

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Sex:	Male
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Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV209
NAME: Karl Bettelheim
DATE: 1st November 2017
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 1st of November 2017 and we are conducting an interview with Mr. Karl Bettelheim. We are in London and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

What is your name please?

Karl Albert Bettelheim.

And when were you born?

I was born in Vienna on the 23rd of April, 1936.

Thank you very much. Karl thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for the [AJR] Refugee Voices Project. Can we start please with a general question? Can you tell us about your family background, please?

I'm the only child of Friedrich Bettelheim and Lily Spira – née Spira, who I would call-describe as a bit upper-second, upper-middle class. My parents lived, when I was born, in a flat in central- central Vienna just a- a few steps from St. Stephen's Cathedral. The place called Franziskanerplatz. They shared the flat with my mother's parents, whose flat it had

been. It was a large flat and they had four- four children. Three girls, of which my mother was the eldest and one son. And because my grandmother helped in the antique shop run by her husband, Siegfried Spira, they had a- a, a maid who did the looking after the flat and so on... and I believe at times a cook as well.

What was the name of the antique business? What did they...?

[0:01:55]

‘Spira *Antiquitäten*’... which was right in the centre of Vienna. The shop was five minutes away from the opera. And the other- one daughter had died in the early 30s of natural causes. Had an appendicitis that went... bad. Got a flaming septicaemia and died. That’s the story we were told. ...Just to give an example of the sort of life my mother would have left: In the early- in, in 30s, 20s and 30s, the- top people visited the shop. As an example, she was seventeen when she was helping in the shop front and so on, and got to know some of the characters. And of course being close to the opera within five minutes’ walk from the opera, people like Richard Strauß, and Leos Janáček, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal would come in and see things, and you know, chat with her and so on. And Strauß who was at that time director of the opera, would give her tickets when he was conducting something. And one day he gave her a ticket to a special gala performance of ‘*Die Frau ohne Schatten*’. And my mother, who was seventeen at the time, was over the moon to get this ticket and so on. But she wasn’t allowed to go, because her parents considered it was not suitable for a teenage daughter of theirs to go to this opera. That tells you a lot about their morals and so on.

And this is the story your mother told you?

This my mother told me.

So she helped them in the...?

She helped- yes, you know, she - front of house you know, might make a cup of tea or coffee for somebody- or somehow - just chat. Because they would come in and see if there is anything new that they might like. I actually was very lucky a few- a couple of years ago, of visiting a place that I’ve always wanted to visit and haven’t had... Brno. And... we managed

to get into Janáček's house to see what it's like. And looking at the furniture, it reminded me of my grandparents.

Did you- do you remember your grandparents at all?

[0:05:03]

I remember my grandmother. She came and stayed with us for a time. After the- they- she and- she and my grandfather survived. Let's start at the beginning. I don't know how they got to Brussels, but they got to Brussels. And when Belgium was invaded - and again, I don't know how - they managed to get asylum with a- in, in- in one of the most expensive, posh brothels of Vienn- of Brussels, where they lived in the top floor. While downstairs the customers ranged from German generals downwards. And the- the owners of the business wouldn't let anybody- anything- come pa- come to them.

And they stayed there throughout the war?

They stayed there throughout the war.

That's quite a story.

...

So they were basically in hiding there?

Yes.

Sorry. I just have to do one thing... [sound break]

And who were- who were the owners? Who...?

I don't know.

So they saved them, basically.

They saved them. After the war they went to the United States which... my mother's sister had three children. And- living in Milwaukee - Wisconsin. And ...they couldn't settle in. My grandfather could never learn English. He had no friends. And got very sad and [becomes emotional]... died. He's buried there. And I never saw him again, after the... But my grandmother came back. Stayed- stayed with us for a bit. Then, she had a younger sister who always begged her to come to Vienna, who was back in Vienna. And she died there – or just outside Vienna. A small village called Hinterbrühl.

[0:07:35]

So your mother went-

My mother was-

Your grandmother - your grandmother.

That was my grandmother.

Went back to Vienna?

Yes.

When did she go back?

It was- it was- if my first year in Leeds... I would say- if I could remember rightly...19- she was back there in 1970-something... I think she went in the early 60s. She came to England for a- but didn't stay very long.

Yes?

This aunt. This sister of hers had a strong... force on her. I don't know why. What the connection was.

And you think was it the right thing for both of them to- to be back in Vienna? Back in Austria? For them?

For- for them- yes. They lived their own life.

Now coming back to you. You were- you were born in-

In Vienna.

In 19...

'36.

'36. So do you have any memories of Vienna at all?

None.

None. No. So what are your first memories?

First memory is being on the ship. I have a vague memory on the ship of a scene of somebody in the bunk above, or the bunk below, sitting there and having the feet dangling down. [Do you mind if I just blow my nose?]

The ship going to...

To- to, to Shanghai

To Shanghai. So, but, you were later told, and you know what happened.

Yes.

Why don't you- let's go back to...

Yes, I'll go back.

To- to Vienna. So you lived in that- you...

Yes.

... were born into that flat...

Yes.

... on the Franziskanerplatz.

Yes.

And your parents do you know where they had met... at all?

[0:09:38]

My parents- my father knew very well the middle sister. And I think it was through work. Cause she was- she worked in an office. And through the middle sister he then also met the oldest which was my mother. Briefly, just to give you the- briefly the situation. He had an- and they lived then in the flat of my grandparents...

Yes.

... which my grandparents had had for years. It was convenient; my father could walk to work. It was in the first district. Could walk- walked to work. They had a shop walkable to get to.

Which shop was that?

The antique shop.

The antique shop, yes. But what was your father's profession?

The Sigmund Lehr...company. I don't- I don't know the name of the- what the company was.

Yes?

And... they... he- he must have met my mother through her- through that. In the early 30s my mother tragically lost- became pregnant and lost the baby at birth due to placenta previa. And of course was very depressed... about this. And... they always talked about how wonderful- they did a trip- the first time my mother went outside Austria. People just didn't travel outside countries in those days. Out- and she- to- to Venice, to see an exhibition of Titian paintings, which was a special exhibition in 1935. And they- they enjoyed the art and so on, but my mother ...often said she felt very unsettled because of the politics in Italy. The dictatorship and so on. The atmosphere was... not congenial. And she was pleased to be back in Austria. And they'd had a walking holiday afterwards in the- in the Alps somewhere, which my mother particularly enjoyed also. So you see the love of art. And I believe that during that holiday I was conceived... cause I was born in April of the next year.

[0:12:40]

And what was your father's background? His family? What ...?

My father's- you will not believe this when I tell you that I do not know what my grandfather did for a living. He hardly ever talked about it.

Aha...

He and his wife's- his wife's family had a business in providing fodder for- animal food fodder for Vienna. They, they would- they supplied the fodder for the horse-drawn trams pre-First World War. And for the fiacres and so on. And my father told me that he had one of the nice things that he had was, they would have the people from the circuses come and buy fodder for the elephants and for the circus and so on.

Yes?

So he got free seats to the circus. The sad thing was, after having a second boy, she died.

His mother?

His mother. And he was ...He and his younger brother Ernest, were brought up really by ...his mother's- deceased mother's brother's family. So the main person that he would relate to would be, not the fam- not the blood relationship, but the married...

Yeah.

And she had five children.

And she took those two?

And she took those two. And he was the oldest of those seven children. So he often got blamed, "Why did you let them do this?" and, "Why didn't you stop them when they were doing something naughty?" And... Relations were a bit mixed. How much he saw of his father I don't know. But something I discovered, if I could jump forward for one second-

Sure.

When we were in the ghetto in Shanghai my mother often said, you know, "Why don't we play cards or something? Have a bridge game?" And he said, "I'm not having anything to do with cards." He taught me to play chess. But not cards. I- I have no idea- I can- no explanation until many years later I was in Sydney Australia where those children, with one exception... had got to. And the- they were telling me the various things they used to do. And they said they used to love having my grandfather come for Sunday dinner...

Yes?

...because he would do card tricks. [inaudible – becomes emotional] Relations with- between the two must have been very bad.

[0:16:26]

But it's not- it's not your direct memory?

It's not my direct memory.

It's what you were told.

It's just that you...

Yeah.

...you put two and two together.

Yeah... yeah. So he must have become independent quite early - your father?

Yes. Yes, he didn't go to univer- he was studious. He- I mean he, he was a brilliant linguist. He went to a *Gymnasium* in Vienna where he- you know, Latin at ten and Greek at eleven and French and German as second- French and English as second subjects and so on. I remember once walking with him. And he met somebody that I hadn't seen before. And they started talking in a language that I didn't under- I didn't know what it was. And I asked him afterwards, "What language was that?" He said, "Oh, that was Finnish." And I said to him, "I didn't know you spoke Finnish." He said, "No, neither did I." So that was his... But he was, as I said, did not have a happy childhood. And he started working at eighteen... above the office type. He did very well, in order to pay for his younger brother to do dentistry. And to cut a long story, they- they followed us to Shanghai, went to Israel after the war... where his wife had relations. And they have one son who's the same age as I am, born in January of '36. And he- I've just had an email from him. He- we're in contact. He visited us here.

Where does he live?

Kibbutz Zikim... In- near Ashkelon. And he's just written a book which is coming out early next year, I gather. About- short stories of Sinai of the time he was stationed there. Is following the Six Day War.

Right... So coming back to- to Vienna and your situation. So...when did things change for your parents and for yourself?

[0:19:08]

Anschluss. Which happened in March '36- '38, sorry, March '38...one month before my birthday, my second birthday, which again, I don't remember but my mother said was not the happiest of occasions. And my father was- had his- the office closed down. Was Aryanised and where there had been a portrait of Mr.[inaudible] there hung a portrait of Hitler. My father was sacked and... arrested by the Gestapo. Now, reports differ. He was held over a weekend, he was held for two days. He was held for one day. He was just held- interrogated briefly. All these I have heard. I don't know which one is true. But. A friendly Austrian policeman quietly recommended to him, when he was being released, that he should get-leave within a couple of weeks, or he's likely to be sent to Dachau. So my father tried to leave. Why he chose Belgium, I don't know And he tried to take my mother and me with him. But they diss- they dissuaded- the other daughter had already gone to America. Their son had moved out. Now they said, "We're- we'll be left with nobody here." So they- they said, you know, "What can they do to a mother- to a young woman and child?" Little did we know. So. We were- we stayed behind and he went to Antwerp. Why Antwerp, I don't know. And... see- being a linguist he read- saw the newspapers, the French and Ger- and English newspapers, where they reported truthfully what was really going on in Germany. And realised that we were in grave danger. And did everything possible for us to come over. In August '38, he managed to get us papers - not quite kosher papers - to go to Switzerland. But unfortunately when we got to Basel, a particularly diligent railway official realised something was wrong with those papers and sent my mother and me back to Vienna. Well, the good thing about this Basel episode was that while we were away those two or three days-

[0:22:45]

Yes?

