IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Association of Jewish Refugees

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive, prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
AJR
Winston House, 2 Dollis Park
London N3 1HF
ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Interview Transcript Title Page

| Collection title: | AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ref. no: | 221 |

| Interviewee Surname: | Badasconyi |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Forename: | George |
| Interviewee Sex: | Male |
| Interviewee DOB: | 20 June 1934 |
| Interviewee POB: | Budapest, Hungary |

| Date of Interview: | 25 April 2018 |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Location of Interview: | London |
| Name of Interviewer: | Dr. Bea Lewkowicz |
| Total Duration (HH:MM): | 2 hours 42 minutes |



| REFUGEE VOICES | 3 |
|-------------------------|---|
| Interview No. | RV221 |
| NAME: | George Badacsonyi |
| DATE: | 25 th April 2018 |
| LOCATION: | London |
| INTERVIEWER: | Dr. Bea Lewkowicz |
| [Part One] [0:00:00] | |
| Today is the 25th of A | April 2018. We're conducting an interview with Mr. George Badacsonyi. |
| And my name is Bea I | Lewkowicz. |
| What is your name, p | lease? |
| George Badacsonyi. | |
| And when were you b | orn? |
| Twentieth June 1934. | |
| And where? | |
| In Budapest. | |
| | |

Thank you very much, Mr. Badacsonyi, for agreeing to be interviewed by the Refugee Voices Project. Can you please tell me something about your family background?

4

Well, don't know where to start. My father's family originally, but we are talking of probably several centuries, is from the Rhine Valley. From Bacharach, we believe. And they slowly made their way and eventually settled in Hungary. Whilst my mother's family- my mother's side, have originated from Austria - from Vienna - who also gravitated towards Hungary. And this is how the family, if you like, united eventually, in probably the 18th century, in Hungary. And family folklore says that some members of the family were actually involved in the Hungarian Revolution in 1848. But documentation doesn't exist, or certainly hadn't come down to me. But we are proudly proclaiming... the revolutionary ideas of liberty, fraternity, and so forth.

On which side? Your mother's or your father's ancestry?

My- it's my father's side. My mother's side was more into the commercial activities. My grandfather had established a bookshop - book handling shop - and a stationery in Budapest. And once he passed away very young due to an illness, it was my grandmother who continued with the business for many decades, until in 1951, '52, the property she was renting was occupied by a state organisation and she was forced to vacate it. And it was this business where my mother was also involved, as running it for a while, and also helping out in other times.

[0:02:52]

What was the name of the business?

It was the Rosenfeld Buchhandlung.

And where was it?

It was in Borarós tér which was very close to the railway station Keleti. And a lot of people came in. In, in fact, there were a lot of German officers visiting the shop. And I, as a youngster, being able to speak German quite fluently- and I was one of the assistants serving German officers buying German fountain pens.

I was just going to say, what were they doing? Were they buying books or stationery?

5

No, no, no. Not books. The books were all in Hungarian, so that wouldn't have been any use to them. But things like fountain pens, famous Pelikan, it was a famous brand, and Matador is another one - Osmia. I still remember Montblanc, as being the peak of perfection.

So the shop was still- was open at that time?

Yes. Yes.

Yeah.

We are talking of the early '40, when German soldiers were transiting in Hungary. This was years before the actual occupation happened.

Right. And do you know how your parents met?

I don't think I do – no. I'm afraid I have no idea.

So when-?

I know that... my father was very smitten. And at one point - so the family folklore runs - he was shown the door. And he lived somewhere out in Pesterzsébet, which is quite a long way. And this was so... hurtful for him, that notwithstanding it being the Shabbat, he walked in to seek reconciliation. And this gesture seemed to have done the trick. Because they were reconciled. But this is a long, long walk, like - probably more like half a day.

[0:05:10]

And when did they get married?

They got married in 1932. Also in Budapest. And somewhere, I still have my mother's and father's ketubah. But unfortunately I haven't got it- got it to hand. It's a very precious handwritten document all in Hebrew, several pages of detailing everything, which I don't understand, to be honest. But - it's an interesting family document.

And where did they settle down?

They settled down in a very Jewish area in Budapest in the eighth district in Népszínház utca. They had several locations there. But initially, that's where they lived. And when I was born, they moved to another apartment not very far from there. And eventually ended up in Damjanich utca, which was close to the [Varos] Liget, which is a nice, green area. And this is where we stayed until the regulations forced us to leave the house. Because it wasn't denominated as a Jewish house, but that is several years later.

Yes. And what was your father's profession? What did he do?

He was a businessman working in all sorts of export-import business. And working for several companies. And after the war for a short time, he ended up running his own business. But luckily for him, he has stopped it in time before the state took over all this kind of enterprises. That was in the late 1940s.

Yeah. And what are your first memories of growing up in Budapest?

[0:07:14]

I do remember playing in the Tisza Kálmán tér [now II János Pál pápa tér], which is a little bit of a green area, not very far from Népszínház utca and made friends at that time. And my mother made friends with their parents, and this friendship has endured to this day. Albeit it's been reduced in numbers. But nonetheless, we have kept in touch all these years. And now we are talking of more like eighty years, in retrospect.

And these were Jewish children? Not Jewish children?

As it happens, yes, not exclusively, but mainly. And one of our friends, [inaudible], lives in London not very far from here, in Muswell Hill. And we see each other from time to time. And another friend has become quite a famous mathematician. And he is a Professor of Mathematics at Vienna University, called Doctor Pál Révész. And another one, János Major, was an accomplished graphic artist who... really attained some international significance.

7

But unfortunately, he's no longer with us. But there were a few more people. But you know,

we were almost like a football team of toddlers.

And those are all the people from that-?

All the players from that particular square, Tisza Kálmán tér, which, as I say, was a bit of a

haven from the buildings of Népszínház utca and the surrounding streets. But it was a very,

very Jewish area; we lived, perhaps not more than three minutes' walk away from the local

synagogue.

What was it called, the synagogue?

Nagyfuvaros utcai temple. It's was quite a well-known synagogue and the rabbi I remember

well, Doctor Szarbo Laszlo, he became the Chief Rabbi of Hungary. But again, he is no

longer with us.

And did you go to that synagogue?

[0:09:44]

Yes, Yes, we did. And- I didn't have my Bar Mitzvah there, but I had it somewhere else,

another synagogue, which was a place we used to frequent when we lived in that vicinity in

Damjanich utca. That was the Fiu Arvahaz synagogue. And it was for orphan children so that

was the name of the synagogue. And the rabbi there, Doctor Yitzchak Schmelczer was our

religious teacher in Madách Gymnasium where I went. So it made sense to have my Bar

Mitzvah there.

This is post-war?

Indeed.

Yeah.

When I was thirteen.

Yeah- yeah.

So '47.

Yeah,

But Nagyfuvaros utcai synagogue is where my grandmother had her seat for decades and we always went there for the High Holidays. And she always went there for- every Friday night.

So both sets of grandparents were-were-was one more religious that others, or-?

Yes, I think my maternal grandmother was the daughter of a rabbi. And from home *Haus aus*. She was a... very pious person and, not bigoted, but ran a kosher household. Which was not that easy in those days. But, as far as my paternal grandparents are concerned, my recollections are not quite so strong because they lived at a distance from us in Pesterzsébet. And they were both killed in Auschwitz in 1944, together with my cousin, and aunt and a number of other relatives. You know, we- our family have lost in excess of 100 people during the Holocaust. But that's probably quite average for people who survived.

So those- what were their names, those grandparents?

That was Henrik Bachrach and Eszter Bachrach. And my paternal grandfather was a pianist. And as it happens, my maternal aunt was a concert pianist. So, music - professional music - ran a little bit in the family. But- I have no excuses to make.

No, so anything- was there any music in that, in your early childhood? I mean, was there any-?

[0:12:45]

No, I would say that during the war years, it wasn't really a priority for boys, musical education. And I had, if you like, the other misfortune that my father, who was one of the few peoples who ran his own cars. I'm talking about well pre-war years. In other words, he was an

experienced driver. And he was called up into the Hungarian Army notwithstanding the fact that he was a Jew. And he was part and parcel of the Hungarian Army, who occupied - reoccupied some of the country- some of the segments of former Hungary- Hungarian territory

that was taken away as a result of the Tri- Trianon Peace Treaty. And so he was in uniform from 1940 onwards, until he was demobbed and turned into a forced labour- labourer. So he wasn't part of my early education and early upbringing. It was only my mother and I who formed the family. And my mother was working in my grandmother's bookshop. So- we managed, of course, but at the end of the day, musical education was not something that occupied the family.

No, so that started after the war?

Yes, yes. And unfortunately, my mother has contracted cancer and died in 1951. And previously, she was ill for about a couple of years. So the- the family's concentration wasn't my education if you like, that was just by the way... whilst we were trying to cope with the other problems of family.

[0:15:07]

Yeah. So what sort of school- primary school did you go to?

I went to an elementary school which was close to where we lived in those days in Damjanich Utca and this was called 'Sziv utcai *elemi iskola'* [elementary school], which was an *elemi*- school and that lasted four years, and I can't remember being an unhappy time. Our house- our block of flats was next to a tennis court- a large tennis establishment which in the wintertime was turned into an ice-skating rink. And I was down there- I had a season ticket and I was down there almost every day, when there was a possibility of skating. And I remember our window a little bit overlooked. And my mother was always appearing in the window and urging me to come home because it's dinnertime, or something like that. I remember also, an accident I was suffering. Because crossing the road and not seeing that one of the trams obscured the other oncoming tram. And that tram hit me. But luckily, I was thrown clear. And- well, didn't suffer very much. I was suspected to have some concussion, which meant that I was kept in bed, and my uncle who was a GP came to see me and

pronounced me well enough to receive all the toys and gifts, which was showered on me, hoping that some of them are going to do the trick and I shall recover quickly. Well, they were very effective.

[0:17:04]

When was it? Which year? When did you...?

I don't remember the year. I must have been not more than sort of seven or eight years old. So add that to 1934 and you are there.

Yeah. So, as a boy, did you have any sense of what was going on? Was there any feeling of...?

Well, there was a lot of knowledge that my father wasn't there, who came home from time to time and brought presents, like... bullets - spent bullets. Or bullets which hadn't been spent only removing the- the explosives part of it. And I remember taking this to school and showing it to the class and everybody was really fascinated because we have never seen anything like it. I remember my father wearing a military uniform. And he had of course a few photographs taken as- as a military driver in charge of some trucks or whatever. And... I remember after school, walking to grandmother's shop, and then going on to grandmother's flat. There I was fed. I did my homework and then went back to the shop to collect mother and we walked home. And it was a cold flat and there's no central heating for us. And there was no possibility for such a short time to put anything on in terms of heat, other than going into the bathroom. Because in those days, baths were- there was just a water tank and there was a fire underneath it. So very quickly, a smallish bathroom could be warmed up. And we took off a table top and put it across the bath. So that was our table for the supper. And then it was early bedtime, because it was cold. And- I have this kind of memory from the war.

