

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Archive
Ref. no:	RV263

Interviewee Surname:	Bornstein
Forename:	Renee
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	10 February 1934
Interviewee POB:	Strasbourg, France

Date of Interview:	21 March 2022
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	3 hours 24 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV263
NAME: Renee Bornstein
DATE: 21 March 2022
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is 21st March 2022 and we're conducting an interview with Mrs Renee Bornstein, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we're in London. What is your name, please?

Renee Bornstein.

And where and when were you born?

I was born 10th February 1934 in Strasbourg.

Renee, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for AJR Refugee Voices.

It's my pleasure.

Please ignore Frank and look at me, thank you. Can you tell us a little bit about your family background, please?

My family background. I was brought up – I was born in Strasbourg, brought up in Strasbourg until my – we stayed there until the War started, 1939. And then started – we were taken – we were *expulsé* from Strasbourg and we were taken refugee. And we went from

Strasbourg to St Dié, St Dié to Saint-Junien, and we were always refugee. And it was hard for my parents, very restricted, because the Vichy law didn't allow Jews to work, so my father had to work *clandestinité*. He had to – he had a family to nourish. And we lived in St Junien. It was a very nice little place. Very quiet, 10,000 *habitants*, and – but when – then, you know, War started, we were first placed in *zone libre* in France. France is separated – it was through a *zone libre* and *zone occupée*. And then end of '42, all France was *zone occupée*, and then started terrible thing. [0:02:11] And we were in a little place where it was underground. They call it in French, *Les Maquis*. It was very strong. And of course, most of the people who were in the *Maquis* were Jewish. And then around the – the round up started, terribly. First, they took the Jews who were not born in France, and then they took anybody and everybody, and also children, in the street, at school. So, my parents, with a lot of hesitation and with a very heavy heart, they decided, and they agreed in the organisation OSE that we should join a group to be safe in Switzerland. And that started May – end of May 1944. We were – my sister, my brother and I, we participated in this organisation, and two other children – girls from St Junien. Then from Saint-Junien, we went to Limoges. We were thirty-five kilometres, Limoges from Saint-Junien. We were placed in a convent. But I must say, I have to tell you, before that when it was a round up, we always had to – we were hidden first in a farmer's house. Then the farmer's lady became very friendly with my mother, but one day she said, 'You know, I can't take you anymore, because if you are killed, we will be killed with you.' So, my parents find another hidden place, and it was – it was a convent. [0:04:00] It was called Notre Dame de Sion, and we and my parents, in the middle of the night we went there. We had to go hidden. And we slept, I remember that, in the chapel, on – they put us mattresses, whatever on the floor. Yes, that was – already it was terrible, that. It was a very, I remember sad life at the time. Then after that, also my parents, which – I mention it, let us go, let us participate to this group. They were going to Switzerland. And I just mentioned it. So, we stayed two – I don't know how long we stayed, two weeks or three weeks in this convent. And in this convent, they were very nice, the nuns, but one day they said, 'Children, you can now participate to a baptism. A girl is going to be baptised. She's Jewish.' And I remember this girl, she was fifteen. In my head, I think I remember her, terrible sad. She lost her – she was not conscient anymore, because her parents were killed in front of her by the Gestapo, the nuns said. So she lost – I don't know. They baptised her, and they said to each of one of us separately, my sister and brother and I – they said to me, 'Look, you are Jewish, you know

you are going to die. And if you die as a Jew you will go in hell, and if you die and you're converted, you will go to heaven.' And, you know, the Jewish religion is so deep, and I said, 'No, I'll stay as I am,' you know. I think we never knew exactly – I don't remember that I knew what mean death at the time, you know, but it didn't make me afraid. So, we went in this convent, and then we had a *convoyeuse* [accompanying person], we call it *convoyeuse*, *madricha* [Hebrew – youth leader]. She came and collected us. And then it was – in this Limoges was a few – we were all together thirty-two children. [0:06:07] Children came from different parts of France to join this group, and we were taken from Limoges to Lyon. Then in Lyon, we met another *madricha*. And in Lyon, we arrived, it was a bombardment from the Gare Perrache was June – beginning June '44, and we had to spend the night in the cellar. And I don't know, we didn't stay long in this convent. And we were then taken to Annecy by this *madricha*. In Annecy, we met the main *madricha*, who was Marianne Cohn. And it was so beautiful, and it is a beautiful place. We were around the lake, and the sunny day, June. And then we met – when we met Marianne, she said, 'Children,' she reassured us, she did us kind words. I don't remember what she said, but very kind. And, you know, it was probably – the faces were – everybody was not very happy faces, and she said, she will see, we are going to Switzerland, but don't be afraid because Swiss customers [border guards], they have nearly the same colour of uniform than the Germans. Anyway, then she said, 'Children, I have to tell you something. We missed the train now and we have organised a lorry, and the lorry will take you to this – to the crossing to Switzerland.' The lorry, it was very hot, I remember. It was a big lorry, and they all close it. We hardly could breathe, but we were there. The chauffeur didn't know that we were Jewish children. I heard that much later. Anyway, we arrived at this clandestine – how do you call it – place. I don't know, there's another word – border. [0:08:03] In this clandestine border was forest. And as soon with the lorry dropped, one young boy, he was eleven years old and he said, '*Oh, Monsieur, les Allemands aiment voyager en Citroen.*' It's like Rolls Royce was a Citroen. And it was a Citroen with four officers, German officers, or Gestapo. They stopped, and behind this Citroen was a big lorry with German soldiers. As we're children, what could we do, you know. And they stopped and they asked Marianne, 'Where are you going?' She said, 'The children just suffered from bombardment in Lyon, and I will bring them to a holiday camp in Pas de l'Echelle.' That place was called Pas de l'Echelle. Off we went in this Pas de l'Echelle, and the person in charge, the *directrice* she was called, she received us, and she said straight away to the

Gestapo, 'That's not the children I expect. I only expect boys, and here are girls with.' And we learned later that she was a *collaboratrice*. She could save us a life. Then we were there and interrogated. It was the end of the day already. Interrogated after each – they ask us individually, 'What's your name? Are you Jewish? What age? Are you Jewish?' Each question, 'Are you Jewish?' But they knew straight away, because first of all our *-comment qu'on dit* – our cards were not even –

Identity cards.