Two or three days, somebody from the Gestapo came to my grandparents' place looking for my mother, because one of the girls that they'd employed earlier as cook, said that my mother had beaten her. If you were to meet my mother you wouldn't find anybody that could

have accused her of beating her. But of course the Gestapo took no- didn't bother about evidence. Anyway, it made the whole thing even more essential. So in Aug- in, in September, my father organised- wrote to my mother, and- on the basis of what she didn't need to know at the moment she was not to know- she wasn't- said she's to go with me and to take a train to Aachen, and stay in the- on a certain day, and stay in the "Hotel zu den Vier Jahreszeiten", which was one of the poshest hotels... hotel - range in Germany.

Yeah.

And when my mother arrived with me and her little suitcase containing essentials...

Yes?

She- just walking through the lobby she never heard so many 'Heil Hitler'-s at one time as... And apparently I made a- I made a fool of myself. I didn't want to stop going on the train. I wanted to see my father and I wanted, I wanted to be on the train not staying in this hotel. Anyway, she quietened me down saying we'll be on the train again, going on... Anyway, it was September the 22nd, that we got to- we went- she went down as... told by my father, she went down to the lobby. She said- he said, "There'll be a German lady who'll come and meet you. Do as she tells you." The German lady had five young women with her. She ran a dancing group ...that did dances...and so on, entertainment, in Antwerp pubs, Antwerp being a port city. You had sailors coming in and so on. So... they did erotic dances.

[0:25:54]

Yes?

We'll keep it at that. [laughs]

Yep?

Anyway. So, they went- she said the thing was she had five girls with her. The sixth was sick. And the dance couldn't contin- couldn't be; they needed the set of six for the choreography.

Yes?

And my mother was going to be number six. So... I was, you couldn't be a dancing girl with a two-year-old boy.

No...

I was left with a- total strangers, friends of that woman, [becomes emotional] where apparently I cried so loudly that they heard me the other side of the road. Anyway, gets to the consulate. And the consulate says, "I can't give you a visa." Despite all the arguments, they- "Can't give you a visa for Belgium because you haven't got stamped in your passport that you are allowed to return to the Reich at any time." So, off to pick me up. My mother had papers that my father had sent to her from a doctor, saying that he was ill and needed his wife and so on. So she- with me went to Gestapo headquarters. And the ... chief, the head in-general in charge, she said a very tall and elegant uniform and so on. She cried and so on and he said, "You know that if I give you this you can't come back." She said, "I do." [with emotion] And so he stamped it. Now. I have a theory. It may be true or not. This was the time when there was the conference, the Munich Conference of Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier and Mussolini about the Sudetenland.

Yes.

That the- there was a large group of military in the- in, in Germany which opposed, which were beginning to oppose Hitler. And there was a plan- they did not expect Chamberlain to give way. They expected that they would- it would- the conference would fail.

Yeah.

And then Hitler would mobilise, march on Czechoslovakia. And they would take the order to mobilise. They would mobilise, but not march on Czechoslovakia, but march on Berlin. And that he, this general was in on this, and decided that it's no point anyway because this is going to stop. Of course it did- of course Chamberlain did give in and it didn't happen. But I think that saved us. I've got a stamp in my- in my mother's passport. I will show it later.

[0:29:36]

Sure.

Anyway-

So you have a stamp that you are allowed to leave the country.

Yes. Allowed to return to Germany. *Heim ins Reich*. And with this we went back, dropped me again with those strangers. I screamed again, but she got the visa to Belgium. And the following morning... we were off on- on the train from Aachen. The ticket collector saw the- who when he came and saw her identity and passport said, I'll say this in German, "*Da ist sie ja.*" There she is. He'd obviously been looking for her. So if we hadn't had those stamps we would have been sent back and... don't know what. So we were in Antwerp. Again, I don't know this... from my- I don't have the memory of it but I have- I have been told that I- there was a window ledge on which I used to play, use matchboxes as trains. One into another and play trains on them. And this comes- interest in matchboxes comes later. And so my father decided that we are not staying in Europe. He's included Britain in this. He said, "He's too strong. Hitler's too strong... He- he walked over Chamberlain, and Daladier, the French Minister", and did everything possible to to leave. The only two places came, came up as possibilities were Uruguay and Shanghai. And Shanghai came up first. So, off we went. It was just around the Christmas holiday time and we went on a- to Marseilles. Oh, I have to say something. The Jewish community advised- got my mother to sign a piece of paper to say that she's going to Shanghai against their advice.

[0:32:26]

Aha...

Because it's a war zone. Which partly was true.

So they advised people not to go?

They advised people not...

So they were in contact with the Jewish community?

Yes.

And your father, where- was it in rented accommodation? In a hotel? Where did you stay in Antwerp?

I don't know.

Okay.

It had a window ledge, that's all I know about it.

A window ledge in a room...

Which I could play trains on with matchboxes. My father was a heavy smoker so matches were always around.

Aha.

Anyway, so from- from Marseilles the ship left- left just before New Year. We went via Tunisia with the French liner, Felix Roussel... Maritime... Maritime, Marine - something like that is the name of the- through the Suez Canal, down to Aden, where I got exceedingly ill and nearly died of diphtheria.

On the boat?

On the boat. Which of course nowadays you vaccinate against. Then we went Colombo, Saigon, Hong Kong, Shanghai.

On the same boat?

On the same boat.

And your- your father managed to just purchase tickets?

Yes.

Because Shanghai didn't require any visas at that point?

But you needed a- a China visa, because of transit- to get transit visas.

Right. And your father managed to get those?

Yes.

So at that point, do you think, was he was in touch with anyone in Shanghai? Did he have papers showing that he- that's where you intended to go? Or just the tickets?

[0:34:38]

Just the tickets.

Just the tickets.

And within days of arriving, he managed to get a very good job. As a- a- non- US, European trades and so on. Unlike the local people, we had a flat overlooking one of the rivers. Which the kitchen was big enough for me to ride a tricycle through.

And you remember that?

That I remember. And my mother would have a hairdresser coming once or- once or twice a week to the flat. I also remember that. And I remember we had a balcony. I could look down and... see the b- junks with bananas. Loaded to the top with bananas.

So which year, when did you arrive in Shanghai?

January '39.

And how long was the journey?

I can't- I don't know. It was- with all the stops I- I can't- I don't remember. I don't know.

But maybe two months or something like that...

No, no it wouldn't have been as long as that.

No.

But...

And did they- did your parents know any other people on the ship? Were- were they with...

No.

... some friends or relatives or anyone else-?

There was one friend of my family that actually went- that my father had befriended in Antwerp, bef- while he was there. A man from Nuremberg who- Jewish man from Nuremberg who was very friendly. He stayed- stayed as a best friend of the family. I treated him like an uncle. And then of course later, shortly afterwards, his brother came over. We tried to persuade my mother's brother to come, but he didn't. But we'll come to him later.

Okay. So your father managed to find a job?

He found a job with- well, with the Sassoon corporation.

Right.

We used- Mr. Sassoon was- Sir Victor Sassoon was one of the richest men in- in the world. I mean, you've got to realise that Shanghai was one of the major ports. In 1937 it- I think it was ranked third major port in the world.

[0:37:19]

Yeah. And you had some of the Iraqi Jews...

Yes.

... were in Shanghai weren't they?

Well, it was Mr. Kadoorie...

Mr. Kadoorie, yes.

...who... paid for- paid for the building of the school that I went to.

Right. And do you remember actually was there- in the Jewish community- were your parents in touch with the Jewish community in-?

Yes, I don't know how much in the initially stage, but of course working for Sassoon, you would be.

Something we didn't talk about is their Judaism, whether, in Vienna at all, was it important for them being Jewish or...?

It was just something that was natural. They happened to be, so they were. They kept good- as my mother said, that her mother kept a kosher kitchen till the First World War, when food was so difficult to get. Basically, save them from starvation, they had to buy whatever they could.

Yes.

And then- and initially before the First World War they would keep it only for- because they wanted their parents, the next, the older generation to come and visit.

Yeah.

So... it was something that was... not- not played an important role in their life.

No, I'm asking because I wondered whether in Shanghai it became more important because the community provided some sort of help.

Well as I said, the first two- three years we didn't need it.

Right.

[0:39:26]

I mean, I know there were people living in camps, you know. A cousin of my mother's also came over with her son. They're now in Sweden. Really, what pushed us together, was the ghetto. Just to point out Mr. Kadoorie was- had paid for and built- had built this school.

Yes.

And in December '41 - it was due to open in January '42 - they started taking- registering children who were five years old and upwards to go to start in January. And as I said, my mother chose the 8th of December to take me to and register me for the school. And there was- I have to say the greatest firework display. There was major shooting going on in the harbour, because when it was the 8th in Shanghai, it was the 7th- Monday the 8th, it was still Sunday the 7th in Hawaii. So at the point where the Japanese were bombing Pearl Harbour, in Shanghai they took over, they marched into the international concession area and the French colony that was part of Shanghai. And took over or wanted to take- and there was a British and American and an Italian battleship in the harbour. The- the...the British fought singularly strongly against the Japanese who wanted to take over the ship. The Italians were ordered to pass it- to, to transfer the ship to Japanese command. Whereupon the crew, or some members of the crew, went off- who were sent off the ship on to the ...outside the- on the land outside,

they started shooting at the waterline so that the ship sank. And it blocked the harbour... entrance for most of the war.

[0:42:16]

That Italian battleship?

The- well, the ship had sunk and blocked- stopped other ships going past. The British were the only ones that supplied [inaudible] the Americans handed over. And the Japanese, with great effort, managed to raise the ship just before the end of the war. The Americans bombed it again and sank it. And... I don't know what happened afterwards.

But you remember that day?

I remember that day.

Were you scared?

No... no. We were- we'd arranged to go to the school. There was shooting in the harbour. Well that was all right. It was away from us. The school yard, it was still a bit of a building site. I still remember we had to... walk over bricks and- and so on. But it was finished by beginning of January, so. I went- we had English teachers. I mean English national- British nationals, as teachers. And unfortunately when they- when the Japanese tightened their grip, the British and American and other nationals foreign- enemy aliens, were incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp.

[0:44:03]

Yeah.

You may have read about that. The- *The Empire of the Sun* by... I can't remember the author's name. There was a film made about it.

Yeah. What was the name of the school?

The Empire of the Sun.

No, the school.

School- Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School. And- SJYA - everybody called it.

So once the Japanese came, how did your life change?

Initially it didn't very much, apart from the fact that my father lost his job. He had left Sassoon for various reasons I don't- weren't discussed in my presence. And was actually the person who handed over the Chrysler Corporation sub-branch – Shanghai branch - to the Japanese. ...And of course was, was wage-less. But he had saved. He had saved up enough that we lived off his savings throughout the next three years, of course not knowing how long it's going to last.

Right.

[0:45:28]

And then in... '42, '43, something like- I can't remember the date, we were forced into this ghetto. And- where we had one room. Cause it was crowded with people moving from all over. One room - from a two or three bedroom house. We didn't- we left the place with the gara- view on the river cause that was part of the Sassoon empire. And suddenly the Jap- the Chinese coolies came one day and took, started to take all our furniture away. Because we were moving into one room, you couldn't move with- with furniture for a three bedroom house.

And that was furniture from- No-

That my parents had bought.

