1946 and what I've found out since, I've got a fairly good idea. But I have no proof.

Yeah.

And the archives in Riga have never replied to my inquiries.

You tried.

Mn. I keep- I'm still at it. I keep on writing to them. "Have you found anything?"

What about compensation? Did you ever...?

We got compensation. And it's- there are so many different categories. You've got compensation for interruption of education. You've got compensation for parents' loss of

liberty, loss of life. Got some compensation for the loss of the business. But of course, all that is split three ways between my brother, my sister and myself. With the education compensation I think we bought our first car. Something like 250 pounds, because it was all scaled down: ten to one. If you were awarded 10,000 Reichsmark, you got 1000. It's- it was pretty poor. And you, you had to prove- this was one of the big problems- you had to prove what the parents' income had been. Of course, that's almost impossible to do. And in any case, the income that you might be able to prove, was already from a time when there was severe depression and deprivation. So, there was never any true compensation. I- when I went back in '49, I did find my father's business premises. And I found two people in possession who had been my father's representatives, whom of course, he'd had to let go after the Nuremberg Law barred employment. And they were running a textile business from those premises. But I couldn't prove that they'd taken it over from my father. And I- when I went to the bank and I asked for documentation, "Oh well, most of our documentation was destroyed in the air raids." You couldn't disprove that.

Had they changed the name of the business?

[2:29:13]

Yes, yes. Yes. But I knew their names.

And they were the same premises, in the same...?

Same premises. And I knew the people. Strohmeyer and Notvogel, I knew them well.

And did you speak to them?

Oh, yes. I went in and spoke to them.

And what did they say?

Well- how sad it all was. And, "Of course, we helped your father a lot." Well, I know they didn't. And, so, you know- as I say, I went to the bank. I- I got some documentation of what his income had been right at the end. So, they didn't really help. And what he'd got for the

business, which was, I don't know, something like 10,000 Mark. It's nothing. And then like all- like all these businesses, it was a forced sale.

[2:30:23]

So, he did sell it for-

No money.

Yeah.

They said, "You- you hand it over and we'll give you - that much."

And now of course there was this little compensation for the Kinder.

Yes.

What do you feel about that?

It's rather late in the day. It's a gesture. I think- given that there are so many refugee children around now, it would have been nice if the- the whole amount for the 10,000 – 9,354 – had been provided and those that aren't here anymore, that money had gone to relief for the current refugee problem. As it is, I don't know how many of us are left.

Because so- it's- in total, not so many people will claim out- out of the 10,000.

I would hope that most, most of the ones that are still around will claim.

Yes.

But it's seventy years ago and a lot of us aren't around anymore. So, there's an awful lot of cash that will never be claimed because people aren't there anymore.

Yeah.

It can't be inherited.

Yeah.

It's- I think it's- I'm sure it's a well-meant gesture, but it leaves a slight taste in the mouth.

Yeah. And we talked about that you didn't talk to your children. What- what impact do you think did your experiences have on your later life? Did the fact that you came on the Kindertransport, that you had to leave your parents-?

[2:32:36]

Well, there was a drive to make good. To give my children as safe and as happy an env- an environment in which to grow up, as possible. We tried not to- even later we tried not to say, "Oh, look what we had to go through. You..." You know. We- we knew people where this happens. In fact, my- one of my cousins went through this in the States. You know, his father was forever telling him, "Of course you've no idea." You know. "You don't know what it was like. You don't know how well you're doing." We didn't want that. And- and having started from nothing, to try and give them as secure a childhood as possible.

And you were quite- aware- consciously doing that?

Yes, yes, absolutely. And if you start with nothing you're more of- aware of what there should be.

And how- how different do you think your life would have been if you hadn't been forced to emigrate?