What about- you had a- you have a sister?

[0:19:25]

Yes. Now, the sister is really my first cousin, not a born sister to us. Because her parents were taken away in 1944 - very tragic circumstances. And after the war, she was adopted by my parents. This is how it came about. And she was born in 1943. So, most of the time I'm referring to at the moment, she wasn't about.

Right.

But her parents went to the funeral of her grandfather in the big cemetery in Budapest, which is one tram stop away from the Christian cemetery. And when they were on their way back, the tram was stopped and all the Jews were ordered off the tram and taken away. And we never saw our- her mother and my aunt, again. We think we know that she was- she died in Ravensbrook – Ravensbrück, I should say. The- her father, who was the doctor, was brought back home by a soldier to collect medical instruments. And he was allowed to take those. And so he was using them and he worked as a doctor in Auschwitz. And we understand that he survived and was liberated by the Russians, but subsequently died of typhoid. So we do have a bit of tragedy to tell.

And how was the baby- the baby just wasn't with them, when they went to that funeral?

No. The baby was still- I still remember sitting on the windowsill and looking for the tram stop, waiting for them to come home. And they just didn't come, and they just didn't come and one tram went after the other one and they still didn't come. So one immediately thought of bad news. And that was confirmed, eventually.

And then your mother basically took care of that baby?

Yes, yes - yes. And she was safeguarded during the worst part of our war experience- was given when she was less than a year old, to an old patient of her father, who was a Christian person and looked after her throughout the- the war period. And returned her, of course, once we were liberated. But we wouldn't have been able to cope - in our way of surviving - with a baby.

[0:22:45]

Yeah. So he saved her?

Yes.

What was his name?

I don't know. I don't think I remember. I don't remember meeting this person at all. But I know that this is what happened.

Yeah. And who found him, or...? Must have-your-your mother must have found...

Oh- I think her father, Doctor Weisz Andor was a much-loved GP in the area. And people were really upset and horrified when it got- the news got around that he was taken away. And I think- I'm not sure how it came about, but this was a former patient, who obviously had some- a gesture of- of thanksgiving as well as appreciation of the help he- she received from a medical point of view, that came to the rescue. There were some people who were very decent. Not too many.

Was his help ever acknowledged? Did he ever- this person?

I'm not aware of it. I'm not aware of it. You see, a- a lot of my family history is in- is obscure, because of our actual current situation at the time. It didn't encourage en- enquiring. And by the time I am really missing the information, there's no way of obtaining it again.

Yeah- yeah.

Which I'm sure is the classic story of many other people.

So now, to come back to you. You said your house was not considered a Jewish- you couldn't stay in your house?

No.

So when did you have to move?

[0:24:51]

That was May time, April, May time, 1944. And it was- the natural thing is to move into my grandmother's flat, which was also the flat of my aunt and uncle the doctor. Because at least the family is going to stay together. And we came back if you like to our old area of habitation - Népszínház utca.

And that was considered a Jewish...?

That was considered to be a Jewish house. It was nominated as such. And so we moved in. And from then on, we always stayed together.

With your grandmother?

With my grandmother - until 1956, when of course, I left Budapest. December the 1st I remember very clearly; that's when I last saw my grandmother.

So tell us a little bit about what happened to you then, once you moved in there?

Well... Every flat- it wasn't a large block. There were only two or three flats on every floor. And every flat was jam-packed with Jewish people who were forced to move in. And there were quite a number of young people as well. So, if you like I had company. And one of the boys there, who now lives in Vancouver, they are still in- not close, but in contact. And we see each other, well, sometimes. And this was our existence, but it was a very tense area bectense time, because nobody knew what is going to happen. And all sorts of news was circ-circulating. And although I was nine or ten years old at the time, news did filter through even to children like us. And there was always a feeling of tension which emanated from the parents and the grownups. Because- because it was a very tense and uncertain time until October 15th, which is when the Arrow Cross Party made a putsch and take- took over.

[0:27:33]

And that was really a very, very serious situation. And right- the next day, we were commandeered and taken away by these Arrow Cross people. We had to leave the flat. We were regimented in the streets. And I remember that in the opposite house, they said that they were shooting at them. So they started to shoot just, you know, a step or two away from us into that other building. We had never seen any shots coming out towards us. And then they took us out, took us away into Tattersall. Tattersall was a horse racing area. And we were sat down in the middle, in the centre, on the grass. And all around in the tribunes, there were machine guns. And the optimists were thinking that Tattersall was very close to the Keleti railway station, that what they are going to do with us is shoving us into wagons and taking us wherever. Deportation. And the pessimists thought that no, they won't do that. They will just shoot us with their machine guns. And we stayed the for two or three days - nights as well. It was not cold. It was no problem. I remember something very vividly. It's a small thing, but to me it means a lot. I was very fond of eating sardines. And for my 10th birthday, the present I received from my mother and grandmother was a tin of sardines, which I didn't proceed eating, because it was too precious to have. And we took it with us when we were taken away to the Tattersall. And my mother said that we might as well have it now before they take it away from us, or before they kill us. So I remember opening this tin of sardines and eating a share of it - in that grassy area.

[0:30:05]

And eventually, for some reason which I'm not quite sure, it was decided that they are not going to kill us there and then, but they are going to take us back to the- our flats- our apartments. And it was dark and night time. And a Hungarian policeman was accompanying a group of us. And we went through the same Tisza Kálmán tér, which was our playing field in any case. And opposite to what was then called Városi Színház (City Theatre) now called Erkel Theatre was the German house, which later became the Nyilas, the Arrow Cross house. And from there, people were shooting us- to us- they are shooting at us. And the policeman ordered us to lie on the ground. And this man was decent enough to shoot back. I don't think anybody was hit. I don't think he hit anybody. But the shooting stopped. And he accompanied us back to our apartment block. And I remember that the porter, the resident porter, the házmester, how surprised he was to see us back. And I know that my mother asked for the radio back, because we deposited our precious radio, which allowed us to listen to the BBC - with him. But we have had it back, at least temporarily. So this is how life, it was- like.

15

But this was already when you had the baby, or not?

Oh, yes, this was a year after.

This was a year after-

The the baby was born in '43 - November. November 18th. And we are now talking of October '40- sorry, '44. Yes, she was born in '43.

But I mean, were the parents still there?

No, the parents were taken away June '44.

And the baby was given to safeguards, when?

[0:32:17]

I would have thought more like September time - before the Arrow Cross takeover.

Right – *right*.

But it was impending. It was- the situation got worse daily. And it's a- it was a very traumatic time, albeit, I was such a young fellow.

It must have been-were you scared? It must have been very...?

Yes. I remember that when we were taken away, one of the young people who accompanied us, turned out to have been an apprentice in my grandmother's shop. And he replayed-repaid her kindness by coming specially up to her and kicking her.

... Yeah. So you witnessed many things which were not nice.

Yes.

Yeah.

It's all part and parcel of me- of my memories.

Yeah. And obviously the insecurity of what was going to happen.

Yes. And lots of little incidents like, for instance, when the Germans took over, they were running the tanks down Népszínház utca, which was a wide enough street for tanks to go. And one followed the other, the other, et cetera, and it seemed like an interminable show of strength which is- was the objective of the exercise. Until, somebody - a grown-up - noticed that these tanks have got numbers. And that the same number occurred again and again. So obviously, they were running them right round to impress on the- the residents with their strength, which was – as later turned out to be - nothing like what the impression they gave. Apparently there were only a few hundred German soldiers in Hungary. Had the Hungarians wanted to resist, it would have been perfectly possible.

So you were returned to the flat. And then...?

[0:34:45]

We stayed in the flat until this... Swiss letter of defence- letter of security, this *Schutzpass*, has somehow been procured by my mother. And then some other members of the family have already been in Pozsonyi ut in a flat, which was protected by the Swiss Embassy. And that- it still has a plaque on it. I think it was 56 Pozsonyi ut. And this is where we moved in. And...it was another house. It was a much nicer, much more modern house and flat than what we had. And I remember that my shoes have disintegrated. And it was my aunt, who lent me a lady's pair of shoes, and which I was wearing. Because that was the only thing I- I could. And, well, they looked very pretty on my feet, I'm sure. But at the time, that wasn't a consideration. And it was- the area where- there were several of these protected buildings. The Swiss, also Swedish and the Vatican. And people were mind- manning the doors to make sure that unauthorised persons don't come in. But when the Arrow Cross people wanted to come in, of course they had guns, so there was no defence. And they took people away, and people were killed every night, shot into the river. The Danube was just around the block. And it was an

untenable situation. And my mother then decided that the only way to safeguard the family is to go underground. And she obtained false papers for us. That is for my grandmother, for herself and for me. I was then taken to a Red Cross home, temporarily, until she managed to obtain, by going into the Part house, the official residence of the Arrow Cross people, to- to demand food tickets and also accommodation. And we were given an accommodation in 48 Ó utca. And that was a former Jewish flat. And we moved into there, but didn't stay much in the flat because we had to be in the cellar, because there was constant shooting, and the fighting was just outside. I remember that one end of the road there were German guns. And the other end, Russian tanks. And they were shooting at each other across the street. I mean, it was a long narrow street. And we were just absolutely bamboozled and looking outside to see what's going on.

[0:38:08]

The Siege of Budapest?

Yes, yes - yes. We were eventually liberated by the Russians on the 18th of January '45, which is the same time as the ghetto. And then the Germans were forced to retreat to the Buda side. And we were just on the Pest side. And eventually, my mother and I, we went back to our old apartment in Népszínház utca. And from a distance we could see there is something wrong with the window, and near the time- nearer the place we saw that it was half destroyed. So we went into the apartment which was not inhabited at the time. And we found that in one of the rooms there was an unexploded artishal- arti- a...a shell. An artillery shell. And that was a big silver bullet. And for all we knew, it could have gone off any second. And well, it didn't of course. And that distant cousin, who saved us by his appearance in- when we were in hiding, because he was just in SS- no sorry, in- in Arrow Cross uniform, with a gun. And people who suspected and would have- that we were Jews hiding, and were on the teeth of reporting us, thought, as it later transpired, that what decent people we have-we are, because we have a relative who came to visit us, who is obviously an Arrow Cross man with a gun.