Yes, it wasn't something they brought from Vienna?

No, no. No, no.

No.

I took a couple of items. I was sort of five then. Took a couple of items into the toilet, locked the door and wouldn't let anybody in. They tried sweets, they tried all sorts of things. Didn't work. I finally of course, had to open the door. And off we went into the- we moved... into a tiny room. Single room on the first floor. Now but before that, I must tell something else. One day, before the war, before Pearl Harbour, my mother had some job to do in town- I mean in the centre of the business district. I don't know what it was, I don't know why we went but we went. Anyway, on our way back we noticed that there was a dog that seemed to be following us. Followed us all the way home. Including going over a crowded bridge. If you can imagine an Asian situation of a large crowded bridge, at- when offices close and the rush hour, I mean- and my mother she said this afterwards, said she was wishing the dog would dis- disappear, lose [tra- inaudible]. No. And on the other side of the bridge, there he came again... and continued following us. She was scared of course of disease, rabies and things that were thought of. Anyway, when we got home, there was a bag of potato peelings that she had left for the dust- rubbish collection. He started eating those. He was obviously starved. My father came home and he has a soft spot for animals, particularly dogs, and said, "I'll"- he will take him to a friend of his who is a vet to see if he can treat him. His actual intention, as I discovered much later, was to have it humanely put down.

[0:49:06]

Oh, right.

A day later, this of course I was told much later. A day later the vet rings him and says, [very emotional] "I don't have the heart to put this dog down. It's an Imperial Pekingese, the sort that only the emperors were allowed to have. Would you- I'll treat him - he's totally treatable with what he's got; he's just been maltreated - if you promise to take him." And he said he would. A few weeks later we bring back this dog and he's actually- when we first got him he was hairless. He'd lost all his hair. But shortly grew up and he was marvellous. [with emotion] He was my dog. I could do what I liked with him. He knew when I was coming home from school and would make a noise and so on. And one day we were walking with

him in the ghetto taking him for his nightly walk when a Japanese- a high-ranking Japanese officer approached us, and in broken English offered us a hundred dollars for the dog. A hundred US dollars which neither of us were allowed to have. I mean, we could have been in major trouble if the authorities knew that we had a hundred dollars in cash. And he- we said, no, and so on. And I must say, he did not take his gun out and say, "I'm having him." He- he left us and we never saw him again. Just to finish the story. Shortly after the war the dog got ill, severely, and- kidney disease- and died.

But he stayed with you throughout the war?

He stayed with us throughout the war.

And you could keep him in the ghetto?

In the ghetto- oh, yes, there was no reason why we couldn't keep a dog.

So that was nice for you.

[0:51:30]

Yes. It was a happy ending. In 2005, I was in Shanghai. I was a guest of the Shanghai municipality and the government, Chinese government. They had a special commemorative conference... on the anniversary of the end of the Second World War. We were treated like Chinese emperors. And I was only one of three that had been invited... from outside China. One of them was ...What was his name? A man who had become president, who was President Carter's treasury director. Head of Treasury. His signature appears on all dollar notes of that period.

Yes?

Anyway. And my topic was: how Chinese culture has affected my life. I can give you a copy of the talk that I gave.

Yes.

And anyway...so during that period, during the period when my parents were well-off and in the free period: pre-war, pre-Pearl Harbour, because of their interest in art and, and antiques and so on, my parents bought a few items of which- some tapestries and some bronze statuettes and a porcelain plate and so on. And there was a lot of interest. And they've got a couple of books on Chinese art. So I started collecting matchbox covers. Cause we found them so... colourful. And my father being a smoker, matches were used extensively. And also we had to use, we had to- one of the things that was difficult, was cooking. And my mother had a charcoal burner, like a flower pot which you put charcoal in and...

Yeah...

And again, needing a lot of matches so I started collecting these matchbox covers. And I think whatever situation, there's always some nice things you can do. Can I just have a glass of- drink of water? [break]

So the dog- so the dog was part of - nice things.

Part of nice things, yes.

Chinese dog?

[0:55:03]

Well, Imperial Pekingese. If you want to know, the nearest that you see here of the dog, is the King Charles spaniel - golden brown and white fur. Anyway, I went- I was distracted- we were in 2005- for a second.

Yes?

And I decided to go and visit the area where we used to- I had an extra couple of days, following this conference, to visit this area. And my heart stopped still. I saw this dog! He looked like my old dog. [emotionally] My own, my dog was male, and he went out at night

sometimes. And I was wondering, is that one of his descendants? It was no more than a few yards away from where I used to live. Who knows?

What was the name of the dog?

We called him 'Foh'-

Foh?

...spelled... spelled F O H, which is the Shanghai dialect word for 'good luck'.

So this brings us to another topic about Chinese; did your father- did you learn some Chinese?

We didn't, and I think it's a dreadful indictment for authorities, that here we were, living in the country and not- I mean, let's face it, the Chinese didn't help because they learnt pidgin English much faster than we could learn Chinese.

Right.

My father learnt Chinese. But I think- but this was the sort of standard thing. I mean I read many years ago the ...book by Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandria Quartet*-

Yeah?

... and there they were talking about the fact that, "Oh, no, we don't- we don't have to learn Arabic. We- they should learn..." It was exactly the same attitude there. I mean, there were parks, public gardens in Shanghai: 'Chinese and Dogs Not Admitted'. It was their country.

[0:57:47]

It was part- I guess that's a part of the colonial story.

Yes.

But did your parents feel strongly about that, at the time? Were they- what did they?

I don't think it was talked about.

No.

Yes, my father- my- my parents did sort of think it a bit odd, I mean...

And who- what sort of friends did your parents have at that time? Other refugees?

Other refugees, yes.

Yeah. And what do you remember from the school? Do you remember what was taught?

What- your subjects? What did you learn there?

Well it was a primary school.

Yes.

We had standard subjects. The usual, you know, English, I don't- mathematics... later on we did French as a second language. And ...I tended to be near the top of the class. A girl and I competed for that position. And I discovered much later- somebody was telling me that there was a prize to be got at the end of each year. That on a few cases I was nominated for this. And I was the, the head, the teacher, the school, the class teacher vetoed it, because we weren't religious enough.

[0:59:55]

Interesting. So in that school there were refugee children, but were there also local- let's say, Iraqi Jewish children?

No, no.

No.

No. We were predominantly refugee children. There were one or two non-Jewish refugees who had escaped.

Yes? They were also there?

Were also there. But they were- they were- You could count [them on] one hand.

So what I was wondering, when- when you had to move to the ghetto when obviously in the Japanese occupation, you were with your parents. Were you afraid? Were you sheltered through your parents? Was it a-? How? Do you see what I mean? You were very young.

I would say I was sheltered. I did not realise the danger we were in. I mean, twofold: One, which we apparently did not know at all about, is that the Japanese- the Germans sent over to Shanghai a colonel Meissner, whose nickname was the 'Butcher of Warsaw'. And for him to organise with the Japanese, a final solution. The Japanese refused. And the reasons why they refused have to this day not been explained. There are two theories and I like both. One is- goes back to the beginning of the century, when Japan and Russia were about to have a war. And Japan wanted a loan, bank loan, to buy armaments. And they sent their finance minister all over the world and he got a negative from everybody. Except finally... he came to London. And saw a Mr. Schiff who was apparently a very wealthy banker here in those days. And he gave them what he wanted. And the Japanese, astonished, said, "I have been to New York, I have been to Paris, I have been there and nobody wants to lend me any money. Why are you doing it?" And he said, "I want you to beat tho- those anti-Semitic Russians. I'm giving you everything you want. Just beat those." And of course the Japanese did... and they'd never forgotten this. The other one - I like this explanation. The other explanation, which I think is even entertaining is, they called in leaders of the community including a- some- couple of rabbis. "Why should we not do- follow our allies' rules and deal with the Jews as they've done?" There was- and one little rabbi sitting in the back came up and said to the Japanese leader of this committee... "Have you been- have you seen the German adverts about Aryan culture and Aryanism?" They said, "Yes." "Do you remember that they- they showed the great achievements of blond haired, blue-eyed tall Aryan people?" He said,

“Yes.” “How many Japanese do you know that are blond, blue-eyed and tall? ...They’re going for us now. You are very likely to be next.”

[1:04:08]

Anyway, fateful day: 17th of July 1945. The war in Europe was over. The Americans had got close enough across the- the Pacific to... start to bomb Shanghai and fly back safely. And there was a major bombing raid over Shanghai. There were a number of dead, including a friend of my mother’s... a lady who- she had a shop and they were hiding in a... place where people were told to- plenty of the houses had shelter- had cellars to hide in a place within the- a sort of storeroom. She was there with the family. She came out. She remembered something that she wanted to take from the shop. At that moment a bomb fell outside the shop, shattered it and she was killed. And there were further bombing raids. The school- many people, we fortunately not, but many peop- houses that people lived in were- had to be accommodated. The school became a- a hospital. It was July anyway so it was summer so, summer holiday time. And then [becomes emotional] one evening I heard noises coming from downstairs. And- the war is over. And with that... the war was over. The Americans came. And I believe strongly that if it hadn’t been for the atomic bombs, tragic though they were, I wouldn’t be here. The Japanese- the way to which they fortified Shanghai, if you consider how they would have fought and fortified Tokyo, there would have been battles street, by street, by street. The- there was- every square, every crossroads...

Yeah?

...the- there are four points in the crossroad- pieces of pavement, little squares like that. At the tip of that, they built a foxhole surrounded by sandbags. So, anybody coming down any of those streets would immediately be shot at. And this- and story went around that the Japanese women had their hair cut - because they have strong Japanese hair- Asian hair is stronger than European. You know, it’s strong hair - so they could make bows and arrows and continue the fight when the guns and ammunition ran out.

[1:07:56]

So how did your parents deal with the occupation- with the Japanese occupation at that time? How- how were they coping?

My father managed to do odd little jobs. Sometimes translate things for somebody. Do that sort of thing. My mother- as I said we had one room. (Can I just blow my nose?) As I was saying, my mother had to go to the market every day. There was no such thing as a fridge. We had to be careful, I mean, maybe this is why I chose the career I did, but I don't know. But... infectious diseases were - rife. We did not- every tomato had to be scalded and peeled. So did apples. Lettuce - just wasn't eaten. Everything was cooked. We had to be careful of flies. We had a box container with chicken wire on the outside, so that no flies could get in. Once, I remember, I happen to remember, my father came home from work and a fly had got in. There was a fly flying around inside. We threw everything away.

So you were very careful.

Very careful. And I have to say, touch wood, that none of us got dysentery or anything like that. Cause it could be- I mean, words like 'dysentery', 'cholera', 'typhoid', I knew when I was a little boy.

[1:10:14]

Yeah. So you got ill on the boat, but then not afterwards? Cause you said you got ill, on the boat, coming to Shanghai...

Oh I had all the- I- I got measles while we were in the middle of the- of the war.

Right.

I was- six weeks I was severely, you know, couldn't- couldn't look at light. Curtains had to be drawn all- all day and I ran a high temperature, and so on.