It's impossible really to say. I- I don't know what my education would have been like. I might have taken over Dad's business because my sister would- would have got married. Whether she would just have stayed in there, I don't know. My brother wasn't that way inclined. I think he might have gone into academe. That wasn't me. So, who knows? And it starts with education. And I have no idea what would have happened. And a few years later, I might

have understood it more, but, you know. But it- at thirteen... And I don't think we ever discussed that kind of thing at home. As I say, I wasn't a terribly inquisitive child. And I wasn't really encouraged to ask questions. So, I don't know.

No, because you were at the age when your education was interrupted right in the middle-

[2:35:22]

That's right.

In a way, where you-

Hadn't really develop- developed an interest yet. And some kids at that age know exactly what they want to do. Not me.

And do you think it had an impact on your children, although you tried not to talk about it when...?

Oh, yes. I mean, David, I think has inherited the idea that there has to be financial security. And boy has he made good. He does a lot of charity stuff as well, but he's made good. He's- he's so bright. Andy, I think was psychologically much more affected. He doesn't show it, but his reactions to some situations indicate that psychologically he's much more-

Okay, so-

...much more sensitive to that. And I think he- it may have held him back. I'm not sure.

And your grandchildren? Are they interested?

Oh, yes. Ben said to me not so very long ago, "We'll carry this on." So- and he's- he's very fluent, and we've got great hopes of him. And Josh did his thesis on the rights of Nazism. So, he's- he's very well aware. So, I- I am hopeful.

And you would like them to- what?

I would like to feel that they will continue the educational bit. Our daughter-in-law has just taken the course at Beth Shalom, so- and she's a teacher. So, I'm hoping that having taken that on, the- the- she's in the outreach programme. So, there'll be a lot coming from her.

Of Beth Shalom?

Mn.

Outreach? [sound break]

[2:37:50]

Yes, we were talking about your grandchildren.

Yeah.

And talking about legacy. How would you like to see, you know, let's say, the legacy of the German Jews, of- of your heritage carried forward?

Well, I suppose- I suppose there's a difference between individual legacy. I mean they never met their great grandparents. They'll never know what they were like and they would only know, of them, what we are able to tell. And since we didn't really know our grandparents either, there's a- there's a break there. But I would like them to understand the German Jewish scene. To be able to transmit what happened to that.

And what do you mean by German Jewish scene- what-

Well-

...what in particular?

There's a very- quite, quite a highly developed cultural scene and religious scene. And it would be nice to feel that that would still be understood by our great-grandchildren and their generation. Can't take it beyond that.

So, something related to that- so what for you personally is the most important thing from that German Jewish heritage?

The- the enlightenment and en-emanicipation, and the flowering of the – what's the best word to use? There was- there was a distinct German Jewish culture, which would be a very- it would be very sad if that got lost completely. And if our children and grandchildren could play a part in carrying that forward, that would be - very nice.

And is there something from that culture you miss, or is that- what...?

[2:40:30]

I'm too young to- I guess, to really understand that. I know it was there.

You didn't...?

I never got into it.

Right. So, it's something you missed out on, in a way.

Exactly. Yes. Which is all the more reason that the next generation might get the opportunity to carry it on. But of course, they are very much English. So, whether that's possible, I don't know.

And how would you define yourself in terms of your identity?

British. And I have heard – I have lived here for -what- eighty years. And thirteen years in Germany, so-the- the influences are quite different. As far as I'm concerned, I'm British. Yeah, I've got that heritage, and that origin, but I've lived my adult life in- in Britain.

And when did you become British?

1947.

And was that important?

Yes. I was doing my army service. It was very important.

*And now you recently received this- the recognition. What does that- what did that feel like?
Was it a surprise?*

It was, yes. Well, in a way, it's just nice to feel that it doesn't matter what your origin is, if you're contributing to society - not necessarily will, but - it can be recognised. That's quite nice.

And tell us what you got it for, because we haven't talked about it yet.

Well, both Ann and I do a lot of talking about our experiences in schools and other organisations. And both- both to children and adults. And we've been doing it now since 1992. And apparently somebody thought it might be nice to recognise that.