[0:40:13]

That same person, later on, came to see us and helped us to get rid of this unexploded shell. He picked it up and took it downstairs. And there was a lot of snow in the street. It was still January, February time. And there was a huge pile of snow and he just dumped it into there. And it didn't explode. Nothing happened. Except, a month or two later, the snow melted. And the damn thing was still there - haunting us. But by then it was very rusty. And eventually I think the police or the military- I'm not sure how, but they got rid of it. But it was a big shock when we went into the apartment and we found this unexploded shell and didn't know how to handle it. But I do have quite a few occasions where I was being a "near miss" on not actually making it. Because had I been a few feet further this way or that way, I would have been killed very easily either by shooting, or by bombing. There were lots of possibilities how- what could really happen to one.

Yeah, it was a precarious situation.

Sure.

Yeah. But just tell us again about this incident when you- the people suspected you. So you were in this Jewish flat?

We were in the, well, yes. We were basically in the cellar, because of the shooting and the bombing.

Yes. And officially you were refugees-

Officially we were refugees from Gyömrö. Gyömrö is, I don't know- about twenty-five, thirty kilometres from Budapest. And we went there several summers for holiday, because there- they had a big artificial lake there so we could swim there. And so we knew the place. We knew the street, we knew some people, we knew shops. Had anybody wanted to ask questions about "what was the name of the butcher?", or something like that, we would have been able to probably pass-

Yeah.

19

...the- muster. Might be able to give the right answer. So we pretended that we were refugees fleeing from the advancing Russians.

And your mother's Hungarian was good enough? I mean, she could pass as-?

Yes- oh, yes. Oh, yes, no problem. No problem.

[0:42:44]

And- but she had if you like, the temerity, the courage to- to go into the den of- of these people and say that, "Here I am with my mother and my son. And we haven't got any food tickets" - because everything was on ticketing, whether you wanted to buy bread or whatever. So she obtained all these documents. And of course, she had to present our false documents to prove that who she is.

Yeah.

So it's not a simple situation.

And why two people started to suspect you?

I don't know.

But what- how did you notice? Did they ask you anything? [inaudible- both talking]

Yes. I think there were questions, leading questions being asked.

Right.

But it's always been a- a, a danger and something which we suspected that might happen. So we were very alert and sensitive to that kind of probing. But nonetheless, if they had reported us, they would have probably come and- took us away.

Yeah. And this cousin. How did he get this uniform and how...? How...? What was his story?

He and some of his friends- were actually wreaking havoc. They obtained these uniforms and the guns by stealth. And what they have done, some of them, is that they went and stopped people on the street and asked for identification. And if somebody identified themselves as being an Arrow Cross member, they took him away and dealt with him. So I understand.

| Right. |
|---|
| That was, if you like, a kind of 'Resistance'. |
| So was it- Jewish, or? |
| [0:45:04] |
| Oh, of course. |
| Yeah. |
| Of course. These were all people who were probably not yet military age, but not far. |
| So young men? |
| Young men. |
| So they pretended to be |
| Arrow Cross. |
| Right. |
| But in fact, they were looking for the Arrow Cross. |
| So they were- was it organised? Did they receive support? |

21

I don't know. I don't think so, but I don't know. All I know is that he and a few friends- I mean, I don't know how many the few friends were and I doubt if it was anything other than an ad hoc organisation on a friendly circle of, I don't know, maybe three or four people. Or that sort of magnitude.

And how many people ...

I don't know. I don't know.

What- did he survive?

He did, because he is the one who actually took the shell, the art art- artillery shell and disposed of it or disposed it from the flat. And he became a doctor.

And stayed in Hungary, or...?

The truth is, I lost touch with him, and I don't know much about him now. It was-he was a distant relative. He was a relative of my aunt, my... paternal jan-, paternal uncles' wives. So we didn't know him very well. But in those days, whoever could- was in touch with each other.

Yeah.

So that was basically the explanation.

So, what else do you remember? Do you remember hunger, or-was it with the food rations, as it then better? Because your mother managed to-

[0:46:54]

Yes, I don't remember being hungry. Not in those days. After the liberation, yes. We had... a difficult time. I mean, as you probably know, all the shops were looted. And we were not able to loot, because I was too young. And my mother was... disinclined. And my grandmother was too old to loot. But what we have had was a sack, half full of split peas. Now, that may

not sound like gold dust, but it was. Because if you were a successful looter and you had a lot of sugar, you can't do very much with sugar on its own. So, it was a one-for-one exchange: half a kilo of this, for half a kilo of that. And we obtained all sorts of things which- with this treasure of split peas. And I remember milling some of them in a Turkish coffee grinder and making it very fine. And we were trying to bake with it, or cook with it or do something to- to eat it. Because split peas on their own - not very appetising.

No. Right.

And I remember that dead horse across the road, which we went and took a piece of the meat. Because it was a perfectly edible meat and it was so cold. It was so frozen. There's no question of anything going off.

Yes.

And yes, we had it. It was- I remember me, being enterprising, selling Hungarian-Russian dictionary... we managed to get a supply of. And I was sitting in a broken shop window on the [Erzsébet] Körut very close to EMKE which was a very famous coffee house, and shouting to people, "Magyar-orosz szótár!" "The Hungarian Russian dictionary!" This was quite a thin little publication.

Yes?

But I sold sufficient, and actually made some money, which helped the family budget at the time.

How did you get it? How did you manage to ...?

[0:49:54]

Well, that's a- another story. One of the people- couple who was sharing our flat, a Jewish couple, the lady was a concert pianist and the... gentleman, who was too ill to become anything at all because he had TB, was a communist and a journalist. And he had the contacts because of his party affiliation, to get this dictionary.

Right.

And this- and through him- I don't know- I mean, I'm not thinking of a large number, but I might have sold altogether, maybe fifty. But it went on for a few days. Of course, my grandmother's shop was completely trashed. When we went there with my mother, it was all open. But the- the people who were looting weren't looking for books...

No.

Or paper-ware, so- or stationery. But everything was thrown off from the shelves; everything was taken out of the drawers. So we were walking - what shall I say - virtually knee-deep in paper, one kind or another. And my mother and I, we spent several weeks in trying to pick everything up, seeing if anything is saleable or remains usable, at least. And what didn't, was stuffed into a rucksack and I carried home several of these every day. And we used it as materials to heat with.

Oh...

You know, several important books just had to go the same way. There's no way we could do anything other than that.

Yeah. And did you get- did you get the shop back?

[0:52:00]

The shop was re-established, and my mother was running it. And that's where my father, who in September '45, came back to the Keleti railway station, was walking past and wondered whether the shop's still in existence and who is in there. And he was in such a state that for a while, wasn't recognised by my mother. And we were the lucky ones, because he came back. And I would say the majority of my friends all- they all lost at least one parent.

And mostly the father.

Mostly the father, because of this forced labour system.

So tell us please, what happened to him?

[0:52:57]

My father?

Yes.

Well, he was initially as I said, a soldier, a driver. And when he was demobbed- I think it must have been something like 1942, he was conscripted as a forced labourer. And that was not a game, if you like, when people were trying to get into a better location. People trying to find- the some of the people who were- the sort of the *keretlegény*[guards] and the people-the Hungarian soldiers who were, if you like, the supervisory people, were- some of them were okay because they were very malleable to money. And some were not. And some commanders were- commanders were decent, or decent enough, and others were very sadistic. So dependent on where you were, and where you were able to manipulate to move from one group to another, to a better position, et cetera. My father was all over the place, and I remember the times when there was news that they were taken through the railway station. More like a goods station, not a passenger transit, and my mother and I, we rushed there and spent hours to wait and see whether the truck they were carried in turns up. And most of the time, it didn't. And occasionally it was possible officially to go and visit them. And I remember my father was building with many others, an air- an airport at Szentkirályszabadja which was - something.

[0:55:00]

And eventually, he managed to get his brother, my uncle, together into the same unit as he was. And they were slowly marched out of Hungary. And they got as far as Balf.

And my uncle said he wasn't going any further. And a number of them took the same attitude.

Not my father. And my father was taken over to Austria. And my uncle, who refused to go, together with a number of other people, were killed on the spot. And there is a memorial of course in the Jewish cemetery in Budapest, to the *Balfi Mártirok nak*. And this is the story.

He was eventually ending up in Mauthausen and Gunskirchen, which I believe is very close to Mauthausen. And he was telling us later that in Mauthausen, they were carrying heavy stones up and down some very bad, deformed steps. And one day he was going- coming across with his brother-in-law, who was Kohn Lajos, who was the husband of my aunt, my father's sister.

Right.

And unfortunately, he didn't make it. He was a very nice man. He lived in Karcag and had a shop there selling cloth - and clothing. And I spent many summers there, for a time and have some very good and clear memories of evenings walks, ending up at an ice cream parlour.

And-

He didn't survive?

[0:57:23]

No, he did not. My aunt did. My aunt was taken to [Bergen] Belsen- Belsen. And somehow, she survived. But-

Do you know how long your father was in Mauthausen, or ...?

Well, they left... Hungary somewhere in November '44.

Yeah.

And I don't know how long it took them to get to Mauthausen. But I imagine something in the region of three, four months.

So, it was so close to-

They all have been. It's one of the things that at times one is wondering: Why me?

Yeah.

26

Why me who survived? And all those who didn't - were just as worthy. Why my cousin, Evie, who was a year older than I, killed in Auschwitz, aged eleven? Or my grandfather, who was blind at the time, and my grandmother and my aunt, Evie's mother. And countless others. It's- it's just something that you don't have the answer to. And you have to appreciate it. That there is some reason other than blind faith.

What is the reason? Why? What do you think?

Don't know. I have no explanation. I just - no idea. All you can put it down, is- is coincidence. Series of coincidences, that I would say. Because one coincidence, two coincidences – okay. But I can speak of many others.

What about when your father came back? How was that for you? How do you remember that? Did you recognise him?

[0:59:40]

Well, I knew- I was taken at the time to a holiday camp... on Svábhegy, which is a little hill, basically in Buda. It's- and that's where I heard that he was back. And of course, I recognised him because I knew it was him. But he was in a terrible state. And he ended up as being twenty-five percent wounded- as, as, as a war wounded. And... basically, he suffered several things. One of them was as a bomb- at a bombing, the air pressure, threw him, and that caused all kinds of internal problems, which later on manifested itself in a serious heart condition...which is what took him.

Yeah.

But... considering how many people have been killed as forced labourers, he was just fortunate. Again- no explanation.

Yes. But he also didn't come back immediately.

No, he did not; he wasn't able to travel.

27

Right, so where was he in the meantime?

I think he was in-hospitalised.

In Austria?

Yes.

And do you think he ever recovered from his- this sort of trauma, or-?