But I assume there were doctors. There must have been refugee doctors as well-

There were doctors- oh yes, there were- there were doctors. There was a refugee hospital ...which- shortly after the war, I developed appendicitis and was operated on. It was an emergency case. I was- I was operated at two in the morning by a surgeon who was called out of his bed.

Right. So when the Americans came, was there an idea that you could go somewhere else soon from Shanghai or what-? Or did people- at that point, what did people-?

Well people were trying to do all sorts of things. We tried for an American visa, but the... quote- the- they had quotas.

Yes.

The Austrian quota was very slow- very low. And so we didn't get in. My parents often said if it- if it had stayed the way it was before the war, they would have been happy to have stayed there. But... it didn't. My father worked for the American Air Force in their... stores and so on, you know, keeping, maintaining aircraft, et cetera. And I remember him taking me out on a- on a Sunday when there wasn't much happening and showing me around the aeroplanes and the soldiers used to like coming.

Yes?

[1:12:43]

He would invite officers that he got friendly with to come and have dinner with us. They- they thought the idea of being with a family and so on was nice- for them. They usually brought nice gifts. They taught me to drink Coca-Cola, which was new to me. But I was very surprised when I subsequently sometime bought- bought some Coca-Cola. I remember I was only nine.

Yeah.

And this- and it didn't taste quite the same. And they said, "Oh, well, that's because we put some bourbon in." So...

Did you move back to the old flat or did they find a new accommodation?

No, no we found a new place. And... as I say- said, I- I enjoyed my life there to a large extent. And I thank my parents for protecting me.

Yeah.

From the great dangers that we were submitted to.

So personally, what was your worst experience in- in Shanghai for you?

My work experience?

Worst- the worst.

Worst experience? Hiding under a big table while we were bombed on the 17th of July '45. And the subsequent bombing. My father's brother's place was- was damaged severely. Unliveable in. And they lived in the school. But after- after the war people tended- a lot of people started leaving. People, I mean, people managed to get... ..managed to get visas for all sorts of places. As I say, the cousin of my mother's and family had family in Scot- in Sweden and went to Sweden. People were- a number went back to Germany. A lot went to Palestine as it then still was.

Yep.

I'll tell you a story about that. A lot of people were- were very pro what was happening in the Middle East, the creation of Israel and so on. And wanted to go there. And we had one teacher, a Mr. Posner - I still remember his name - who propagandised that we go- should- we should all go to Israel- or Palest- et cetera. I mean, I'm one of those people who, if everybody runs this way, I always go the other way. Now, I had been given a very nice book. I was always interested in Greek legends and so on, stories. The one, *The Book of Greek Myths and Legends*, beautifully illustrated and so on. And I made the- I took it to school one day and showed it to this teacher. It was to do with our subject- what we were doing. And he

asked whether he could borrow it. And I said, “You have to ask my mother.” So when she came and picked me up, he asked her and she said, “It’s all right, yes, you can borrow it for a few days.” I never got it back. And after all his propagandising about going to Israel, he went to New York. There’s a moral there somewhere.

[1:17:14]

But options, your- your family didn't want to go to Palestine?

No.

Your parents- no. So where did they-? They wanted to go to America, it didn't work.

Can I just tell one other story? It actually goes back to pre-war, pre-Japanese, pre-Pearl Harbour.

Yes?

My mother had been invited by a group of ladies that organised the day trips, to do a day trip to a- a thirteenth century Buddhist temple and pagoda, Longhua pag- pagoda, which is the- sort of the oldest in the Shanghai area. She heard the day before that we were supposed to go that her brother, only brother, had been caught by the Nazis on the Franco-Swiss border. And she really didn't feel like going. But I-I pestered her; [emotionally] I was looking forward to this trip. Anyway, we got off the bus that they had hired. And she was so taken by the architecture. The roofs were like that and so on which were very- So she stole out while they were streaming in the main door- main gate- she stopped to explain to me the, the difference between this and what a church would look like, and so on.

Yes.

And while she was doing this we sort of heard somebody selling incense sticks, said, [with emotion] “Come Missy, make wish. Buy incense.” She did. And set fire to it when we got in, in front of the Buddha. She wasn't religious. I asked her what she wished for. She wished good luck for her brother. He survived three years Buchenwald... and lived into his nineties.

And she used to say sometimes while- during the war, "I hope the Buddha of Longhua is looking after him." ...Anyway. I- I thought I wanted to bring this in.

On that topic, were there actually, because I know- were there actually people who became Buddhists? Because I actually recently went to a talk about German refugees who went to India and they were- they all became Buddhists.

Not that I know of.

[1:20:22]

Yes.

I mean, I won't say there weren't. I have no idea; I don't know.

Or the next question is, were there refugees who married local women?

Very small number, but there were.

Which is an interesting topic, isn't it?

I mean, there were 25,000 of us.

Yes.

I mean com- compared to- that's more than Australia, New Zealand and India and so on, had taken.

Yeah, that's a lot of-

And there was never any- I cannot say there was any racism. The Chinese were poor. We were poor, but the Chinese were poorer. We used to get invited to New Year's dinners by neighbours. And to put in a little plug, we never bombed anybody. We didn't kill anybody.

Yeah. So what contact was there with the local population? For example let's say, you, did you know?

Friendliness. The Chinese are very friendly people. But very proud of their...

Yes. So did your parents have Chinese- did they have some friends, or did they...?

There wasn't much intermingling.

That's what I meant, yes. So it was- quite separate?

Yes.

Yeah.

There was a case- a situation that I remember once... During the Rosh Hashana holidays, they tended to hire a cinema to take the crowd. And for reasons I- that don't matter, it overran the time. And a lot of people - Chinese people - queued outside waiting to go to the cinema at the time indicated. And there was a bit of a riot starting. And out came the cinema owner and said, "There's a religious service going on, we can't stop straight away." And when he- as soon as he used the word 'religious' apparently they said, "That's alright." And it quieted the...

[1:23:04]

So there was tolerance?

Yes.

So, the post-war period for you was a happy period - in Shanghai?

Yes. Oh, yes, yes. Absolutely. I mean, both periods: the period before Pearl Harbour and the period after- of peace...

Yes?

... were happy periods.

And you gave a lecture about how it influenced you?

Yes.

So how do you think? Maybe this is a good point to talk about it. Because we can talk about that at the end of the interview as well. How- what did you, what did you take? What do you think did you take? I mean, you were very young.

Well, a love of Chinese food. A love of... Chinese art. I mean...the things that I- that I have inherited from my parents, which they bought, are treasures that I don't- that I like to look at regularly. If I see pictures of Shanghai... [emotionally] something moves in my heart.

You have an attachment to...?

Sorry?

You have an attachment to it?

Yes. One of my most favourite pieces of music is *The Song of the Earth*. Do you know it?

No.

Music by Mahler. Translated from Chinese poems... which ...my, my mother taught me. There is one poem in which they describe lotus flowers, fallen off the tree, lotus tree, floating down a little river. And I remember her showing me this and singing - she didn't have a good voice, unfortunately - singing 'the lotus flower is floating down the river'. And I've remembered that.

So did you actually want to stay in Shanghai? Or did you know that you basically- that everyone was leaving and that it was time to... go somewhere else?

Yes, well everybody else was leaving.

Yeah.

I mean, as I told you, I was registered to the school when the school was initially built. And I was in the class for some four or five-hundred children. There were thirty of us left in the classroom when it closed in January '49.

[1:26:42]

Right.

And as I said, it doesn't exist anymore. The building's been pulled down. And...

And so your father, the family decided to go back to- to Vienna?

We were sent- we were sent by the Austrian government- Austrian consulate, who had sent us- given- given us back our Austrian passports. We were sent a letter saying that they're organising a boat, through the UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association], United Nations- I don't know exactly what organisation it was -

Yeah.

To take us back to Ital- to- to Europe. Whether the destination of Naples had been mentioned at the time or not I don't know, but that's where we were going. And the communists moved faster than- oh, yes. They even sent us a piece of paper written in Chinese characters - large bold letters - and underneath in English: "This is a neutral dwelling. Not involved in the war. Please leave alone", or something like that. You know. So- to put in the front of our door in case the communist army turned up. I mean, this- and ... We- yes, it said, "This boat is going and is likely to be the last." It was the last. And, unfortunately, well I suppose fortunately for them, but unfortunately for the rest of us, they had to take many more refugees. Because Nanking, Nanjing as it now is - fell to the communists. And there were a lot of people, it having been the capital of nationalist China, a lot of people were working there. And they

...wanted to- wanted to leave as well. And one of the people told us he and his family were just sitting down to dinner when an officer said, "If you're not in the port of Shan- Nanjing in fifteen minutes, we'll leave without you." And he said they put their spoons down. Took their bag and drove their car to the port. Left the keys in – and... went. So- so there were people- particularly worried were the White Russians.

[1:29:57]

So how many people were on that ship?

We never got a full number but it was about 1,600.

And when did it sail from Shanghai?

January '49 which makes it, arrived in January '39 - I left in '49.

So I think this is a good time to have a break and we pick it up from here in a little bit.

Yes – OK.

[1:30:30]

So, we are continuing our interview. And we got to you leaving Shanghai. Maybe let's pick up from there.

Yes.

What do you remember?

I remember that I was weeping bitterly when we were- when I was watching the ship leaving the harbour, because everything that I knew was going to be gone. Going to a new place. Unknown. And- and it shows you that it can't have been too bad for me, to have enjoyed my time there. As I said, we- we had a ship, it was called 'Captain Marcos'. It had been Kaiser Wilhelm II's luxury yacht. As part of- acquired after the First World War. And it was run by

that P & O, I think, line. So we had marble inlay dining rooms and so on. And very poor cabins. My- my parents managed within a couple of days to get a place in what is known as 'the hatch' which is down the first level. You had to climb down the stairs and with help of the ...sailors, put up a sort of barrier so we had a separate space. We would go up to the main dining room for meals and so on. But you can imagine for a twelve-year-old a long journey on a ship with all sorts of places to hide and games to play was a whale of a time. My mother wanted- sort of wanted me to- I was due to have my Bar Mitzvah in- after my birthday on the 23rd. - and thought she would like me to do something. Anyway. She couldn't organise- I was trying to- to learn the passage to read and it was just too difficult. But I did read the title in the Seitenstetten-Tempel, the main one in the centre of Vienna. And the Mayor and all sorts of people - dignitaries - made a lot of do about it. Here was somebody returning to Vienna...

[1:33:30]

Aha.

... and so on. Anyway, I had- I had a good time in Vienna. It was difficult, initially, getting into the- having to write in German. While I could speak fluently, because we spoke German at home, while I could speak fluently my, my reading I learnt quickly and understood. My writing- in the first ever essay that I did, all the commas that I wrote were in the wrong place and where there should have been commas there weren't any. But I put some work into it and basically they gave me- I arrived in early April, so it was the beginning of the summer term. They weren't going to mark any of my work that I did. They- they... said that I will be given- I will be given- personally tested at the end of the holidays to see how I'm doing and which form level to be put in. And of course my aim was to go into one of my age. And the threat of being in the lower class fired me up and so I did far more than I needed to, probably. And as I said I- I was, I wasn't top of the class, I wasn't bottom. I was in the middle somewhere and coped. There were a few things that I couldn't- that I had great difficulty with. There was a thing called 'engineering drawing', 'geometric drawing' or something like that, which you had to do in ink with special pens and so on. So it was- we asked- my mother asked about whether there was an older boy who could perhaps give me some help, and there was. And just to make things even more - how shall I put it - odd, perhaps, because there was a shortage of- housing, shortage- when isn't there a housing shortage? There was a lot of- high

housing shortage because places were still bombed- had been bombed and so on. So we were in- do you know Vienna?