Ann Kirk: It's almost our retirement job. [Bea laughs]

Well, yes. It's- it's not just around Holocaust Memorial Day, which is where it started, of course. But we do it all, all the year through. So-

And when you talk, what is your main message to the audience, although I'm sure you adapt it slightly?

[2:43:16]

It gets adapted, depending on what the- what- what HMD [Holocaust Memorial Day] promulgate as- as the year's theme. But the main thing is that you have to respect people's identity and individuality. And I always make the point that you must never use a broad

brush- brush description, like “the asylum seekers”, “the refugees”, “the Muslims”, “the this” and “the that”. Everybody is an individual, with their own dreams and fears. And they have to be respected as that. And it just, you know, our story shows what happens when people are prejudiced and discriminate and humiliate. And what happens if you allow a dictatorship to take over. And that's what's- what frightens me when- when I hear people say, “We need a strong man to sort all this out.” “Never mind about Parliament, we need somebody to sort us out.” That's dangerous. And that's what I try to put over.

And over time did you learn- is it for you difficult to talk about your own past or is it- do you find you have a sort of-?

It's- it can cause a sleepless night. But - it's worth it. Compared with what our parents went through, if we have a sleepless night, so what?

You feel it's your- it's your duty?

[2:45:20]

Among other things, it's a duty, yes. We know what happened. We are able to speak. And those who are able to speak, should.

And in terms of the questions you get, what is the most- do you...?

Where do you- how did you meet? It always comes up, because we do a double act.

Yeah.

And I think people are quite amused at us. “Did you lose your faith?” Which is a very interesting one. In fact, it's that question that led us into this double act- act. We used to speak separately, and the one who wasn't speaking, sat in the audience. And then, Ann was speaking to school in Hertford. And one of the boys in the audience came up with just that question, “Did you lose your faith?” And, Ann said, “Oh, I think Bob might be eas- might find- might be able to answer that more easily than I.” And asked me to come up on the platform. And that gave us the idea that speaking together might be- might work. And it does.

Because it adds your two experiences?

It adds the two experiences, they get a change in voice, they get some different views sometimes.

So, what did you answer about your faith?

[2:47:12]

Well, Ann and I have got a different take on that. And I go into Jewish teaching on this one. The idea of free will and the good inclination and the evil inclination. Yetzer Tov and Yetzer ha-Ra. So, it's your own choice, which one you follow. So, it's no good, blaming somebody up there. It's your own- it's your own conscience. So, the question at Auschwitz wasn't, "Where was God, but where was humanity?" So- that may sound a bit harsh to some of them, but that's my view.

And do you find that the questions have changed over the years or...?

Not to a great ext- any great extent. The- the questions change with the amount of preparation the children have had. Sometimes-and in a way, in a certain way, it really depends on age. The younger children are much more uninhibited. When they get to age thirteen, fourteen, they look over their shoulder and they do don't- don't want to be the first. But it depends on- a lot on preparation. I think one of our best experiences was a Muslim girls' school in Slough. They were just fantastic. We could have been there for hours. They were well prepared. They were very thoughtful. The questions just kept coming. It just varies com- completely.

So, you go out into Jewish schools or...?

No.

No.

I don't think we've ever- yes. I think we've been to one Jewish school, but no, not on the whole. And I wonder sometimes whether the authorities in Jewish schools think that they know it all. They don't have to pursue it.

That's interesting, interesting.

I'm not sure about that. I mean, I wouldn't want to accuse anybody.

No, I understand. I understand.

It's- I mean, it's in the curriculum, maybe they fear that if they treat it within the curriculum, that's good enough. It isn't. But it may be that. No, and Jewish Museum brings in all kinds of schools. I don't think we've ever had a Jewish school there. They- they have a very nice programme. They have the museum in the morning. And after lunch, they have a speaker. Of course, many of the local schools have their own- the Jewish schools have their own programmes, but they bring in local schools, and they're not Jewish schools.