He never spoke much about it. And I left Hungary and '56 and my interest in this has grown since. And although I did see him a- quite a number of times between his passing away and me leaving Hungary, there were other topics more important, more pressing to discuss than-also, it wasn't a pleasant time to remember. So it was, if you like, a consideration, at least in part, of not leading on to that particular topic.

[01:02:17]

No. So he basically didn't talk much...

No.

... about his experiences.

No. He wasn't such a gregarious person anyway. But he certainly was wounded by it in a substantial way.

When he came back, was the cousin already with you, your sister?

Yes. She was, if you like, re-appropriated quite soon. As soon as temperatures gone high enough for us to survive in that unheated flat.

And how did your mother take that on? I mean, she was...?

| Well, it's just, if you like, a Jewish tradition, if you like. |
|---|
| It was her sister? |
| Yes. |
| Her sister's child? |
| Yes, yes. It's like a brother is taking the wife from- of- of a deceased brother. |
| So there was no question, for her? |
| Absolutely none. |
| Right. |
| Absolutely none. It was the- the obvious thing to do, and the only thing to do. Who else should look after her if not her aunt, if you like, and? |
| And you? What did you think about it, as a child? |
| Well, I've known her ever since – it- it was natural. |
| Right. |
| You know, I've known her - almost the day she was born. And we were mostly, apart from the first few months, living in the same apartment. |
| Yeah. |
| So there was no change. The name change, yes, and the adoption. But I mean, that didn't |

matter to me much when I was eleven or twelve.

So how did your life then change back to normal? [inaudible] after the war?

[01:04:10]

Well... It probably never changed back to normal. I don't think... I ever had a normal life other than the time which I don't remember. I think in some ways... we are survivors, but also still victims of Hitlerism and the war.

In which ways, George?

Well, if you like- have we realised our potential? Have we been living the sort of life which we were meant to, or would have been able to, had that not been the case? Meaning, had Hitler not been in power. Had there not been a Second World War, we would have been living a completely different life from what we are leading now.

How? What sort of life, do you think?

Well, I would probably- most probably stayed in Budapest, and most probably had been properly educated in terms which I wasn't. I was brought up in a household, where... drama, if you like, was always in the background, one way or another. So, my upbringing was never a problem- a- a question or a priority. It just happened by default. And because of my mother's illness, I was, if you like, looked after my- by my grandmother. And although she was a wonderful woman, and has gone through more in life than was a fair portion for anybody, losing two of her children and ending up with two grandchildren of disdisproportionate ages, but she wasn't able to give us the sort of guidance and help that we would need. She was feeding us and all that, but that's something else. We didn't have the family life, as such. We didn't have ...religious life, albeit my grandmother ran a kosher household all the time. And yes, we did go on High Holidays to shul. And when my mother died, I went every day for a year to a mourning service to say Kaddish. And it was expected of me and I've done it. And I've done it with a clear heart, and - not a religious conviction, but an obligation, which I needed to discharge and I was expected to discharge. And I'm happy to say that I discharged it.

[01:07:27]

And I still go most years to a [inaudible] service. And that's my contribution - other than going to Bar Mitzvahs and Bat Mitzvahs. And since we have nine grandchildren, and no longer counting... there is scope.

Yes, so your mother became ill quite soon...

Yes.

... after the war, so...

Yes, yes. And there again, this was a priority, which of course is absolutely right. But it's my story.

It must have been a big shock to...

Yes,

Get the family through this situation, and...

Yes. I didn't realise how ill she was...

Right.

...until really late in the day. And it was- everything was done that was possible. But in those days, cancer therapy was not nearly as advanced as it is now of course.

And when did she pass away?

Fifty-one. October the 28th. And I remember very clearly, and the shock of it- it was.

So for your cousin- sister, I mean. She was very young at the time.

Yes. Well, absolutely. She was eight years old.

31

And what about your father? How did he cope with this?

[01:09:11]

Well... He had a very difficult time for a variety of reasons. One of them was that he had his own business which he liquidated himself, prior to the state enforcing liquidation. And then he was basically without a job. Not without money, as such, but without a job. And that was a very precarious situation in those days in Hungary. Because the slogan was that those who don't work, shouldn't eat: "Aki nem dolgozik, is ne egyék" – this was the Party slogan. And he was trying to become a worker. But of course, being petty bourgeois by our background...

Yes.

And that was held against me as well when I was looking for musical education at the higher scale. One of the reasons of leaving Hungary was that I wanted to have proper musical tuition, which I didn't get in Hungary because I wasn't accepted into the Academy due to my family background.

Right.

Which is again, an old story.

You were not prole- proletarian enough?

No. We were- you know, we weren't aristocrats. We weren't even bourgeois in the grand scale, but petit bourgeois. But that was a very demeaning description of our situation. And he was, my father was going through all kinds of s- schooling to try to get the skill- the skill and the qualifications of being a mechanic. Which he received, but then he couldn't get a job. And it was very precarious. Then he managed a job. Then he got into a very murky job where he was accused, with many other people, of some embezzlement. He was in prison for several months before trial. And during the trial, he was acquitted. But I remember going every week, once a week, there was a chance to see him in prison - for I don't know, half an hour or something like that - and to take clean clothing. And then my grandmother did the clean

32

clothing, preparation, and I went and to Marko utcai prison and- and saw him through glass wall and eventually managed to hand in the parcel and took out the dirty linen. And- and that went on for several months.

[01:12:16]

And I remember the trial, and I was in the public gallery. And his chief was telling something to the judge as a- as a witness. And I knew that that was wrong. And I got up and started to shout that this man is lying. And the judge actually called me onto the stand. And I repeated what I said. And the man was in such an obvious... embarrassment, that it was clear to everybody that he was lying. And eventually, my father was acquitted. But in I was only seventeen at the time. And I remember 'negotiating' in inverted commas, with his solicitormy father's solicitor, who wanted to ease his acquittance by saying that he will accept the three months or four months he was in prison as- as a sentence, and then he will be freed straight away. And we said, "No. He didn't do it. He wouldn't accept it."

And do you think was that part of a sort of anti-Semitic... situation or...?

Don't know. In all fairness, I'd say I wouldn't know.

Right.

But the- the shen- shenan- shenanigans that went on. Like the solicitor was saying that- there are a couple of people who are next to the judge, who are the voice of the people, so to speak, and who can be influenced with money - shall be influenced. And- and of course we should influence them if we can, provided it's the right way. And making decisions like that- and providing the money, which I didn't have, but my grandmother did. It was - a difficult situation.

And at that time you were in school? In the Gymnasium?

Yes, yes.

So how was that, if you could just tell us your experiences?

[01:14:33]

Well, I wasn't a brilliant student, by nature, and by result. But I survived. But- and I got my matriculation. And the fact is that I had grown-up problems to handle as well as mathematical ones. But eventually, as I say, I managed to get my results right. And, and I got it. But basically, it was a traumatic time. And I mean, my youth hasn't been the most straightforward. And certainly not one that I would recommend anybody to indulge in. So this is when I say that had circumstances been different, both on the big scene and on the small scale, things would have been - could have been - very different.

Yeah.

But am I complaining? No. I'm very grateful to fate, and the fact what I achieved which is not very much, but I'm happy.

So when did you start your musical journey?

I think around 1948 - or something like that. And I was playing the piano badly. And I got into the Conservatoire. And I got a good teacher there. And I stayed with her and it helped me a lot. But it wasn't really what I wanted to do. Initially I thought it was, but eventually I knew that it wasn't, partly due to the fact that I was too lazy to practice. Partly because I did have a hand problem which stopped me practising. So, there was every encouragement to go over to conducting.

Aha. What was the problem in your hand?

[01:16:58]

I have a, a- a bone deformation here. And it's not painful, but it did- does stop me practising with the left hand.

Right.

And - up to a point. So that's- was the problem. But I was very happy because my interest was apart from symphonic music is- was opera, always. That was where I felt most at home. And understanding stage and singers is something that I'm enjoying. And I pride myself a little. And I've been involved in many operatic ventures and I'm still counting. But now it's retirement of course. But this is what I have come to really like and enjoy. And I had my most success in.

And at what point in yourself, did you decide that music is going to be your career?

Oh, I think it has always been clear to me is from early 50s onwards - 1950s onwards.

And what did your father say? What reaction did he-?

[01:18:31]

Well... He was cautioning, saying that not many people have been successful. Even Paul Schubert has not come to a... fruitful ending. And I'm nowhere near that. So, but at the end of the day, he was enlightened enough to allow me to do what I wanted to do. So- and I indulged in a little bit of journalism on the side, mainly musical journalism. I gave a few talks, wrote a few pamphlets. And I did work for the Hungarian radio. And but-so, I was a little bit making my way, but not sufficiently, and not in the way which I wanted to make it. So, for that you needed to leave Hungary. Apart from the fact that I got very frightened during the '56 Revolution. There was quite a bit of fighting in our street. I must say that I have never had a gun in my hand - ever. And I'm pleased about that. So, I was no hero, and I did not throw a Molotov cocktail, or even seen ones being thrown. I was pretty frightened when it all blew- broke out. Eventually, we- we were in- in our cellar again. And when the Russians came, from house to house and took all the men away, and they took us, again, fatefully near the Keleti Station, and locked us up in a courtyard of a block of flats. Again, the idea of being deported had crossed our minds. And, my father and I, we scaled a wall and walked away. As it happens, later, everybody was let go. It was a precaution. They took the men away, because they wanted to comb the whole area.

[01:20:52]

But we didn't know that at the time, and we were rather frightened. I certainly was. So that was, if you like, an impetus towards leaving, which was in any case a little bit a hysterical reaction, because everybody was leaving. Everybody I knew was either leaving or thinking about leaving, or will be leaving - or left already. It was a variation of this kind, on the subject. So, you always knew that you could leave. And eventually, if you wanted to, probably could get back. Not that I ever seriously considered that as an option. But that and the fact that I wanted to study what I wanted to study, was basically the reason for leaving.

And you said you knew you could leave because you knew the borders were not closed down?