[1:36:14]

Yeah, a little bit.

We were housed in a place in Sievering, where there had been a villa of a- of a wealthy Jewish banker who – don't know what happened to him. But... we lived in one of the rooms of the villa in- there. It was a communal kitchen and so on. And I went to school. My mother did whatever cooking and so on needed to be done. And my father managed to get a job which was reasonably paid and it was on the edge of what could be called legality. They were using Vienna as a neutral place to... to export things into the communist countries. Vienna was ideally suited so there were times when under my bed there were cases of Cadbury's chocolate, were due to be sent to eastern Europe. And was that surprising when we came to England an found chocolate was still rationed.

Yeah. But before we talk about Vienna, let's just go back a little bit to the trip. To the boat ride. So can you tell us the route that this boat took again please ?

Well we went - Shanghai, Singapore was our first stop. And we weren't allowed to land the ships. The ship docked in mid-sea and we- I told you about the accommodation that we had. They built a shoot out of wood to go from a crane into the ...deep parts of the ship. It was going on coal. And anyway, we- the first minute of the coal going through that shoot the shoot burst and we were completely covered in soot. The only thing the ship did was provide us with- with showers and cakes of Imperial Leather soap. I still remember. It's good soap; it works well. I still use it. And we re-built our thing and went off. The next stop was Durban, which we, having gone through the straits of Sumatra - between Sumatra and Malaysian peninsula - we then turned south. We had an almighty hurricane and I thought the ship was going to collapse. And I hoped it would, so, so bad; it's the only time I've ever been badly seasick. But otherwise I had one of the most wonderful experiences on board. My father called, called me up one- early one evening. The sun was about to set. It was full moon and so it was absolutely clear blue sky. Wall to wall blue sky. And looking west one saw the sun setting into the sea and the sea turning gold. Looking east you saw the moon rising out of the

sea turning silver and just standing there, on the point, looking at both sides... was astonishing.

[1:40:28]

And did you make friends on the boat? Were there other young...children?

There were others there as well, yes.

So you were then, Durban-?

Durban-

And from Durban?

Durban, we- we were inundated with visitors. There came Jewish ones bringing presents for the children, toys and games and things. We had difficulty going on shore, again, they didn't really want us. I- I did manage to get across with my mother. My father managed it on another occasion. They didn't want whole families going – together.

Right.

And... after Durban we went round the Cape. And then up to Dakar in French West Africa [present day Senegal]. I can't- I can't remember what- what the name of the country is that it is in now. The country is called, itself- I could look it up on the map but it's.. And there we were allowed out. We could go anywhere and I still remember the- the market. And I mean a... oriental – or, it's not oriental - African market is seen to- seen to be believed. Everything was so- Anything you wanted you could buy there. And colourful and... so on. And with this we came into- through the Strait of Gibraltar to Naples, where we docked in the middle of the harbour. And there was a major ...we reached a discussion as to what they're going to do with us. Because while the Austrians - which were about a third of the ship - were all right, I mentioned before there were White Russians who were passport-less. And the Italians didn't want them staying there. So after various debates going on between represent- our representatives and ship's representatives and the Italian government and so on, they

...unloaded us and we were- the ship went next to the shore- next to the shore as you- and we were marched through a...two sides of a path, there were soldiers with guns standing. And we had to walk between them to a train. The train was absolutely packed. We were all dead tired. It had been a very strenuous day, packing and so on. And despite the tiredness, we, we initially couldn't go to sleep but we then slept very heavily. And I remember being told after we woke up that just across the corridor of the train, a man had had a heart attack. And a doctor had been called and so on and we'd slept through all that. That shows you how tired, and so on, we were. When we- when we woke up and opened the- opened the- pulled the curtains away from the window, we- we saw a magnificent sight. Something that I shall never forget. It was hilly country, and absolutely covered in blossom trees. Apple blossom. Pear blossom. The pink pale colours. Hill upon hill, covered with these. [with emotion] As I said, there's beauty everywhere. Look for it. You'll find it.

[1:44:38]

Where was it?

This was somewhere in southern Italy. And we got to a place called Trani, which is near a bigger place called Bari...where there had been an Italian military base. And the ...places where we could- where we could sleep and so on and stay because we were going to be there for a few days, were an ex-military base. You had the sleeping arrangements and so on. And basically they used this to sort us out. We- we stayed there for about ten days. And I still remember my mother saying, "Oh, I can eat lettuce now!" I've never gone- I don't like lettuce particularly. I- I have an aversion from- from it. But anyway, we took some walks around there. My father had some ...banking to do. I don't know what. I mean, I'm not told these things. But he had to go to Bari. And I- he took me along. And we had lunch there. I still- I still remember my first time I had minestrone soup. Anyway, we went up to- to Austria on the train. And having had some nice experiences on trains we had one of my most- worst mis- experience. Having to cross the Po River with a deep valley, we were crossing on a bridge. The main bridges had all been blown up in the war. A bridge, of which you could not see anything looking out of the window. All you saw was a deep drop on either side. And it went as it- very slow, walking speed, if that, if not slower than walking speed. So it seemed to take an eternity. I expected at any time to topple out over. Anyway we got to the Austrian border and there was no problem as far as I could judge. We arrived in Vienna and the- the

Mayor came and welcomed us all. And we were told where we were going to be staying. This[inaudible] this villa in Sievering for us. And I don't- you know, some people had arranged- they made their own arrangements, but-

[1:47:50]

And what- what did your parents feel at that point?

Sorry?

How did your parents feel coming back to Vienna?

There were things- and this applies to ...even since. It's a love-hate relationship. I will give you a quote of my mother - much later in time when my father had died already and so on. And she'd been to Vienna - is [with emotion], "The Viennese don't deserve a beautiful city like this." I think that sums it up. I mean, I- I don't know if you saw a programme about Vienna on television a few weeks ago. Montessori...[Simon Sebag Montefiore] gave the history of Vienna... in three periods. And he also says it's a beautiful city. And I can't deny. Anyway, my father got a job. My mother was kept busy. I was busy with the school work.

And how did- what sort of- how did the pupils react to you? Were there any other returnees so to speak?

No. No...

You were the only one?

I was the only one. Only one in my class. I don't know about- yes, there was one in one of the lower classes.

Did people ask you questions, or was it-?

I found this, of my career, the strangest thing of all is that people didn't ask questions. I was a bit of an odd-ball there. I mean, when they were talking about football teams... I was- I

couldn't provide any - help. I did not find any anti-Semitism. I mean, they may have had it, they may have been, but I didn't find- I mean, they were obviously...

[1:50:08]

You didn't experience any?

No.

No.

This was at the age of thirteen-

Yeah.

Thirteen – fourteen.

And can I ask you, were there people on the boat who didn't come back to Austria? For example, who stopped off in Italy and maybe went to Palestine and did other things?

Yes, yes. Yes. Yes. I mean many of the White Russians had permits to go to Venezuela which they never wanted to do.

Right.

What happened to them, I don't know.

But for your parents they wanted to go back to Vienna- or-?

It was the only choice. They didn't particularly want to. But we were, you know... at least they would know their way around and so on.

Because for them, it must have been quite hard, so soon after the war...

Yes.

... in a way to go back. I guess without their friends and family.

But they enjoyed showing me things.

Yes.

I got- in the year that I was there I got taken to the opera six times. I got taken to the museums and so on. And the curious thing is, it's something that- I knew virtually nothing about Christianity.

Right.

I knew about Buddhism. And I knew about Judaism but- and of course you can't go around a European city without... And being shown the paint- my mother was very keen to show me the- the art museum- the National Gallery there and so on. And of course many of the paintings are New Testament scenes. So - you'll be surprised - so I decided to read the New Testament so that I could understand the pictures. I remember telling that to an intelligent very devout Christian - good friend of mine. And she found that very strange that- as a reason to read the New Testament. Which did not appeal to me as a, as a document.

[1:52:41]

But did your parents manage to bring what they had- these objects from Shanghai? They managed to bring it with them on the-?

Yes.

On the boat?

On the boat. And then on that train. We had two big metal cases about that big, full of things. You know. Clothes. We knew we were coming to a much colder place. And it was nice to come in the spring and find the weather nice and summer and so on.

And then did you- you said you were in the Seitenstettengasse for your Bar Mitzvah.

Yes.

So there was a ceremony of some sort? Yes?

Oh, yes. Yes.

And who came? Did you have some friends there or was there any of-?

Well, my uncle who had been in Buchenwald came.

The one who survived because of the... ?

Yes. The Buddha, yes.

The Buddha. Yes...

My mother's aunt, the one that later got- got her sister to come from America.

Right.

Hilde was her name - came. She had had a- she had inherited a furniture store, which was- the inheritance had been divided- this was long before the war. Had been divided between her and the man who was a general manager, who was not Jewish. So she had arranged that he looks after the shop. And sends her a regular income, while she tries to escape. And she actually went down to Yugoslavia and worked with the Partisans. She brought some friends along and- we were talking about cinemas. One of her friends was- owned a cinema. I think it was called 'The Colosseum' but I may be wrong. And they were going to show the first time-premiere of *The Third Man*. There was a lot of writing in the newspaper about it, and so on. And I- I, I wanted to go. Everybody wanted to go. And we were told that I can- it's not for-fifteen years is the limit, the lower limit that people can go and I was four- I was thirteen.

[1:55:30]

Yes?

So she booked us a lo- a *Loge* [box] in the cinema, and I was told that we were foreign visitors and only to speak English in the cinema. So I got to- and not to tell anybody about it. So, I got to see the premiere of *The Third Man* in Vienna. And of course I was the envy of all the boys in this class because I, I went to this film which they couldn't go. But still there was no... antagonism.

So did you think that you were going to stay in Vienna or was there an idea-?

The intention was to, the intention as far as I know is, until a certain crucial moment which I'll come to in a second, that we go - that we stay in Vienna.

Right.

My father got a job. He, he'll get one again, if he finds this place a bit shaky. And we can get a flat from the council. We were high on the list. When... The key was, the Korean War broke out - 1950. Now you might say, what on earth has the Korean War got to do with this? My father took us up to the Vienna hills, the Vienna woods - hills, the Kahlenberg. And if you look south from there you see the city of Vienna sprawled in front of you, et cetera. If you look north you see the plain, the north Austrian plain and the Bohemian hills – Böhmerwald, in German - in the distance. He said- it was a lovely day. I still remember that as if it were yesterday. It was a lovely day and he showed us, he said, "Do you see there... the Bohemian Hills? It's two hours by tank from there to here. I don't want to be caught again." He had met his boss from Vienna, from before the war by pure coincidence... at a tram stop. And he offered at the, at the place he offered him his job back. But it had to be in London. And so off we went. I told the school that we were not going to be back in- and they were very sad. The school- the class teacher was very upset... But I question whether I would have had the career that I've had, in Vienna. I don't know. I haven't sort of met anybody that had been a refugee as a child, went back and went through the university system in- in Austria or Germany. Would be- that would be an interesting study some time. Anyway, we arrived in London - having had a stop in Paris to go to the Louvre - on the 17th of July 1950.