And you were featured also in the recent exhibition on the Kindertransport.

[2:50:30]

Yes.

In the Jewish Museum.

Yeah. Yeah.

So, I'm sure there was- you got lots of responses.

Oh, yes. And Northwood has a very strong programme. There's a combined operation between Northwood Liberal and United. And the- there are various other synagogues involved with it now - in Boreham Wood and I think, Watford. Over Holocaust Memorial Day, over about four days, we get somewhere- something like 3000 children through there. And there's a similar sort of programme at Kingston where we also speak. We regularly get

invited to Kingston Grammar School. And you know, it's- we've just been invited back to Queen Elizabeth Girls' School in Barnet. It's-

So, you're very busy.

Yeah - busy. Well, it keeps us occupied. As Ann says, it's our retirement job. We feel we are helping just a little bit.

And in your own family, do you think it has affected yourself, your brother and your sister very differently, the experience? How?

Well, they- they are both dead now, but- well it affected my sister in that she uprooted herself. Because she was very close with my mother. And I know they had copious, very personal correspondence. What was in that, I don't know. But I'm sure there was quite a lot of personal heart searching. My brother never talked. But I think it affected him personally, even more than me. For one thing, he married very much later. I had Ann. So, it affects us all differently. But it affected us all in some way. It couldn't not.

[2:53:04]

No. I mean, in hindsight it's easy to say, do you think more could have been done to put in these safeguards somehow, for the children?

I suppose to some extent it depended on manpower and woman power available. It depended on who volunteered to foster and the safeguards weren't as strong. And now- a part- I assume that part of the problem now in finding spaces for the children that ought to come over, is to find safe spaces for them. And safeguarding now is so much more focused on, that- we didn't have that then. I think people were inspected, but I'm not sure about that. But once inspected, that was it. So, the scene is quite different.

Yeah. And do you think the British government today, in terms of the refugees, should bring more refugee children in, or?

Yes. With the proviso: there have to be safeguards. The children can't just be dumped somewhere. And I'm sure there are quite a lot of people who would be prepared to foster. And it's one of my big questions. And I- probably, if I voiced it publicly, and it may not be for publication here, even. I'd really like to know what the Muslim community is doing. Because a lot of these children's- must be Muslim. And I'd very much like to know whether the community here is supportive. I mean, the Jewish community- and when we-

I know the Liberal Synagogue is doing quite a lot for refugees.

Yes, we have a very strong drop-in- what we now call a drop-in centre. It's once a month, and we get about 200- and it's specifically for families with children.

In the- in the synagogue?

[2:55:25]

Yeah. One Sunday a month, they come in, they are given a meal. They get spending money and vouchers, the children get a space to play. They can get advice. They can get clothing. Oh, yes, it's- it's very well organised to the extent that a local- I think one of the local churches is now taking the overflow, because we can't cope with them all anymore. But it- I mean, even when we came, the Jewish community didn't exactly cover itself in glory. There were more people that could have done something and didn't. Having said that, the government takes a lot of credit. Again, this may not be for publication. They gave permission. That was it. They didn't put their hands in their pockets.

So, do you think it's the- it's- the Kindertransport is celebrated too much as a sort of British rescue effort or...?

Yeah - it isn't. I mean, there was the Home- well, I don't know- actually, I have to be careful. I don't know which of the ministers it was, who was quite resistant. And it took an awful lot of lobbying to get the agreement. And it was on- on the condition that the community made itself responsible financially. So, the government- I regret to say, I think the government is taking more credit than it's entitled to.

Yeah. And do you think that if we can learn a lesson from the Kindertransport what, what is there to be learned?