Well, that was- The borders were free, rumour had it, a- a month or so beforehand. So by the time we were leaving, it wasn't quite so simple. And we managed a lift on a truck to the border area. And we were stopped more than once on the way. And had we not been hidden in the truck we would have probably been taken off the truck. But we arrived to this- I think it was Köszeg where we were spending a night or two. And a local contact, mine, found somebody who knew the way, and prepared to lead us. And it was a friend of mine, a girlfriend, my sister and myself. And he took us along and then he stopped at that point and he said, "The water is just ahead of you. All you need to do is walk across." And I said that, "Why don't you come with us? Here is my watch. You can have that as well, as-"

[01:23:06]

Which he said no, he doesn't want to go any further, he wouldn't, but we can go. And all we need to do is cross there, and cross a few trees and we are in Austria. And we walked across there. And then the Hungarian border guard trucks appeared. And so we lay down on the- in the snow. And it was December, or something like this – 3rd or 4th. It was pretty cold and we were pretty frightened. And they didn't stop. They were running this convoy of trucks and their headlights were strong and we were afraid that they will notice us. And, well, they passed and we went on. And we didn't know where we were and we got into this forest and we lost our way but completely. And- no idea. We just walked and walked and walked. And we parted company with this man around midnight, and around six o'clock we found a few houses. And we decided that whatever it is, we need to get in because it's just too cold we are really far too exposed. And I knocked on the door and no answer. And I knocked again. And then someone said, "Was ist los?" And so we knew we were in Austria. So that was a huge,

36

huge stone off our chest. And it turned out that he was- this was his storage area for wine. And he was controlling the quality of the wine so he got asleep as a consequence of trying the wine too many times. And then he took us into the village and handed us over to the police there. And these people took us into Pinkafeld, which was a- kind of a collection point. And we wanted to go to Vienna. And my friend's brother was already in Vienna. So, we made our way to Vienna somehow. And there was this hotel in the Prater which was refurbished - just finished - completely unoccupied. So we managed to get a room there. So that was great. And then I spent a whole night at Westbahnhof trying to ring my father to say that we are Vienna. And it took about eight hours to get through. And all we had was a one-minute conversation saying we are well, and in Vienna, and let you know once we know something more.

And then a new chapter...started.

Yes. A new chapter started.

So I think, George, let's take a break now because that's-

Enough.

A new chapter. Let's have a short break and then we'll continue.

Okay.

[01:26:12]

Good. Let's continue our interview. The second part. I wanted to just take you back. I know we got to Vienna, but I wanted to take you a little bit back to before you're leaving. Can you just tell me a little bit more about the decision? At what point you decided that it was time to-to leave Budapest?

I think it's- it's a manifold consideration- it was. Not just a simple dichotomy. Because A, that was a slightly hysterical, general feeling that you need to get out. The fact that we have been locked up, virtually, not able to travel anywhere outside, was a contributory factor. The

other consideration for me was, this frightened- frightening experience when the Russians collected all the men, including my father and myself. And they took us away and locked up us in a courtyard from which my father and I, we scaled a wall and escaped.

Yes.

But the fright nonetheless, there was palpable feeling that you've got to make a go for it whilst you can.

Yes.

And as I said, probably before, an underlying consideration for me was, that I wanted to study conducting, and that wasn't possible for me in Budapest.

And what about your father? Did he think of leaving at all?

[01:27:56]

No-

No.

He never considered leaving. He- or, I think- I was not really ever discussing this question with him. But my feeling was that he was... left be- behind holding the fort, as it were. Making sure that there was somewhere to go back to, should we ever- wanted to.

Aha. And similar for the grandmother? That was-?

Well, no, the grandmother had a completely different plan.

Aha?

The grandmother felt obliged to look after and bring up my sister, who was then only thirteen.

38

Yes.

So she decided to go to Sao Paulo, where at this- a sister of hers was living with a large family, and make possible for my sister to travel from London to Sao Paulo, to continue her supervision and her education. So, whilst my sister and I, we came to England in '57. In '58, she has been, with the help of relatives and also the Jewish Refugees Committee, got herself a ticket to fly to Sao Paulo and reunite with Grandmother.

Marvellous! And how did your grandmother manage to get to Sao Paulo?

Not easily. But she managed to get a visa and she went by sea- not flown. So that was a long journey. But she nonetheless undertook that at an advanced age of seventy- well, plus.

Amazing.

And she died in Sao Paulo in 1968. And I've been twice and always visited her grave. So, this is why my sister lives in Sao Paulo.

Yes.

[01:30:06]

But nowadays she's an annual visitor. And we are expecting her this summer as well. So she normally comes with her daughter and a couple of grand-children. So, that's another wing of the family.

Yes. So your grandmother managed to legally leave?

Yes - yes, indeed. I mean, she wasn't able to sort of cross the border at the dead of night, in the middle of winter, or something.

So, but she was willing to send your sister or cousin-?

39

It may- my father made a- a condition of me leaving, of taking her with me. I never understood quite what- why he did that. But it certainly was. It was unquestioned by me, and I said, "Fine". And this is what we have done.

Because there was quite the responsibility for you to take a thirteen-year-old.

Yes ...Indeed, indeed. It's just something else to cope with.

But you knew at that time that the long term plan would be for her to go to Sao Paulo, or-? That emerged later?

That emerged a little bit later. Yes. Yes. It's one of those mental games, sometimes imagine what happened, had it not been this turn of events.

Yes.

But of course, you never shall find out.

No. If she'd stayed here [in England], for example.

Yes, indeed.

Yeah.

The problem would have been that grandmother couldn't have come in England- to England, and we wouldn't have been able to support her. Which was a different ballgame in Sao Paulo.

Because there, she had the support.

Yes, there was a large family. And she was welcomed by her sister... and her husband. We here- we have been in a bedsit. So, what do I do with a grandmother? How do I look after her? It's just a complete impossibility.

Yeah. Yeah.

So that is why it has- never came to pass. But she nonetheless felt obliged to her daughter, if you like, or daughters, to look after my sister and bring her to adulthood.

[01:32:40]

Which she did.

Yes, indeed. She was quite a character, my grandmother. I appreciated by me more and more as the years- passes.

Yeah. So your sister was with you when you did that crossing?

Oh, yes.

Yeah.

Absolutely.

Okay, so you crossed the mountains, you arrived then in Vienna.

Yes.

And what happened next?

Well, like everybody else, we've been to the Joint [Jewish Relief Agency] and we were sort of registering ourselves and received support: money, in a word. And the- our accommodation was paid for. It wasn't a princely sum, but it was certainly enough to exist on. And I went to the Academy of Music. And I was accepted into the conducting course of Professor Hans Swarowsky, who was a very well-known, probably best-known teacher. But I had no financial support other than what I received from the Joint. And therefore, I had to look for a scholarship. And I applied for the Ford Foundation Scholarship. And my- I was supported by the Academy, and this is how I got my application approved. And it was made clear that I could choose basically anywhere I wanted to go to study. Then the big question

came, how to decide where to go. And partly because of consideration of my sister, we decided that it was safer to come to England, than to go to say, Paris.

In which way, safer?

[01:34:35]

Well, it will be a more solid existence. It will be easier to look after my sister, rather than in Paris. So, this is why we chose London. So we were taken in part of a group, a train journey, long train journey, something like thirty hours, from Vienna till- arriving to Victoria Station. And of course there was a sea crossing from Ostend. It was all very exciting. We'd never seen the sea before, and big boats, et cetera. And arrived quite late in the evening. And then we were shipped across to Euston. I remember, and packed on another train and went up to Stafford in Staffordshire. And then a bus journey on to Hanford, which was a disused RAF base. And this was used as a Hungarian refugee camp. And we stayed there for a number of days until we had an opportunity, with the help of the Jewish Refugees Committee to come up to London. And in London, my sister was taken off my hand, as it were, and looked after by a foster parent type organisation. And she stayed with this family before- until she went to Brazil. And I went to a shelter, which was in Mansell Street in Aldgate East, where I stayed for a number of weeks until my scholarship actually started to pay money so I could come out, and find a bedsit and start to join the college. And had to go to Trinity College which wasn't anywhere near my first choice. But that was the only college for- recognised by the Ford Foundation for musical education. Because that college stipulated that you should have A-levels qualifications, or equivalent. All the other music colleges do not have this stipulation, or did not- had this stipulation. So I was going to Trinity College, which was very nice and very friendly, but not particularly demanding, and certainly not enough pressure on me to- to accumulate knowledge in a hurry. I was lucky to have a professor, Doctor Stanley Sadie, who taught me music theory. And he proved to be a long-time friend- become a longtime friend and helped me quite a bit in many ways. But the actual conducting tuition was not much good. So I went over to the Guildhall School of Music. There, I was rolled into the class of Norman Del Mar, who was the best teacher at the time in London. And he was a very intelligent and knowledgeable person. And I learned quite a lot from him. But unfortunately, or fortunately for him, he got himself a job of being the principal conductor of the Welsh BBC Orchestra, and therefore, he left this job- job. And his replacement Lawrence Leonard

was very nice, but not quite the same standard, not quite the same level. However, I got my normal diplomas as well as my fellowships, for which I had to write a dissertation which I chose to be the orchestral music of Liszt, which was not too difficult for me to cope with. Much more difficult to get it typed, which at the time, there was no word processing or anything of that kind.

[01:38:48]

And how good was your English?

Well, when I arrived, non-existent. Maybe half a dozen words – maybe. But I learned. And eventually I managed to get sufficient to get myself understood.

You didn't want to stay in Vienna, for example?

Yes, I did. But there was no financial basis of my- me staying there.

Aha.

I had to come away from Vienna.

The scholarship stipulated-?

Yes- yes. That was- would have been, from a professional point of view, by far the best solution.

Right. And language-wise, probably easier for you?

Yes, I mean, German was something I grew up with. And imperfectly maybe, but I certainly could get myself across. And...

Yes - yes.

Viennese German is, is not a million miles away from my hearing. So it would have been alright, but - no money to live on.

Yeah.

And that was a crucial problem and I didn't find any solution other than what we have chosen. The truth of the matter is, looking back, that one would have benefited greatly from helpful advice, which we didn't get.

Right.

[01:40:18]

We got support in England to lots of financial help, et cetera. But no proper, friendly, advice, which we- would have been more than welcome. Or simple things like, you buy a house if you possibly can. Buy as big a house as you can, as expensive a house as you can afford, because that's the way to accumulate a little bit of capital. And that's the way you move up on the housing ladder. So, we didn't know. We didn't dare to buy anything because it was a financial commitment, which was imagined more than real. But imagined is just as onerous. So we didn't do anything. We didn't know which part of town to look for accommodation. Nobody have given us this kind of basic, friendly, advice, which would have been without responsibility, without money involved, nothing. But we didn't have it. We should have hadwhat would have been helpful, let's put it this way, if a professional musician would have advised how you go about becoming a professional musician in England-

Yes.

Which is not quite the same as elsewhere. But you had to find out the hard way. And that's the sort of thing which would have been more than welcome.

Yes. Or some mentoring or help.

Yes.

44

But how do you- you are sponsored with the Jewish- the Refugees Committee. How did you find English Jews? How...?