[1:59:28]

And what were your first impressions?

I liked London. We- a- a brother of my grandmother's, who lived here, had found us a B& B to start with in Hampstead, in Swiss Cottage.

Where was it?

Swiss Cottage.

Where exactly?

Eton Avenue. And... it was easy. My father could go to- we learnt about the underground system quite quickly, and my father could go to, to the office. It was in Queen's Street. I spent my time exploring London. That summer my mother came with me sometimes. Sometimes I did it on my own. Like going up on Primrose Hill and... Then came the worry about schooling. We registered. I was registered with the LCC as it then was, London County Council education department. They said it's very difficult to find places. Anyway, I, I- I got interviewed at Westminster City School and all I can say is, that when I showed the headmaster my reports he said, "They are- I'm impressed by your reports and you can come tomorrow, but you must get a uniform." So with that, I started school there. In September. Travelling every morning with my father... on the tube. Changed at Charing Cross. He went to the- he went east to the City, to Mansion House which was nearest station to him. I went to Victoria, went to- to the school. And I'll say straight away, I was hardly ever asked about anything, experiences. I was actually speaking to somebody - who's since died - was in my class. And he said, "I really must have been stupid not to think- not to ask you questions. You'd let such an interesting life. I wish I'd asked you more." I mean I can say the same. I wish I'd asked my parents more questions. I tell my children everything. Whenever I see something that's relevant, I tell them about my experiences. But they don't ask as many questions. I think that's something ingrained.

[2:02:46]

Yes?

I- I was- I was good in, in German and in French and so the school thought of putting me into the arts side. But I enjoyed the science more. And switched. So I've ended up with a dozen O-levels- O-levels taken at various times. And... applied to Leeds, to various universities. I applied to Cambridge amongst others, but was told I needed to have an O-level Pass in Latin to get- to get a place. I did their exam. Their- at Christmas time, the... entrance exam or something, and I got a very good mark. So when the results came out and I'd failed Latin but got good A-levels in physics, chemistry, botany and zoology, I wrote to Cambridge "thank you but no thank you. I can't come because of that." And unfortunately, who knows?

Unfortunately I got a letter back saying, "You could have come. We would have taught you enough Latin to pass the entrance." But by that time I'd accepted Leeds. I don't know. There was... you, you can think, you know. I enjoyed Leeds. 'Had my first serious girlfriend. And I enjoyed the course, up to a point. Biochemistry in those days, you've got to realise, was at its beginning. And there were only two or three universities even teaching it - doing it. And my reason for choosing it was, it taught- it is- it claimed to teach about how things work in bodies. How is it that we have red blood cells and what do they do and how do they work? What do they- you know, and so on. But it was too early in the- to answer those questions. They were still questions.

[2:05:50]

Right.

And I thought ...rather- rather than just looking at superficial causes, I want to look at the whole organism. Now, for that, elephants and whales are too big to handle. And even humans. But microorganisms... you can do things with. So I decided to do a course in microbiology at Imperial- for a Masters' Degree in Imperial. And I found the social life at Imperial particularly for people who lived in London, not as good. It didn't- Leeds was crammed. It - at that time it was this- it had about 3,000 students. It's 10,000 now, if not more. And... to stay for an evening at that Imperial after lectures and so on, made a day too long. And then to have to do a long journey to- back- because at that time we were living in Finchley.

That's where your parents had settled?

Yes. They- my father wouldn't consider the idea of buying a house. And this at a time when houses were relatively cheap here, in the 50s. So they paid an horrendous rent, and ended up with nothing.

Why did he not want to buy?

I don't know. I don't know. I could do a talk like this for all the time that we've got left, and more, purely on what a tragic life he's had. From losing his mother at six. To die in- early, just after- the day after we told him that we were expecting our second child. ...So my daughter has the name Frederike.

You think he didn't adapt here, in England? Or he didn't-?

[2:08:54]

He- no, he didn't. He didn't know what to do. I mean, the last time I spoke to him on the telephone, a couple of days after we'd told him that Julia was on her way, we were talking and he suddenly, he said, "When will one ever get onto a green branch?" And on the next morning my mother rings me about eleven o'clock saying, "Your father's very ill, can you come and see him?" I was working in Colindale. He was- he had- he had got up in the morning in Finchley, Finchley Central - just off Finchley Central. The house doesn't exist anymore. He had woken up, got ready to go to work, and said he doesn't feel well. He sometimes got severe head-headaches and after- after a rest they got better and he continued doing what he was doing. But he deteriorated by the minute. The doctor had come and he had called an ambulance. And I went with the ambulance to- with him. And my mother as well. I think it was Finchley Memorial Hospital but I can't be sure. I wasn't thinking. And... we'd left - I called my wife, and she left Felix who was ...what was it? - just over a year...with a neighbour who had children. And drove in to- and at about six or seven o'clock, Felix had to be picked up and fed and so on. And so we left. And- because we were living in St. Albans by then. I'll come back to that. I left. And got a phone call later- shortly afterwards that he had died. And the- the diagnosis was severe brain haemorrhage... due to un- undiagnosed

high blood pressure. Caused by heavy smoking. He smoked some sixty a day. And I've- I've never smoked. Never wanted to. My mother didn't smoke either. It- it's been one of my big worries, regularly medically to go to have an X-ray, because I've been exposed to passive smoking for the first twenty-five years of my life.

[2:12:42]

But do you think that smoking was worse because of his emigration and that experience, or-?

I would say so.

Yeah?

It was his last comfort. ...But we don't want to go through his life.

No- no, let's come back to you. So you finished...?

Finished at Leeds and finished at Imperial. And... passed well- the head of department there- of the microbiology department, acted also as a job agent.

Right.

He called me into his office one day and said, "There's a job at Colindale in the Salmonella laboratory. I thought you might like- like to have a look at it. I've arranged for you to have an interview there - whenever." And so I went and was given the job on condition that I can work for a PhD, while there. It was- in those days graduates still had a chance to make conditions about employing from employers.

Yeah.

That's how it should be. Anyway, I got the job. And I was basically put in charge to create and- and run when created an e-coli reference laboratory. The realisation was coming that those were pathogens. People had not thought they were. Some are and some aren't. And I started work, publishing papers, showing that there are pathogens there, there really are...

developing an animal model for the thing. And ...Do you watch, have you watched the programme, which is on at the moment, *'The Last Post'*, about the soldiers in Aden?

Yes.

[2:15:10]

Well I can tell you a story about that. Shortly before this film would have been, the period this film depicts, I, I was called into the boss's office and asked- and there were two highly, high-level military officers there, plus a couple of civilians. And it was explained to me that they want to run a laboratory- run an experiment because they've got a problem. Since the Wilson government had come into power, they wanted to re- to retract British forces from east of Suez.

Yeah.

You may remember the- that.

Yes.

And they said what's the point of having troops there, potentially being shot at by native insurgents when- if there's a travel spot one can fly a division of troops in by Hercules. And we don't need to maintain these expensive bases. But, if we bring these people there, we find that there- many times they develop diarrhoea and make them un- unusable as troops. Can we do an experiment on this? Anyway the experiment developed that we- a week before and the day before they were due to leave- a battalion of British troops was the experimental animal, if you like. [coughs] Excuse me. A week before and day before they leave, they provide a faecal sample which can be analysed- for further analysis. They again provide a sample from the first specimen, first- first faecal specimen on arrival, and then daily if they get diarrhoea – weekly, if they don't. These specimens would be flown out every morning by Hercules, from Aden to a lab in England – an army lab in England - where they would be selected for further study, based on what they see and the diagnosis and so on. This would come to us. In the end, in the evening, we would- in the evening they would bring us the media and the equipment that we need- we needed for the next batch the next day, and take this- took the inoculated

specimens back to be incubated in our lab in- in London, in Colindale. And so our main supplier of specimens- every day came a batch, new batch brought by- by Hercules. And we found a certain type- you can sub-type e-coli into something like 10,000 different serotypes and I won't bother with the detail.

[2:19:02]

Yeah?

We found a unique type that hadn't been found before... which peaked at the same time as they had diarrhoea. We did get some other well-known diarrhoea cases like Salmonella and Shigella. But whereas they were sort of- if you drew a graph of dates, they would be sort of little peaks at the bottom. Then you get a huge peak at the top.

Yeah.

That's- and with-or this was associated with this new type of e-coli. And we claimed that this was the cause of travellers' diarrhoea. It was published in *The Lancet*.

Was it to do with the food- some-?

Pardon?

Was it the food they eat or-?

Yes, the local food.

Right.

And we had a visit shortly afterwards from an American who... who was doubtful. Said, no, et cetera. So he instigated a- the Americans do a similar study with a- with a battalion of troops going to Vietnam. And so... he gets a- surprises- he did- got- found the same result as we found- the same strain. And- and another one that also was involved. And we've since- since, they've been shown they produced specific toxins. They know exactly what they do,

how they affect the body, the gut cells - attack it. And, I mean that's end of story. But that was possibly my biggest success.

[2:21:15]

What was the name of the article you published then? In The Lancet?

In *The Lancet*. 1970, it came out.

And what was the name of the paper, or the article?

I can't remember the title. But my name's on the- is one- the other-

Your name is on it?

My name is the third name. And the other two didn't actually do very much.

Right.

Now, I had written a first draft of my thesis, in '64, having started in '61. Took it to the boss and she wouldn't read it. Didn't want to read it. The trouble was, I'm only surmising this, the trouble was, that although I could do and did do all the work that a deputy for her can do- I mean she went off on a... a- a sabbatical for six months and I ran the laboratory. But I couldn't get the position because I wasn't medically qualified and- which again has since been rectified. And so I couldn't move on and I couldn't get- I couldn't apply without a P- I couldn't apply for a reasonable job without a PhD.

Right.

And I couldn't get a PhD because I- wouldn't- and I couldn't force her, you know. So I looked around and managed to get a job at Imperial with Professor Chain. It wasn't really my line of work. I really didn't- I didn't get on with Chain. I found him a very difficult person to- and others have said the same. I mean, he's a genius, but there's a limit to what you can tolerate sometimes. And this provided a stimulus for my boss to read the thesis. There were a

few errors that- a few points that she raised which were valuable... but basically it's- it's the same and it was- and I got the PhD. It's from London University itself rather than from Imperial, because I didn't do the work at Imperial.

Karl, can you, a little bit just now summarise your professional career, because then I would then like to ask you some more general questions.