[2:57:27]

That... When there is an emergency like this one, the government does have to step up and make- and make it easier for refugees to come in. And to support them more. I think what happens to asylum seekers is quite shameful. And to expect people to live on five pounds a day and not be allowed to work, and be held in detention indefinitely for deportation. That's not how one should treat people. And I'm sure it could be done more quickly and more efficiently, if the will was there. It worries me. Because we set ourselves up as a highly moral society. It doesn't feel like that.

Is there anything I haven't asked you which you would like to add to your story? Something we- we talked briefly before the interview about Belsize Square Synagogue and you said you knew Rabbi Kokotek.

Yes.

He was one of the rabbis at Belsize.

Yes. Yes.

Maybe you could tell us just a little bit about...?

Well, I- Ann knew him better than I did. But I just remember him is a very warm man with a wonderful voice. Extremely friendly. You could talk to him about anything.

Did you ever go to Belsize Square Synagogue?

Not for a service, no. Most we- when- we always go for the Kristallnacht Services.

Yes.

But apart from that- I- I went there when Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, my rabbi's son, was over here. And he went to Belsize Square, so I went over to meet him. And Rabbi Altshuler allowed me to sit in on the meeting. [laughs] But [Rabbi] Kokotek was- he was just "Koko". You know, we knew- we knew him as that. But Ann knows more about him than I do.

OK. We'll ask Ann. Because Belsize Square obviously was the synagogue founded by just German Jews.

[3:00:19]

Yes, well I- and they were supported by Lily Montague, of course.

Yes.

Very, very strongly. And Georg Salzberger, was holding services for the community at the LJS to begin with, before they got the premises in Belsize Square.

Yes. In German, wasn't it?

In German. Yes. Well, the- the first *Siddur* [Jewish prayer book] was in German. And, I mean, we used to meet some of them. The Strauss brothers, were representatives of Belsize Square to the Union- Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues. We used to meet them there. Because both Ann and I at various times were representatives there for- for the JLS.

So, there was a close contact?

There was always contact.

Ann Kirk: Purgatory for me.

Mn?

Ann Kirk: Purgatory for me to keep silent. [Bob laughs]

To Ann: You're doing very well. You'll get your chance. You will get your chance, I promise.

To Bob: Anything else you think we haven't talked about or...?

No, I think we've more or less covered it.

You're members of the AJR. When did you join, or...?

Oh, I couldn't give you a date. We've been members for quite a long time. We didn't participate too much because first we were working and then very busy at the LJS, so there wasn't an awful lot of spare time.

You're usually busy. [Ann laughs]

Absolutely. Much too busy. Which is a- well, in a way it's- I mean, we- we don't have- get time to get bored or- you know, get in too- too much of a rut. And one of the reasons for moving here was that the house was getting too big for us. So-

You have a flat. And where do you feel at home? Where is your home?

[3:02:44]

Here. Unless you mean spiritually, which is at the LJS.

Ann Kirk: We call it our second home.

Yeah. That's in St. John's Wood?

That's right. Well, and I was on the council for, I think twenty-seven years. Entirely against the rules, but I- I was always doing something either as a Chairman of a committee, and as Chair of the education committee, I chaired the rights and practices. And I chaired the committee, which commissioned our Shoah Memorial. I don't know- have you ever seen that? It's made by Anish Kapoor. It took us- it took us six years to find the right artist, and then it took him two years.

Where is it? Inside?

Yeah. Just inside the main entrance.

Maybe I've passed it and didn't realise what it was.

You, well, you don't normally come in that way.

Oh, okay.

The problem is that just when we were installing and just when we were rebuilding, the security situation worsened. So that we don't now normally open the front doors. People come in by the, what we call the "Number 28 door".

Yes.

At the back.

Right.

If you came in through the front door, you'd see it, because it's right there. So now it really has to be a dedicated visit.

Right.

You have to go around there to have a look at it. But it's worth a visit.

Okay. Next time I'll have a look.

Yeah.

And maybe the last thing I want to ask you- so, do you think belonging to the LJS helped you to find a home- to- in England?