We didn't have that much contact. So, there was no real possibility... apart from Stanley Sadie, who was very friendly and invited me more than once to his home, I don't remember going to very many British Jewish homes.

Yeah.

So we had a very limited experience.

[01:42:24]

And how was your sister in her foster home? Was that a good experience, or...?

Mixed - mixed.

I think they were very decent towards her, but not the warmth that would have been necessary for somebody at that age, to come out of herself and feel relaxed and happy. It was more factual and the psychological background was missing.

Yeah. Yeah. Was it a Jewish family, or ...?

Oh, yes. Yes, definitely. She had- they lived in an apartment very strategically placed literally a stone's throw from the British Museum.

Aha...

I remember being at Mansell Street, I walked every time when I went to see her. And it was quite an interesting walk through the city. And looking at all those buildings and... historical monuments, and then arriving at the British Museum and Bury Place - that was the address.

Yes?

45

And it's, it was a different world. I mean, England is not quite the same as say Vienna, or Budapest. And we were really our of our element.

Yes. What was different? What was ...?

Well, everything is different from the architecture to the way of thinking about the food. The customs, what is right what is wrong, you don't shake hands - simple things like that, which is surprising, but there are you are. Or the way people eat and what they eat and- no, we didn't like it. And it was a great, great pleasure when somebody invited you to a Hungarian meal. Home cooked. And my goodness - was it great? Yes. But even simple dish like *rakott krumpli*, which is layered potatoes and eggs and... sour cream on top and in the oven. I mean, that was heavenly. [Bea laughs] Very basic food, of course, but for us at the time was like a breath of fresh air.

[01:45:00]

Yes. But did you have contact with other refugees?

Oh, yes. Yes. There is the Euro Building University of London Union, in Malet Street. And we belonged to them. And so every time I finished my lessons at Trinity College, which is in Mandeville Place, just off Wigmore Street. I walked to there. And there was a canteen, so you could, for two and six, have something to eat. And there was a lounge with papers, and a table tennis table. And that's where you did meet people who were not studying music, but the same time they were also Hungarian refugees of the same age.

Yes.

Students were going to different colleges. And sort of most afternoons you spent an hour or two there. And once I found out that a nice place to live is Earls Court. So I had a bedsit in Earls Court, which meant that not a long walk, saving on the tube fare or bus fare, which was I think probably thruppence or something.

Yes. Yes.

But nonetheless, our first- the basic scholarship was twenty-nine pounds a month. And from that you had to find everything. Whether you needed a box of matches, or the rent, or the food, or the transportation, your shoes, your clothing, your cleaning - everything. And then we discovered that we can't manage, but we couldn't. People were really going short. So they increased the scholarship to thirty-one pounds. Another two pounds did make a bit of a difference. And that was the undergraduate scholarship.

Right.

And when I became a postgraduate, then I luxuriated in forty-five pounds. But by then I got some odd jobs here and there of conducting and playing the piano. So, I was, you know, probably getting up to something like sixty quid or maybe even seventy in a month.

Yes.

[01:47:22]

So, I was really living it up quite considerably, compared to what I have had before.

And where were you living then? In Earls Court or did you move?

Earls Court, yes, for a long while. And then, because a friend - a close friend - moved to Belsize Park, I got myself a bedsit in Steele's Road, which is more like Chalk Farm, I think. And they had a nice room. And the big thing was, of course, that in 1961, my father got a visiting passport. And he came out to visit me. And he stayed here something like two to three weeks. And I mean, this was the first time I saw him since 1956, the 1st of December. And we have spoken on the phone a number of times in- during these years. But they were always very short conversations, because of the expense involved. And also, we were pretty sure, that they will be monitored, the conversations. So it was all fairly [inaudible] and simple, family matters, rather than anything other.

Yes.

So, he came- he came on the same kind of train journey as I had been. And I remember [his] going across to France and then to Brussels, and actually getting onto the train at Brussels because he was very concerned about the sea crossing.

Aha.

So I joined him in Brussels and helped him with the suitcase on the sea crossing. And then we arrived in Victoria and a close friend, Tommy Hegedus, and of course, my wife to be then, Marie, were waiting for us at Victoria. And it was great, great reunion. Really fantastic for us.

Happy, for you?

Very, very happy. And took to the-like a duck to water to Marie and to the rest of the people I was with. So it was a very happy stay here. And thereafter he came most years for a few weeks at a time to see grandchildren et cetera. And we have been frequent visitors. Initially, I drove to Hungary many times.

[01:50:00]

So when was your first time back in Hungary?

My first time back in Hungary was 1963 – four. 1964. That was, again, a train journey. It was very funny in many ways, because we travelled first class from Vienna to Budapest. And when the train left, our compartment, only Marie and I spoke Hungarian. Everybody else spoke German and French – whatever. And then we came to the Hungarian border and all of a sudden, it turns out that everybody could speak Hungarian. So we had a little bit of a giggle about that. But, yes, '64.

And on what passport did you travel then?

We had, by then, British passports. Because the naturalisation takes five years. So '62 we got British citizenship... and that was very pleasing.

Was it important?

Yes. Very important. Both from a practical and from an emotional point of view. It meant belonging as well as facility of travelling. And in those days, visas were *de rigueur*. So, even if you wanted to go to- to France, which is nothing these days, you needed to have that. And that's the- we went back many times. I remember the first journey very easily. We had a Mini - a very basic Mini with an 850cc engine. Red. And Marie was working at John Bell & Croyden, which was a very famous pharmacy.

Yes?

And she had twelve-hour shifts. And she finished at ten o'clock at night. And Kati, our daughter and I, she was then thirteen months old, we met her when she came out – and dog tired, of course - got into the car. And I drove down to Dover, and we took a ferry at two o'clock in the morning. And we arrived in Dunkirk and got out of the port, and both girls went to sleep straight away. And I lost my way straight away. And I had no idea where I was; I probably didn't even have a map, never mind GPS which didn't exist in those days. And I just drove and I just drove and I followed my nose. And I got nowhere. Until all of a sudden I'm- hit a main road. And it was an arrow saying 'Brussels'. So I said, "Now I know where I am; I'll be in Brussels in a minute." And I was. And I drove nonstop, virtually till past Munich, from Pine Gardens, which is where we lived in those days in Eastcote. So that was quite an epic journey.

And what was it like for you to be back in- in Budapest?

[01:53:28]

Well, it was, in some ways, very happy. In some ways, a bit mixed. Happy to see some people and happy to be made a fuss of, if you like. I was a little bit like the prodigal son that has made good. Because in between, I got my first permanent job at University College London and I was the Opera Director there. And our first production was an obscure Verdi opera called *I due Foscari*. And this was - if I say so I shall blush, but I will say it - a really huge success. It was a piece not known to people. And it was a revelation how good it was and how good the performance was. And it was produced by an old- old friend of mine,

49

another Hungarian Jewish fellow, called George Roman. And this is a story based on a poem by Byron. And it had all sorts of connotations. But it was absolutely... the ticket. And I think from then on, I thought everything is going to be very smooth. But it wasn't quite, but that's beside the point. All I can say is that that had a big reverberation.

[01:55:08]

And UCL- it was UCL Opera?

UCL Opera. And...

Yes. And where was- where was the theatre?

It's- Collegiate Theatre. And later on, I became the music director of UCL, and I've been there for fourteen years. But that's a long time ago. But that was important. And led to all sorts of other things, including a lot of BBC work. I worked for the opera department for quite a number of years, doing a couple of Prom concerts, like the original versions of *Macbeth* and the original version of the *La forza del destino*. And also I- I acted as a *répétiteur* to a number of other productions. I got myself a little bit of a niche of being interested and interesting in digging up well-known composers' little known works.

Aha?

For instance, a piece which we have done, probably the first time ever in England, was by Wagner, *Das Liebesverbot*, which is based on *Measure for Measure* - Shakespeare.

Yes?

And it's a very early piece. And in many ways, it's a little bit like a- a successful piece by [Daniel] Auber or any of that ilk, French *Opera Comique* composers. But you can still already see the fingerprints of Wagner to come. And that makes it interesting.

That was for the UCL Opera?

Yes. Also, we did- done a Mussorgsky piece which was unfinished by him, called *Sorochyntsi Fair* - which is a score of great richness. It's not of great consequence in terms of storytelling, but nonetheless it's well worth - because of the musical riches - an occasional hearing. We have done that. We have done lots of pieces... Donizetti, *Poliuto* ... did Haydn operas. We did a Gluck opera, *Armide*, which was great success at the time. And many others. There was always at least one annual production.

So you sort of fell on your feet. Did you feel that was what you wanted to do?

[01:57:48]

Yes, yes, indeed. And then I did work on an ad hoc basis for English National Opera and... but- and eventually, I ended up establishing my own company called Thameside Opera. And we were based in Bracknell at the Wilde Theatre, South Hill Park.

Yes?

And we've done a lot of modern work there. For instance, we did a very successful production of Peter Maxwell Davies' *The Lighthouse*. We have done a piece by Thea Musgrave - *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. We have done Walton's *The Bear*. We have given the first performance of Peter Brooks' version of Bizet's *Carmen*, which is interesting. It's a cut down version of *Carmen*, really working on Prosper Mérimée's storyline, rather than the choruses and the ballet or anything like that. It's all stripped out; it's just the drama. And it's- was very successful. We've done a piece by Stephen Oliver called *The Beauty and the Beast* - and a few other things.

And that was your company?

Yes, Thameside Opera. [Have] done a piece by a Shostakovich pupil, and we performed in The Queen Elizabeth Hall as well as in Blackpool- Blackburn- sorry, Bracknell. So, this is the story of my life.

So for how many years did that- the company go on for?

[01:59:58]

About fifteen. And then, you know, money runs out. Sponsorship dries up. What can you do? Stop doing what you are not able to do. But I've done also a fair bit of choral work.

Yes?

Just had a really quite good performance of *The Creation* by Haydn last Friday-last Saturday.

Yes? Where was it performed?

That was in Maidenhead. I'm associated with the Maidenhead Choral Society, who has got a very illustrious President by the name of Theresa May, who is our local MP there.

Right.

And she has, for her credit, come to some performances. And we occasionally entertained royalty. I've been introduced to Prince Philip who was holding the fort for the Windsor folk.

Yes?

And he- he discussed the intricacies of carriage driving with me, because he thought that being a Hungarian, I knew something about carriage driving. And I'm afraid – [both laugh] I had to disappoint him on that one as well.

And are you working on any projects at the moment or what-is there anything you-?

Well, I have a...a few concerts lined up later in the year. But being of the age I am now, which is knocking on to eighty-four, I'm being told by my wife that it's high time I hung up my stick and stop threatening people with it.