[2:24:12]

Okay. The professor who was in- who was my external examiner for the PhD told me that there was a job a-vacant, would I like to apply as lecturer. So I became the first ever non-medically qualified lecturer in the clinical school of the oldest hospital in England - St. Bart's. And this was- somehow I got wedded to the e-colis. We did a lot of work there showing how babies acquire them... when they are born and what diseases they cause. And laid the basis of an e-coli reference laboratory. Economic crisis in the '70s here, lack of research grants, lack of promotion, lack of everything, although I had full tenure and could have stayed till I was sixty-five, I was forty-odd and wasn't getting anywhere. So I looked around, and my wife being a New Zealander, I did give New Zealand a- a look. But also picked Australia. There was a job in Queensland that I applied for. And but the New Zealand one came up first. And I set up an e-coli reference laboratory there, which isolated the first pathogenic e-coli reported. And I started – again - with opposition. Politics has been our big- my biggest enemy. Public health, they don't like the idea that we say there's a- there's a disease around. Having visited the Centres for Disease Control in Atlanta, in Georgia, in USA shortly after the first outbreak of Legionnaires Disease, I- I wanted to set it up. They would have provided- they were going to provide me with all the materials needed to set up a reference laboratory for Legionella. And it was great opposition. Things like: "We don't need a- we don't use air conditioning as much as the Americans, so we haven't got it." "Why should we look for something we haven't- we haven't found?" "Why haven't you found it?" "Because we haven't looked." And a- qua- quasi-described the first case of Legionnaires disease and subsequent ones. Then the politics got the better of me and I was asked to apply for a job if I wanted to at Fairfield Hospital, which was the- the only infectious disease hospital in the southern hemisphere. And I mean, their big work when I came was in the virology section on HIV, of course.

Right.

They provided the first test, this was before I got there- the first test on identifying HIV. Anyway, I was very successful. I- I've published in a sense over 250 papers.

In the field of microbiology?

In the field of microbiology.

So in the end you ended up in Australia, in Melbourne?

Yes.

Yeah.

[2:28:30]

And then as I said the drift back to England occurred. My son and his then girlfriend wanted to live in England. I think, while there's a lot of culture available, and I could have stayed in Melbourne, there's more in London. And- I mean, I'm- I'm having a ball. Just to give an example, and then we can go back. On Monday, I went into town- into town on- and I went to- you'd be surprised, St. Clement Danes church in the Strand which the [Royal] Opera House has taken over to hold free recitals every other Monday, lunchtime, with young singers. So I went to that. And then I took the underground to South Kensington and went to the opera exhibition at the V & A. Spent two-and-a-half hours there, then came home tired.

Yes. So that drew you back to London, as you say.

Yes.

[2:30:05]

Yes. And tell us when did you meet your wife and have children?

Well I met my wife in... '61. I think it was '61. Was it '61? Yes. ...Was it '62? Sorry. Can't remember exactly.

Well you got married in 1962.

We got married in- I met - we met in in March. We had both without realising of course the future, we had both joined a club. I had finished my PhD and so on and- or had more time for the - what's it called? - the ...can't re- the- it's for ex-graduates club. The... And you had to be interviewed to become a member. But they provided activities - all sorts, every time. And I- I joined and she had joined. She had come over from New Zealand. Had joined this club. It was a graduates club, something like that. And one evening there was a... evening- on a miserable day in March. I nearly didn't go. Bring a- the meeting was: Bring a record along, play it and talk about it. And I decided to bring a record along, and play it and talk about it. And she went with an acquaintance who was a friend of a friend who had- and she'd been asked- she'd arrived a year earlier. She'd been asked to look after her, show her something... in London. She- anyway, it wasn't a friend, just happened to have an acquaintance. And I met a friend, male friend, whom I- I'd met having been a member of the Institute of Contemporary Art, which I also went to lectures and so on, there. And... we- I, I stood up from my seat to sort of stand in the middle which is what they did once they'd played their record. And the record I played was "*Songs by Berthold Brecht*" sung by Lotte Lenya and ...talked about them and so on. Anyway, while I had stood up, this acquaintance of Shirley's grabbed my seat - which I have to admit was more comfortable than the one she'd left - and left me with the other one and suddenly I was sitting next to her. And how shall I say? And the rest is history.

[2:33:45]

Yeah.

And we celebrated our 52nd wedding anniversary. And ...I of course hadn't had my PhD at- by then- then. And we tried to find a place to live. And found a house in St. Albans and bought it. With my mother's help. And we moved in.

And- and have three children?

Three children. I hated the commuting but there was little one could do. It was a nice three bedroom, you know, typical three bedroom home. We expanded in the late 60s because children were getting older and- and so on. Now I'll tell you one of the things that people are astonished that we did. In 1966, there was in August the International Conference on Microbiology, which is held once every four years, in Moscow. Now Moscow was the ...It- and I wanted to go. Colindale was prepared to pay my expenses. Shirley wanted to go as well. My expenses if I flew from London to Moscow and back and just stayed for the conference, we were covered. A friend of mine who was also working at Colindale also wanted to go. And with similar conditions. Shirley wanted to go. We had Felix - about four months old. So we decided to go by car. This was the first year that the Soviets allowed travel if- by- in your own car, without having to have an interpreter in the car with you. We'd recently bought a Morris Traveller, and with- and a carrycot on wheels. So, armed with ten gross of disposable nappies and milk powder, we had the back covered with the carrycot in the back. The wheels on the roof, plus a gallon can of petrol on the roof in case we ran out cause we had to go at least 100- we had to go at least 100 kilometres between petrol stations that do the western petrol.

[2:37:30]

Yes.

And off we went to Moscow.

Yes.

Our route went from London through to- by boat across the Channel to Ostend, then to Cologne, through the motorways to Nuremberg , towards the Czech border. And we stayed very near the Czech border for the night and left early to go as far as possible and we went to Prague...where we were shown around by friends of a friend, who, as- as a result of spending the day with us and getting us into places that one wouldn't normally get into and seeing things and so on- their daughter had permission to come to England for a time, could we look after her there, because she can't- all she can take is a small sum of foreign currency.

Yeah.

So this way we got to see quite a lot of Prague. And from there we went on to Kosice, having a thunderstorm in the Tatra mountains. And then on into Lvov - or Lviv as it is now - where we spent another night. Then to Kiev. Which we found phenomenal. I really liked Kiev. Then from Kiev to Kharkov [now Kharkiv]... then up from Kharkov to Moscow. It was I think 600 kilometres which we had to do without changing petrol- without getting new petrol.

Yeah.

[2:39:30]

Got to Moscow, to the- the university where the conference was held. Had a wonderful time there. Conference was dreadful. The Russian work was poor. But they dominated it. They had a Russian chairman who would let the Russians speak for hours overtime and nobody else could speak in that session, et cetera. It- it was poorly organised. And from Moscow we went, we saw, we went on tours while we were there. We saw the ...the- the Len- the Kremlin, we went into the Kremlin, were overwhelmed by all the golden domes of the cathedrals. Cathedral of this, cathedral of that. St. Basil's Cathedral outside. We were not impressed by the fact that you could buy things in sort of foreign currency stores or- if you were a high member of the apparat- apparatchiks, but not for the common man. Thought that was the reason- what communism was about.

And then you travelled back by car as well?

Yes, we went to Novgorod and then to- to Leningrad. And from Leningrad we went to Helsinki. Caught a boat to Travemünde which is near Lübeck. Then crossed over through- through the north to the Netherlands to Hook- to Hoek von Holland I think and - hop over to London.

What a trip. Yes.

[2:41:30]

Four-thousand miles. we found having Felix as a baby with us in the pushchair really made people interested. And we were astonished at how little people knew about the west. Just as an example: In Kiev, the hotel we stayed at, which actually I recognised in one of the pictures of the rioting that there was a few years ago. In the centre. We stayed in that hotel. And the three sides were flats and locals lived in there. The fourth side was the hotel. Had the car park down there and for some reason or other we needed something out of the car. So I walked down. And there was a group of teenage boys looking around, looking through the windows and so on, trying to work things out. Probably the first foreign car they'd seen. And they asked me questions like, why is the steering wheel on the wrong side? Why- why do we have 'GB'? What does 'GB' stand for at the back? They couldn't believe me when I told them there are hundreds of cars crossed the Channel every day. They knew that England was an island. But the only way- the waters that cars crossed that way in Russia would be rivers. So I explained that there are boats. They didn't want to believe this. When I told them that I- how do you travel in western- in Europe? I said, "No problem, I- I just need to show my passport; I don't even need a visa to go to Belgium or Germany..." which we went through, or Finland, and- they wouldn't want to believe that. They asked- they were particularly curious, what were- what were [inaudible]? Why did we want those?

Yeah. So you travelled with your son. So maybe just to say something about your children. What sort of identity did you want to give to your children when they were growing up?

[2:43:50]

I don't quite know what you mean by identity.

Well what was important for you? I mean you had- you were born in Vienna, grew up in Shanghai, had to come to- back to Austria, back to England, then you went on to New Zealand. Was there anything-what was the important thing you wanted to- your children to be, or-?

I wanted them to appreciate and enjoy the world. And seek- seek beauty and- where you can find it.

And for yourself, again, you have lived in many places, how would you define yourself in terms of your own identity?

As a seeker. Seeker after truth. Seeker after... I mean I follow world events – closely. I'm not philosophical in this respect. I may be a Doctor of Philosophy but I'm not a philosopher.

Right. And would you consider yourself British or...?

I don't. Look, I've had six nationality statuses.

[2:45:16]

Yeah.

Three before the age of three. And how, how should I call-? I mean I can't call myself an Austrian. I only spent three years of my life there.

Right.

I can't say that I'm British. I have done nothing to stop my accent. I'm proud of it; that's me. Like it or leave it.

You didn't change the K to C - in your name.

No. Karl with a K was the- an uncle of my mother's, who died in the First World War fighting for the Austrian Habsburgs – Empire, on the- the field of the Brenner Pass. The Italian Campaign, where they created avalanches to- for the enemy. He went missing. And many did. Fell into a crevasse or something, and so on.

So you wanted to keep his name?

So I'm keeping his name. I mean, I obviously never met him and so on. My mother said he ...He came in one day when she was ...she would have been about – well, 1905 she would have been nine, ten, and- in his wonderful uniform and looking dashing, and so on. And that was her last memory of him.

[2:47:00]

You- you also didn't anglicise your surname.

No.

Were you ever tempted, or asked to anglicise it?

It was suggested. At Leeds somebody actually – going back to the accent – said, “Oh, I can clear your accent in a few- but you would probably be left with something else, like a lisp or something.” I said, “Thank you, but no thank you.”

So did you become Australian or New Zealand-? Do you have any other citizenship?

It was- Australian and New Zealand was strongly suggested that- when we were there because I was working for the government.

Yes?

Therefore I had to- and they didn't mind having dual nationality. I can't become a Member of Parliament in Australia with- while I have dual nationality.

No, I was just- it was recently in the press, wasn't it?

Yes, I have no intention of becoming an...

Yes. Yes. So what do you think for you is the most important part of your own heritage or let's say, of the Viennese Jewish heritage, for you?

[2:48:17]

I think it taught me... It taught me how to- to think that there is- I mean I, I think there is a lot to be said for the human race, if only we can get rid of fanatics - and bigots. I think... things that are so plainly obvious, people disregard.