I'm not sure that it helped finding a home in England. I mean, that's purely a function of, well, on the whole a function of family and work. But spiritually, and communally, of course that's so, I mean it's- and it's part of our life. It's a very big- big part of our life.

And you have a meeting tonight?

[3:05:16]

Yeah, the Annual General meeting.

Okay, we better hurry up in that case. Have you got a message for anyone who might watch this interview based on your personal experience? And on what we talked about?

Well, I think it's more or less what I'd said before, that you have to learn to accept people as they are, and respect the individual. Not try to change them or... treat them in a particular way because that's their station in life. It doesn't work like that. Everybody's an individual. And it doesn't matter whether they actually agree with you on something or- or not. You have to interact and treat them as human beings. And I- I think that's the basic building block of society. And if you don't do that, then eventually you run- you run into the sort of trouble that we did.

Okay, well, all I can say is thank you very, very much for this interview. We are going to look at your photos next time we come-

Okay.

And we're going to interview Ann.

Yeah. And I'll have to keep shtum [laughing]

Well, I'm very impressed that you managed that. Not many people can. [unclear] Just one- one moment and we'll...

Ann Kirk: Then you'll have to keep quiet.

That's what I just said. I'll have to keep shtum.

[End of interview]

[3:07:14]

[3:07:24]

[Start of photographs and documents]

Who is in this photograph? It's the middle one with your grandfather.

Photo 1

This is my paternal grandfather with my two sisters, Helga and Lotte. It must have been taken before 1921 because that's when my younger sister died. Presumably taken in Hanover, but I have no further details of it.

And what was his name?

He was... He was Sigmund Heller, born in Postelberg [present day Postoloprty, Czech Republic] in Bohemia and then moved to Crailsheim in Württemberg and from there to Hanover. Why, I don't know.

He was your father's father?

My mother's father.

Maternal - sorry. And he was called Heller?

Yes.

Photo 2

Well, this is a photograph of my mother Hedwig with my brother, Frank, and myself at naught years old, so it's taken in 1925. In Hanover, presumably.

Photo 3

This is a studio photograph of my father Josef Kirchheimer. Born 23rd of January 1883. But this photo must have been taken about 1936 or '37. It's the last, and only good one I have of him.

Thank you.

Photo 4

This photograph was taken in Garßen, which I think it's near Celle. In 1927 when I was two years old. We're either just arriving or- on holiday or leaving. And I'm sitting on the chauffeur's lap, at age two.

Photo 5

This is a photo taken in about 1927. It's my brother and myself with two uncles, outside the- what was then the *Technische Hochschule*, Hannover- now part of the university. The two ladies I'm not sure about, I think they must have been cousins.

Photo 6

This photograph was taken in Hanover - I can't tell where - at Easter in 1928. So I'm just short of three years old, clearly obsessed with balloons.

Thank you.

[3:10:44]

Photo 7

This is a Purim party arranged by a B'nai B'rith in Hanover. My mother was the secretary of the organisation. I don't know when, but I am in the front row, third from the left. I can't say I remember anything about it, but it seems to have been a good party.

Photo 8

This is a photograph of me on my first day at school with the traditional *Zuckertüte* – a dunce's hat full of sweets - standing in the playground just outside our flat. So, this must be... the start of the school year 1930.

And what was the address of the flat?

Well, at that time we lived at number 25 Christuskirche. That's the church at the back there.

Thank you.

Photo 9

This is a photograph of my sister Helga, who emigrated to South Africa in 1936 as a governess. And there she is with her two charges at the house in Johannesburg. She later- after she married in 1938, she then moved to Cape Town and after the war, to Brazil.

Thank you.

Photo 10

Yes, here I am in the garden of Dell Farm Whipsnade where I was billeted after- after evacuation in 1939. I was there until I went into the Army in 1944.

Is there a picture of the people you stayed with?

No.

But you said there was a family who you stayed in touch with.

Ah, no they were- the Morrises.