And? [laughing]

And?

What do you think about that?

Well, I'm saying that there is one more performance in me. So- maybe sooner or later it will happen because it involves a fair bit of travelling, particularly if I want to go to Maidenhead. Well, I have to go to Maidenhead. It's more than an hour each way. And wintertime, evenings, late, perhaps not seen such a good idea, I'm being told. But of course they don't know how good I am at driving. But still...

[02:02:28]

But yourself, what- in your career what is your personal highlight, or what is your favourite-Opera or...Have you got anything which stands out, for you?

To listen to, or to perform?

To perform.

Yes-

Or to have performed.

To have performed. ...I have fond memories of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, which I have done something like thirty-odd performances of... with a company called Phoenix Opera. We have been touring England up and down the country. And I had quite good name singers in it, like Owen Brannigan. And we gave a lot of performances and it was a lot of fun and comradeship. And it was a nice thing. But in many ways, the ones I prefer most are the Verdi operas. I have done three of them: *Alzira*, which is the least important, *Il due Foscari*, which I think is quite important, but the one which I liked most, and I love most and find the most interesting is *Macbeth*, which I have done the first version of - the 1845 version. Which is quite a bit different from the later 1864 revised version. And I have done this for the BBC as well as for University College Opera. And I think that would be the one which I feel most strongly about.

Thank you. Can you tell us a little bit about your private life and what happened? How you met your wife and how...?

[02:04:28]

My wife used to be, or still is, a very close friend with a former girlfriend. Is that a news story? No. [laughs] I love them both. Always have done. Always will do. It's a- our- if you like, we've been married now very nearly fifty-seven years. And it all started with a cup of coffee. We bumped into each other at University College, would you believe it? And I said, "Would you like to have a cup of coffee with me?" And she said, "Yes." And then one thing followed another and so forth. And we got married in 1961. So... We have got two children. A boy and a girl. Born in reverse order - a girl and a boy. We are very, very fortunate with them both, in every respect possible. They are all- both happily married, or at least I suppose they are happily married and very productive. My son has got three - two boys and a girl. And my daughter has got six - three of each. The eldest, Joshua, is twenty-three later this year and youngest, Stanley is pushing eight. So the scale is quite substantial. I hope I won't be contradicted when I say that we are on very good terms with them all. We love them all, enjoy their company and looking always forward to see them yet again. Joshua, the eldest, is already through Durham University. He's got a nice degree, and now he's doing a postgraduate degree at LSE. In between the two, he was teaching maths in Teach First scheme. But he is now going back to actually studying. And the second oldest, Zoe, is a medical student in Bristol. And she is doing fine, thank you very much. She is now intercalating, doing an extra BSc degree in anatomy, which I suppose is useful for a doctor. And the third one, Sam, is also at Bristol University studying mechanical engineering. The others are struggling with school hol- and looking for holidays and good results for little work. And there is nothing new under the sun, I'm told.

[02:08:02]

And you moved to this area to be close to them?

We have indeed. We used to live in Pinner, where we had a nice enough house and large enough house. But it was an hour's or more drive, dependent on traffic. So when this flat

became available we grabbed it, because it's not just a flat. There is a garden to it as well and this- the Heath extension across the road, literally a stone's throw away. And that makes a huge difference for us. We like to live in Hampstead Garden Suburb and the emphasis on the Garden as far as I'm concerned. And so this is where we are. It's a comfortable enough flat. Is it perfect? No, certainly isn't. Can I improve on it? No. I can't. I'm suggesting all the time to my wife to build an extension to it, but she's turning it down. So, here we are. And hopefully, a long time coming yet.

And when you had your children- what sort of identity did you want to pass on to your children?

European is the word I think I would use. We have always said that England is wonderful and we are very grateful to England for taking us in and helping us on our way. But we are Continental people. And we love Europe. And there are lots of countries we haven't been to but I'm sure when we are going to get there, we will love those as well. But for us going to Italy is in a way, a little bit like homecoming. Going to France is a great pleasure. Being in Austria is a mixed pleasure, because Austrians are not necessarily the nicest people as far as I'm concerned. But I love the mountains, and I love the lakes. And some Austrians are very nice indeed. And the food is not too bad either.

[02:10:26]

And the same applies to Germany. There we have always been many times. And perhaps go back to lots of European holidays yet. But interestingly, although we did not give a specifically Jewish background to our children, they both happen to be married to Jewish people. Our daughter is married into what I think is described as a modern orthodox family. And our son has got a wife who is sufficiently Jewish, but not too much.

And did that surprise you?

In some ways, yes. It's unfathomable, as far as I'm concerned; we have friends who have been very, very keen to get their offsprings to marry Jewish people - without success. And here we are, doing nothing about it, ending up with the right result. I have no explanation for this.

Did you ever join a synagogue?

No.

No, so you were not affiliated?

No, no, I wouldn't be allowed into any Jewish cemetery. So I prefer to stay alive! [both laugh]

That's a good idea. Yeah. So how do you see yourself in terms of your identity? How would you describe yourself?

Lucky, Continental Jewish boy.

And what do you think is your most- the most important aspect of your Hungarian Jewish background for you?

[02:12:36]

Well, I can't decry certain aspects of Hungary, or Hungarian upbringing. I lived there for twenty-two years. I learnt a lot there. I learned the love of music, I learned the love of literature. I acquired the luck of- the love of art later on, not in Hungary. There was no possibility there, or at least I didn't find it. So, in a way, I learned the love of nature, the love of sport. It would have been- had it not been for Hitler, and the war and general anti-Semitism, it would have been a perfectly decent place to live in. But "had it not been" is not something that you can do anything about.

No.

So, would I ever want to go and live in Budapest again? No. Would I want to go back and visit? Yes. I am very frequently, meaning maybe once every year, there for a week or so. And I'm now regarding myself as a tourist who happened to be able to speak very fluent Hungarian. But I don't belong. But I do want to go as long as I possibly can to the cemetery and visit those few graves which are connected with me.

56

Which are- your parents?

My parents, my grandfather's grave, my uncle's grave, my aunt's grave, and a friend's grave, as well as my mother-in-law's grave and father-in-law's grave. In other words, family. It has quite a number of- I always go and never miss it. And I always spend at least an hour wandering around and it connects me with them. And that's my benefit. They have no benefit of me, but they are-

You never know.

They are still alive, in me.

[02:15:00]

Yeah.

In my memory. ... And that's important to me.

Yeah. And so you go every year?

Yes, yes. I've already booked to go this month, at the end of the month.

Where do you stay?

In a hotel.

Yeah. And are you worried about the current political developments in Hungary?

In a way, yes. I think it's not going the right way. Not the way I would prefer it to go. But it doesn't touch me directly, only indirectly. And in some ways I feel that when I hear a lot of people complaining is that, why did you vote for this regime? And it is, unfortunately, a- a well- established Hungarian tradition of people who should know better, do not act the way they think, or the way they say they think. And that has always been a problem, in my

opinion, in Hungary. And, well, this is what's happening now as well. But at the moment, people are free to travel, free to go, free to even say things, but ...it's not a happy situation.

Is there- is there anything you miss from Hungary most, or?

[02:17:00]

I'm trying to think... Well, maybe a friend or two, a- a meal or two. There are some pleasant places, nice places in Hungary, which I am not visiting but I could, or perhaps even should. And for many years we hadn't been to the Lake Balaton. This time we are going down for the day, or maybe two days at the most. So, but do I miss it? No, there are plenty of other lakes I can go to so it's not that. But do I want to go to Badacsony? Yes, I may definitely go there just to check out whether the wine is still up to scratch or not. It probably isn't anymore, but still. But no, I don't miss anything other than that, I don't miss- only superficial things.

And where- where's your home today? Where would you say you feel at home?

Oh, in England, of course, in London. I'm not English, but I'm a Londoner. I don't know how long- how many years have to live in London to become a Londoner. But I think I would qualify, being here for over sixty years. So- and as I always tell to the locals, the natives, shall I say, "I'm here by choice. You are here by accident."

And how do you think did your experiences during the war, and then your leaving, you know, impact on your later life?

It impacts me more as I get older.

In which way?

Missed opportunities. Realising the missed opportunities or the wrong turnings, the mistakes in other words, one makes inevitably - at least in my case. The regrets, if you like, in that sense. And also, the realisation that I was impacted by the Holocaust whether I like it or not. And some people may have been impacted more than me, and some people may have been impacted less, but I am impacted and... that's all there is to it. You have to cope.

Yeah. And how was it expressed? Or, how- in that impact?

[02:20:00]

Well, loss of family, loss of home. Loss of- if you like- worldly goods. As I said before, I come from a petty bourgeois family but not from a very poor one. Not rich, but not a poor one. And we started existence here in England, with a briefcase. I arrived with a briefcase – literally - with a clean shirt in it, and nothing much else.

Yeah.

So from- yes, we did have help. We had lots of help. But where we are, we are here because of our own efforts. And whether that meant saving money or being lucky with money, that is also the fact.

And I think it's also-must have been difficult to sort of- so shortly after the war to start again, I mean, you know, the- '56 is not- it's just eleven years-

Yes.

... After the war ended. To be so completely independent. As well as to-[inaudible]?

Yes. It's- we were completely unprepared for it. And this is when I said that guidance, tutoring, mentoring, would have been really very helpful. We come from a place where things completely different. In- in Hungary, if you had done something good, and-you would have been promoted. It doesn't mean a damn thing here.

Yeah.

You know, everybody says, "Well done. Well done." What's next? Nothing.

So do you think there's a lesson to be learned for other refugees that are current-?

59

Yes, I definitely do so. You see, we have come from a such a different world, meaning Hungary before 1956. And London... It's just- not even light years, but much more than that. The differences and the thinking, the concept of what life is about and how you go and realise whatever you want to do. What's the practicality?

Yeah. So you think that, let's say, younger refugees or migrants should be mentored, or?

Well-

That there is a scheme to ...?

Yeah, I think so, to- And I think so. But we were a very special case because we were so hermetically sealed away. We knew nothing. We even thought that Coca Cola was a good drink. Well, how stupid can you get?

I understand.

Yes, it's we were- you see, if you get an- a migrant from say Africa or Asia, they are far more attuned to existence and living and habits in London than we were at the time.

Did you ever- I asked you before whether you had contact to Hungarian refugees. What about the German Jewish refugees?

No, nothing.

In the music world, or anything? Did you ever...?

Well, who knows? Well, I knew Norbert Brainin, and Peter Schidlof.

Yes. That's the Amadeus Quartet.

Yes. I didn't know Siggi. And- but Martin Lovett was English, of course.

Yes.