And how do you think did your experiences of immigration, of changing countries how did it, or did they impact your later life, your early experiences?

Well something of having had these experiences, in my memory- having them in my memory as people say, what- what you remember can't be taken away from you. And just to put in I've yesterday had a... test for possible early Alzheimer's or early Parkinson's and so on, have- had a check-up.

Yes?

I passed the test by ninety-eight percent. Nothing to worry about.

No, you have all your- all the memories are there.

Yes. I sometimes have difficulty retrieving a memory, but it's there.

And did you talk about your experiences with your children? We talked about-

Oh, yes. Yes.

And how they also changed countries and now they're all in London.

Yes.

How- how do they see their own identity?

Well, I hadn't come to that, but there is a tragedy in our family. That is, Felix's son has Duchenne muscular dystrophy, which is inherited, but not in his case. It's not even inherited in his case. His mother is not a carrier. It's- a third of cases are spontaneous mutations. Happens to one in every 3,000 [sic] boys born. But - not that I would have wished for- not

have wished for it or anything, it has given me another lease of life. I joined the- became a trustee of the charity Action Duchenne. And am on the committee of dec- deciding whether we will support certain grants, certain applications or grants for research, and so on. And I write reviews of research papers as they're published. It's been a learning curve for me. It's been, you know, completely new and unlike any- nothing to do with- with the bugs.

[2:52:04]

No. But related?

But related.

How old is your grandson?

Fifteen. He's still walking. And he goes to a standard school... with- with ordinary boys and girls. And my granddaughter- my daughter has two children. She married a Chinese. It was a strange marriage. One side of me of course, favoured it. The other side of me was worried about it. Unfortunately, the worries won through and we had an almighty bust-up with him. He lost everything, and Julie lost a lot. And then, they've got a son as well, Anthony, who is in his third year of a history degree. He's twenty.

And is he interested in your history?

Oh, yes. Very much so. He- he loves talking to me when he comes home from holidays. And I like talking to him. And my third, Robert, I was going to tell you- I would have told you- a year ago, is happily married, hopefully there were chil- children. Whose wife- well, they've been together for twelve years, when a year ago, just over a year ago, she said "I don't love you anymore." And went off with somebody else. He was devastated. And still hasn't got over it. So there you are.

[2:55:04]

And how do you feel about being in London now? Do you feel a Londoner? Do you-?

Yes, I mean, just to give you an example. And I'm an optimist. Every year in April, March – April, the Festival Hall starts selling tickets for the concert for the following year, which starts in September. So- to September- so I bought, at the beginning of this year, 2017, tickets which start in September 2017 and go on till June '18. So I plan to be around in June '18. I'm not going to let anybody else have my seat.

So the music is important for you?

Yes.

And was throughout your life?

Yes. Surprising, because when we were in Shanghai we were deprived. The Japanese didn't want us to have radios. So, I really only got to know it once I'd come- when- I was hooked when I was about thirteen or fourteen in London, listening to the Third Programme [leading cultural programme on BBC radio 1946-67]. And I like the sort of stuff that's big orchestras. I mean, we- you mentioned- when I mentioned Leningrad, on- a week ago, we- I went- my wife and I went to hear the Leningrad Symphony, the one written by Shostakovich, during the siege. So that, and going to exhibitions, going to the theatre... watching reasonably good programmes on television. I mean, the BBC takes a lot of beating.

And do you go to Vienna at all?

[2:57:49]

We were there a few years ago. It's- I think it was three years ago. If you look at that book over there, under the... TV screen, it was- it- a doctor and retired anatomy professor called Arthur Spira, my mother's maiden name-

Yes?

...has looked up the family tree- the Spira family tree. And ran a- in inverted comma - a 'reunion' of cousins. There were sixty-five of us ranging in age from a baby, to a lady in her nineties. And we all got on very well, went on outings...

In Vienna?

In Vienna. The meeting was in Vienna. That was the last time I was there.

And how do you feel towards Austria today?

I feel better towards it than I used to.

Why?

I think being in the EU, I mean, I'm totally opposed to the Brexit. I think it's the most stupid thing to have done. And I still hope there- it won't work. I- you can't blame the people that were born since 1945, for anything that their parents did. You- I wasn't- we had some miles to use up, 'cause when you fly from here to Australia and back as we did often, you use- you gain lots of miles.

Yes.

Well, we gained miles and- we- which gave us a free trip round trip to any country in Europe and a free round-trip to any country in the UK. So we managed to get a return trip to Warsaw and a return trip to Belfast. I decided to pick the furthest. Belfast was interesting for its own sake- for its own difference. But I happened to stand in Warsaw, in front- have you been to Warsaw?

[inaudible]

[3:00:38]

In front of the memorial to the Jewish ghetto.

Yes.

Which is a moving- the description is in Polish, English and German. And I was standing in front of it looking at it and reading the thing and so on and contemplating, when behind me I overheard. There was - and I didn't really want to look - a young German couple, 'cause they were speaking German. And I overheard one of them - the woman - saying, "I wonder what my grandfather did in this." In some ways, this is a severe punishment. And if I end my life and nobody can say, "I wonder what he did?", I will be happy.

Which leads me to the- almost the last question. Do you have a message for anyone who might watch this interview in the future?

Yes. Enjoy the beauty that the world has and don't dwell on the faults. I mean, the number of times I hear people saying they've been on this expensive cruise or this holiday, and so on, "And the restaurant was terrible." Well, I couldn't care less what the restaurant is, as long as it feeds me and doesn't make me sick... if there's fantastic scenery outside. Over the Christmas holidays, my sons have organised that the seven of us - that's not the two youngest, but seven of us - go to northern Finland for- for four days to have some snow and so on... do rides in sleighs pulled by reindeer, or...

Yes?

And so on. I mean, we did a trip this summer of Orkney and Shetland. I like looking at things that have age and have history to them. And you wouldn't believe it. There are buildings there that are 3,000 BC. Pre-date Stonehenge by 1,000 years... and look like places that could be liveable-in now. All you need to do is to put a roof on.

[3:03:46]

One thing we haven't actually discussed, is your mother. Did your mother follow you first to- Did she also come to New Zealand?

Yes, she came to New Zealand. She was a great help, because Shirley was working as a nurse. Had odd hours. It was nine till eleven or something like that, and it- in the morning. So my mother would come and see them when they come home from school and we'd all have dinner together. And she'd either stay with me or... go home. She lived in a place around the

corner. And she found her husband- a new husband! In New Zealand. And they got married. I mean I said - they were both in their eighties - I said, "What's the point of getting married? It's not like you're going to have children or anything." But no, I had to give her away.

They got married in their eighties?

Yes.

Yeah.

And... she found it difficult to find people to talk to about the things that she has interest in. I mean there are not many people I know that have interest in what I'm interested in.

Among the fellow refugees, probably more? You- what are- your friends?

Yes.

Are you friends with some other Austrian or German refugees?

No.

[3:05:48]

No?

I find- I was- I attended the U3A [University of the 3rd Age], the one in Hampstead, for a number of years. Shirley wanted to learn how to play bridge and so on so we went to the bridge class which is the most popular there is. We got to a point where- with another couple. We used to play every- once a week. But it's got so difficult. You- there are all these conventions and so on, that we- we gave up. And then intervened illness and so on, on their side and Shirley needed a- a hip-replacement and got that earlier this year. And is- is far better than she was. No, I find if I've spent the time, going to lectures- I'm friend of Imperial College which does something like a dozen lectures a year. Just to give you an example of what- the last one I went to was about a week ago, on cybercrime. The next- one of the next

ones is on the ... asteroid hit- that the earth was hit by in the period when the dinosaurs were ex- extinguished. And the- the- one of the next ones is about Mars, whether life- whether life will be possible there, whether life is there. Whether it will be possible to set up a colony there.

[3:08:04]

So you're keeping a busy life- you are interested in many things.

Yes.

You are keeping busy.

Yes. And I suggest, that is- the world doesn't come to you.

Yeah.

There's a cartoon that I saw many- many, many years ago which is very relevant, and which you see a man looking out of a window in one of the high-rises in- in New York it was – but it could have been anywhere - yelling, "I am lonely!" Well, get out and do something.

Yeah.

I mean you can't- Samuel Johnson said, "He who wearies of London, wearies of life." I know you can't go to things- Shirley couldn't go to things while she had that hip replacement and so on. But... didn't mind me going. I didn't go as much on my own, but I am capable of going on my own.

Yes.

I don't mind my company.

Karl, I think we need to finish because we need to also look at your photos and documents. But is there anything else? Anything we haven't touched upon or talked about you'd like to add? ...I think we've covered...

No, not really. I think we've covered plenty. I mean, how do you feel I've...?

Fantastic. I think we got a very good- [telephone rings] impression. And the telephone is ringing so that's a sign....

Yes.

...I think. I think we talked about Shanghai, we talked about your career, we talked about your parents, your children.

Yes.

Your wife. I think... And we can- you can come in- I just wanted to say thank you very much for the interview.

That's all right.

And we're going to look now at some photographs. Thank you.

[End of interview]

[3:10:24]

[3:10:44]

[Photographs and documents]

Document 1

This is my ID card for going around Shanghai during the ghetto area. When the Japanese encircled us.

So when was this taken?

I think 1942.

Photo 1

This picture was taken in Melbourne in February 1997. And it shows four generations. My mother, and then from left to right, Felix, myself, Shirley holding Anthony, and Robert. So it's four generations.

What is this one, I'm sorry I...?

Document 2

This is from my father's passport. From 1938. Showing that he was permitted to return to the *Reich* at any time.

Document 2 or 3?

*Das ist die Seite auf dem der wirkliche Retourbe- bestimmung. ...*Sorry, can we start again?

This is the page where the actual permission to return to Germany is given.

[3:12:20]

Document 4

This is my mother's passport in which I'm also listed. Showing the various entry and exit visas.

Document 4 or 5?

What is this?

That's the page with the visa, isn't it? The exit stamp.

Yes, I just said that. This is the passport of my mother, with the exit stamp, and the Belgian visa. 1938 - 22nd of September.

Document 6

This is the visa for Shan- China, with- on my mother's passport. ...'47 ['46?]

Document 7

This is my report from the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, or SJYA School, showing - from 1948.

Photo 2

This is part of my collection of matchboxes – matchbox covers- from Shanghai.

When did you start collecting them?

When we went into the ghetto, which was in 1943.

And when did you stop?

I didn't until we left Shanghai.

OK.

[Bea speaks to Shirley Bettelheim about another interview] So this interview is twenty years ago?

Shirley Bettelheim: Yes.

Quite interesting to compare, you know, how different. Of course it's a different interview. But also in time somehow the memory is different.

Shirley Bettelheim: [inaudible]

Karl Bettelheim: I started collecting matchboxes as we moved into- into the ghetto. It was easy to get matchbox covers because my father was a heavy smoker and my mother needed them to light the, the, the cooker, the charcoal cooker. The Japanese war propaganda matchbox covers.

Karl, thank you very, very much...

That's all right.

... for sharing your story and for showing us your photographs and documents. Thank you very much.

[End of photographs and documents]

[3:15:25]