Yes.

That was [sound break]

[3:13:17]

Photo 11

This is a photograph of the Morris family; Arthur and Ivy Morris and their children Colin and Heather. I was sent to them in mid-May 1939 after I left my sponsor Mr. Smith, and stayed with them for about eight weeks until the boy that they had sponsored arrived, after which I went off to a hostel. I always stayed in touch with the Morrises. They were absolutely wonderful. In fact, they came to our eldest son's Confirmation service in 1939- in- in 1969. Although I moved around a bit, I sometimes went back to them for holidays. Of course, they were also evacuated. Arthur died shortly after our eldest son's Confirmation. That was 1969. And the rest of the family eventually moved to Canada. We visited Heather there later. And sadly- of course the parents have long gone, and sadly, both Colin and Heather now suffer from dementia. So, there's no longer any contact, which I find very sad indeed, because they were absolutely wonderful.

Thank you.

Photo 12

This is a photograph of the three of us who were billeted on Dell Farm. From the left, there's myself. Then- sorry, I can't quite see- Harry Titera in the middle. And on the right Henry Lowenstein. Three refugees, we were the last to be selected when we arrived in Whipsnade- quite coincidentally, I think, because nobody knew we were refugees. And Mrs. Hain and her sister Rose, who ran this chicken farm, agreed to take the three of us. Fortunately, we all had bikes, so we could get around. Hen- I don't know what happened to Harry. He was taken away by his mother after a couple of years. Henry worked on a local farm for a- a couple of years and then went to the States because his parents had survived and had gone there. And he became a- quite an eminent impresario in Denver.

Ann Kirk: And came to visit.

Right.

[3:16:19]

Photo 13

This is a tea party held in the superintendent's garden at the zoo, at Whipsnade Zoo at Whitsun, 1940. The whole school was invited. This is just a small section. There are four

refugees in this photograph. That's- I have to admit I don't remember their names, but it's the four on the right. The school originally was the Hampstead Parochial School at the top of Haverstock Hill. And those of us who were- those refugees who had been sent to a small hostel on Crediton Hill - that's just off West End Lane - were sent up there. So, we were at the school at the time of evacuation. And that's how we all ended up in Whipsnade. It was a quite high proportion of refugees.

Photo 14

This is a photograph of me in 1945, and I'd been in the army for probably about six months. I joined up in Glasgow, in December 1944. And this was still at the time of the basic training, before I moved on onto the Royal Artillery.

Photo 15

Here we are at Dell Farm in early 1940, trying to reinforce the access to the cellar of the building, in order to create an air raid shelter. My friend Henry and I are on the boards treading on earth, I think. And on the side, there's Mr. Thorn, a brother of the two ladies who ran the farm, directing operations.

And did you ever need this shelter?

We did have one bomb in the zoo. And it killed a duck and an elk died of shock the following day. But- it was a mistake, that bomb, because there was a listening station in the valley that they were really going for. And we just got a bomb by mistake.

Thank you.

[3:19:10]

Photo 16

This is a photograph of me at the prisoner of war camp where I served in Thirkleby in Yorkshire. Taken in 1947. I'm handing out numbers to the prisoners, probably a new draft, for them to have their photographs taken.

Photo 17

This is a photograph of the members of the Sergeants' mess at POW Camp Number 108 at Thirkleby in Yorkshire. Taken in 1947 or [194]8. No, I think it's probably 1947. I'm on the left.

Photo 18

This is a photograph of the Austrian prisoner of war band. Actually, I think they would have called themselves an Aust- orchestra of Thirkleby Camp. Taken, I think, in the autumn of 1946. They were an extremely music- musical and professional lot of musicians. I was quite sorry to lose them.

Photo 19

False start: [This is a photograph – Sorry.]

This is the photograph taken for our official engagement on the 19th of August 1949. We'd made up our minds a good deal earlier than that, that we were going to get married, but we were- well, the aunties wouldn't let us rush into anything. So, we had to wait. [laughs]

Thank you.