60

But trying to think... German. I don't think I had any contact at all. And I knew Norbert Brainin only very, very slightly because he used to be playing with Norman Del Mar on the piano, all sorts of Beethoven and Haydn- and Mozart sonatas. And I was sort of somebody on the wallpaper at the place.

Yeah.

But... And I remember Schidlof coming to play the viola concerto- the Mozart violin- viola concertante with Brainin and Del Mar was conducting them. But I don't think I had any contact with German refugees. That's a different generation anyway.

[02:25:04]

It was a different generation, yes.

I mean, they were considerably older than us.

Yes, *yes* – *yeah*.

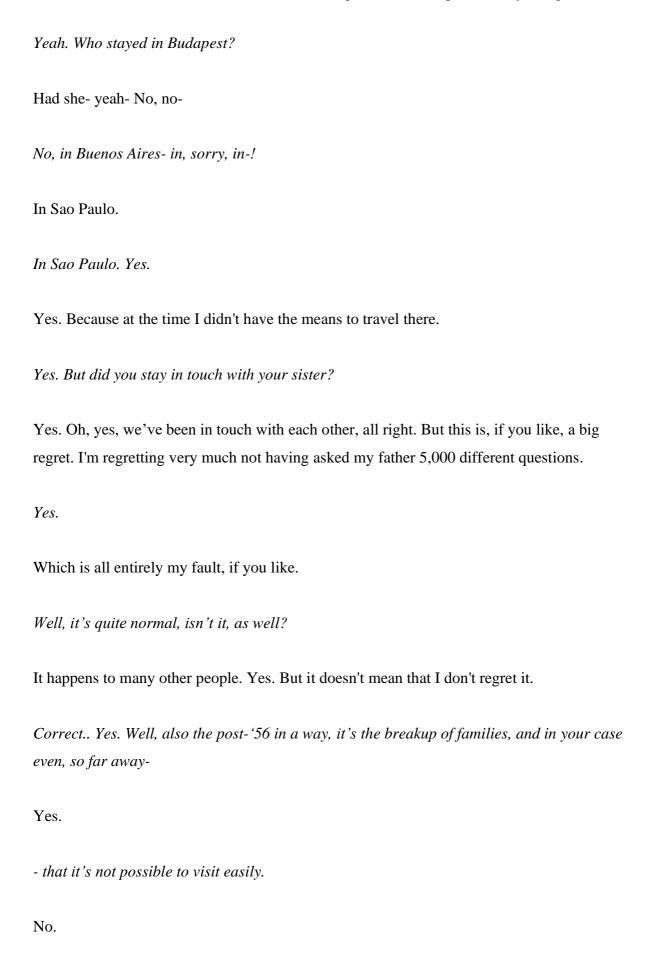
And, no, I-

So you said about when you're older you think about regrets. What-do you have? What is your biggest regret? Do you have anything you think you should have done differently, or...?

I don't know if I can single anything out at all.

But that's good! [laughing]

Yes, well, I said, I'm describing myself as a <u>lucky</u> person. And I mean that. Could I have got more lucky? Yes! But who couldn't? But- yes, I mean, it's- you know, you are hinging on all sorts of, all sorts of ifs and buts. Which it's no point in going down that kind of road. So I don't have a big regret - as such. I regret things like never having seen my grandmother again.



[02:27:22]

And do you think it was the right decision for your sister to ...?

Go to Brazil?

Yes.

No. No, but at the time, was I glad she was going? Yes, it's the honest truth. Because it was difficult for her to be here. It wasn't a simple matter. And I was in no position to offer any kind of help.

Yes- Yeah.

I wasn't- I didn't have the position, and I didn't have the preparedness. I didn't have- you know, I just could not do it. And it wouldn't have been possible to expect me to do that.

No. So why do you think it was wrong, or ...?

Because well, I think her life would have been better had she stayed here.

Does she feel the same? How does she feel about it?

I don't think she would admit to it, even if she did, which I'm not sure of. I'm really not sure of. And I might be saying all this because- I think- in that case, my grandmother wouldn't have gone to Brazil. And I would have been able to see her in Budapest.

Yes.

Or she would have come to visit us in London. I mean-

Yes. It's complex.

Yes. You see, in a way, my grandmother brought us both up, meaning my sister and myself. Because my mother was so incapacitated through illness from say, 1949-ish onwards. So she wasn't able to give much in the way of guidance and help.

Yeah - yeah.

However this is not- I don't wish to- it to look at it as a sad or tragic story. It's just how it is. And as I say, I feel lucky and fortunate to be where I am. And long may it continue.

Is there anything I haven't asked or any aspect you think, which we haven't discussed?

You haven't asked me why I'm such a mediocre tennis player.

[Bea laughs]

A mediocre tennis player. But I asked you before about your name, Badac-

Badacsonyi. [pronounced Badacsonyie]

Badacsonyi. Can you tell us, what was it changed from?

Bachrach.

[02:30:01]

And it was changed by your father, or?

Yes.

Yes.

And - yes. And my grandfather and grandmother, they didn't change the name. Only the children.

Interesting. Yeah. And you were never tempted to change back?

Well, it's too late.

Yeah.

It's too late. Besides, some people quite like this name. I don't know why, but-

Do you like it?

Well, I've got used to it. [Bea laughs] I know that when my son married then we said very gently that, you know, if you want to make a medical career, choose a good old English name. How about 'Smith'? And he said, "No, no, no, no-', he said. And then we said to our daughter-in-law- to-be, that, "Why don't you keep your original English name and-?" Etcetera. She wouldn't do that! She's not- not only that she wouldn't do that; she has already ordered the new passport in her married name. And the Registrar is going to hand it over because they- they are off next day. So I said "Okay, fine." A grandson is completely unauthorisedly, using our name on the internet and masquerades as- as another Badacsonyi, albeit he is a Kay. [Bea laughs] So, obviously there's something in the name. And. you know, people ask me, does it mean anything. I say, "It means a very good wine, which if you get the right vintage and you cool it down properly..." Yes.

Did you- linked to the name, did you ever experience any anti-Semitism, anti-foreign sentiment in England?

[02:32:20]

Superficial ones, yes. Not so much anti-Semitic. I haven't- I'm not wearing my Jewishness on my... lapel. If anybody asked point blank, I answer it truthfully. But I am notif you like, an inherit- a- an ingrained attitude from my Hungarian times, that you don't advertise it. It's not that you don't acknowledge it, but you certainly do not advertise it.

Yes.

And be very careful who you talk to, what you say. This is part-legacy of a totalitarian state.

Yes.

So I'm not being very much recognised as a Jewish person.

Yeah.

Only people who actually know. As for resentment, because of foreigners, et cetera, yes, but I mean, you know, I'm not even sure how serious that would have been. So I just say, forget it. Not important. Not- not in my case. I didn't find anything at all. Discrimination – probably.

Yes?

Meaning if I went for a job, I might get discriminated against. But I don't think I would have an example to quote. I didn't find anything objectionable.

In terms of your career, or ...?

At the worst I could say, you never know. But in all fairness, I'd say I wouldn't know. I just don't have any experience.

And do you have any message to anyone who might watch this interview in the future? Based on your experiences?

It's not easy to shift abroad, even when you are young. And it does require a conscious effort not to be underestimated how ingrained in you are old habits. Childhood memories are in many ways the strongest.

So the consequence is, try to avoid moving if you can.

Well, the consequence is that don't move easily and- and flippantly.

Yeah.

66

Consider it really, really carefully. It's not that you shouldn't move. But- maybe it's different if you are born and bred in this country. But I can only speak from my perspective.

Yeah. Okay, Mr. Badacsonyi thank you very much for this interview, and-

My pleasure.

We're going to look at some photos now.

Okay.

Thank you.

[End of interview]

[02:35:45]

[02:35:57]

[Start of photographs]

Yes, please.

Photo 1

This is my great grandfather Ignatz Schwarcz. He was Rabbi in Újpest, which is a district north of Budapest. He was forced to resign from his post, because his Hungarian wasn't good enough to keep the sermon going. And when he stopped being a rabbi there, he established a restaurant on Teréz körút, which apparently was a great success.

Photo 2

This picture was taken around 1909. And it shows my grandfather, Farkas Rosenfeld, who originally established the bookshop and who not that long after, in 1913, died of meningitis, very young. And my grandmother and my mother, as well as her doll.

Photo 3

My father, Sándor [Alexander] Badacsonyi, as a dashing young man, aged twenty-three.

[02:37:15]

Photo 4

The Bachrach family portrait. In the back row on the left, Jóska, my uncle, Manci, my aunt, her husband, Lajos Kohn, lovely man, and my mother and my father. And in the front, in the centre, Henrik, the grandfather, my grandmother Eszti, between them myself and then Evie my cousin and her mother Rózsi. Picture probably taken around 1939- 1938, '39.

Photo 5

This is the other side of the family. My grandmother in the centre, Duci the pianist on the left and my mother on the right. And of course, myself.

The name of the grandmother/when was the photo taken?

Terezia. Probably around the same time, 1939.

Photo 6

The last family holiday in the Mátra. This is at Gyön *tetö*, with Manci on the right. My father, my mother, myself, and the little girl in the centre. It- 1949.

Photo 7

The last picture of my mother from the winter of 1950-51. I took this at Tisza Kálmán tér. And I think it shows the suffering she has already endured.

Photo 8

Just married. 24th November 1961. And there are the witnesses around us. The witnesses Tommy [inaudible], Vera, and Elizabeth.

And the name of your wife, please?

Marie Badacsonyi [née Abonyi] from that day onwards.

Thank you.

Photo 9

An inspired and inspiring conductor at work in the late 1960s.

What production was that? Do you remember what this was?

No.

Photo 10

2014 - it's someone's 80th birthday party. It's unbelievable how our family has grown. Well done, everybody. Everybody is in the picture in the closest family. There are fifteen of us. Marie and myself in the middle. Andrew and Allie to the right. And Zoe, Kati, Paul, Sam and Joshua. And the small ones in the front: Ben, Rachel, Lily, Stanley, Evie and Frankie.

[02:40:00]

Photo 11

After my father passed away in 1978, I was going through his belongings in the flat, and I stumbled upon this photograph, which depicts the three siblings. And I suppose it is-dates around 1912. Certainly before the First World War. And it's Jóska standing, Manci in the centre, and my father on the left. It is an incredible document, which I treasure.

And where- where are they in the photo?

I just said it. Jóska on the right...

No but where? What's the location?

Oh, I don't know. This is must be a studio. It's not, certainly, their house.

Okay, Mr. Badacsonyi, thank you so much again for sharing your life story and for sharing your photographs with us.

My pleasure.

Thank you.

[End of photographs] [02:42:04]