Photo 20

Here we are on our wedding day on the 21st of May 1950. From the right, that's my brother Frank. My cousin, Viola Klein. Behind us, is my another cous- a rather distant cousin, Henry Klein, known as Heini. And to the right- to the left of him is his wife, Lisa, who's my first cousin- put herself at the back because she's highly pregnant. And their daught- their daughter Barbara, a bridesmaid, is in the front. And on the left is a distant cousin of Ann's, Lotte - I can't remember her surname - who we found quite by chance. She was living in Belgium and Ann's aunts brought her over for the wedding. Unfortunately, she didn't speak much English, so we couldn't communicate very easily. But that's one of the few official photographs of the wedding that we've got.

Thank you. Yes please.

Photo 21

This is the whole family. Ann, myself, David and Andy in the garden of our house in Ballogie Avenue in Neasden. We had a flat in Maida Vale for the first two years of our

married life, and then moved to this small house- a semi-detached in Neasden, where we spent sixteen years before moving to Kenton.

[3:23:27]

Photo 22

This is a group photo of the whole family, except unfortunately our younger son Andy, who couldn't make it. Front row from the left is our elder son David, and myself, and Ann. Jenny, our daughter-in-law, Devorah, our granddaughter with her second child, Sophie, at that point about six months old. Sitting on the back on the right, Simon – that's Devorah's husband, with Joseph the first- their first child, who is there about- just about two years old. And on the left at the back our grandsons: on the left, Benjamin – Ben, and Joshua, known as Josh.

And when was it taken?

It- when was it taken? Just looking at September.

Ann Kirk: I think it was taken...

About September?

Ann Kirk: Yes, I think-

The year, about 2018?

About- yes, it must be about – September, October 2018.

Photo 23

Our youngest son Andrew, known as Andy, who unfortunately couldn't join us for the group photo. So here is a separate one in order to be able to include him. He was born in 1956.

Photo 24

This is a photo of the- from the reception Prince Charles gave for the 75th Anniversary of the Kindertransport at St. James's, in 2013. And he was extremely good in working the room.

Everybody got a little time. So, there are the two of us. In the background is another member of our congregation, oddly enough, Edward Mendelssohn, whom we know quite well. It was a very interesting occasion.

Photo 25

This is a photograph of me, taken in about 1934, '35 so I would be either nine or ten. There's nothing else I can say about it, really.

[3:26:14]

Document 1

This is the document of evidence of authority for me to be able to enter Britain without a visa. So, it's part of the Kindertransport procedures.

And the picture? You said it was taken in Germany.

The picture- well in effect it's a passport photo. I don't remember it being taken. It's not at least- not a bit like my passport photo. So, it must have been taken specially.

Document 2

This is the reverse of the other document- of the document that we've just seen. It includes the entry permission, and the immigration officer's stamp of the 4th of May 1939, which was when I landed at Harwich.

Document 3

This is a- the record held by the Kindertransport organisation, giving details of reports from me and the result of visits, giving a- giving a pretty good track of what happened to me after I arrived here.

When did you receive those papers?

After a conversation with with Paul Anticoni [from World Jewish Relief]- we- on his advice- we advised- applied for them. And we got them, I think probably about five years ago. And Ann also has her papers.

So, yes, it must- we must have had them for about five years.

And what was it like to suddenly have this- these documents?

Well, rather amusing. There are things in there that either I didn't know at all, or had totally forgotten.

Such as?

I don't know. I've forgotten.

You've forgotten. [both laugh]

I've forgotten.

Thank you very much Bob, again, for sharing your story.

It's a great pleasure. It's nice to have it all on record.

Well, soon you'll get the interview.

Ann Kirk: I've had the kettle on. Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?

Yes, in one second. Thank you.

Ann Kirk: Yes?

[3:29:20]

[End of photographs and documents]