Identity cards were not even finished. We had the false name. We had false name and it was not finished. I think they noticed we were Jewish.

What was your false name?

Blanché, Blanché. I remember that. And my parents gave my elder sister, three years older, a few Swiss francs, and she put it in her mouth and swallowed it, so that the Germans wouldn't see she's a- when they make search, that she has the Swiss money. Can you imagine, thirteen years, she swallowed it. [0:10:17] But then we spent – we went to this Pas de l'Echelle, and we all went down, and the eldest one – it was a convoy from three years old until nineteen. So, the eldest ones were taken straight away in the prison in the Prison du Pax in Annemasse, it was very nearby, and we spent a few hours in this – in the middle of the night, four or five, we were taken to the prison also. We went to this Prison du Pax. In there, straight away, the Mayor of Annemasse, he visit us, and he visit us. And he was a prisoner of the last war, so he spoke – he was five years in Germany, so he spoke fluently German, so he tried to help. And we saw Marianne. She came the first day. I think in the daytime she had to work. And she came one day, and I remember her face. It was red like that and like that, swollen, and she said, 'Oh children, you can see everything.' It was – she had – they did in this Pax the most severe torture. It was a special man with the chef of the Gestapo who only did torture, and they tortured her, and it was called in French, *le bain chaud et le bain froid*. I don't know if you heard about him. In Lyon was a famous – one of the biggest Nazi in France. He was called Barbie. And it was – he's – you know, what he find out –

Klaus Barbie?

Yeah, he did this *bain froid* and *bain chaud*. And then after a while – I don't know, we didn't stay long. [0:12:08] I remember, we slept – I don't remember – I said to my sister, 'What did we do the whole days that I don't remember?' She doesn't remember either what we did. And she just said to me, 'Oh Renee, we don't need to keep our Shabbos dress.' She know this – I didn't, but she know this will be the end. And we had a little rucksack where we had, you know, the minimum. And we heard also – the cell next to us, we heard the people – we knew it was terrible, like before, when you are tortured, the last scream until the death. So it was a terrible surrounding. But the Lord Mayor, I heard now, in Annemasse, the grandson of the Lord Mayor, he said, I didn't know that before, that the Gestapo, the chef of the Gestapo, he said to the Lord Mayor, 'You know, the prison is full.' Ah yes, why they don't send us to the camp, because all the *ligne de démarcation*, all the railway were bombed, so it was no train available going out of this thing. So, he said, 'You know, I need now the rooms. I want you to organise to build a *trench*.' He said, c'*tranchée*', a trench, because I can't have the children any more.' The trench means just to – the children will be killed and put in the trench. So, the Lord Mayor said, 'Look, I promise you the children won't escape. I have a place where to put them for the moment. I have a place.' And then he put us there and they said – the Gestapo came, they count us, and they said, 'If one of you is killed, we will be all killed, inclusive the Lord Mayor.' Nobody escaped. [0:14:01] But I must say, at the border, I remember one boy had already one leg on the other side, and he was taken back. But that I forget also to say, you see, how would they found out? I heard later on the Gestapo found us out through the dogs [pause]. When we stayed in this prison, and after the prison we went in a home. It was very – I remember, we were very, very unhappy, and always we had to pray and do the prayer, you know. I was a naughty girl; I didn't want to do the cross the other side. I don't know. And we were not happy. But it was from end of May or beginning June until the 20th – until August. In August it was a liberation, and the Lord Mayor – start the liberation. The Lord Mayor was afraid that the Gestapo will come back. But, before, when the Germans still insisted with this trench, if I remember well, the Lord Mayor, he made a deal with them. That I heard also now that the Lord Mayor made a deal with the chef of the Gestapo, Meyer, and he said, 'Look, you know, it is the end of the war, you are going to lose.' And the *Maquis*, it was called, the underground, 'They know perfectly where you are. You are going to be killed. I make a deal

with you. Let the children free and I'll help you to go to Switzerland.' Because Annemasse is like a suburb from *Géneve*. It's like the same thing. So, we went in a centre from the Red Cross. We stayed three months in *Géneve*, until we get *repatrié* in France, and somebody from the Red Cross took us back to my parents. The parents find us also through the Red Cross. [0:16:04] My mother became very ill. She didn't know where we were. She knew we didn't arrive in destination, because my sister – the Lord Mayor said we can write, but we were afraid to give the address. The Gestapo wanted absolutely the address from the parents, you know, to take them. And my sister wrote a card, and she wrote it in the name of our neighbours, and she wrote we didn't arrive in our destination, so they knew we weren't in Switzerland. It was even – it was terrible. I think my mother became very ill. That was my story.

Thank you. You gave us a fantastic overview. But now I'm going to come back and ask you more questions. Tell us a little bit about your parents' life in Strasbourg, your life, before the war.

My parents were comfortable. My father was a businessman and he had even a car. You could count the people who have a car. It was not a new one, but it didn't matter. My mother wouldn't go in the car at the time. She was afraid. She regretted it so much. And I think, I don't know, I have not that much remembrance, that we have a normal childhood, a very happy childhood. I remember on Sundays going to family. I don't know. I remember that we were normal, normal family life.

What are your first memories?

And we used to go to my grandparents in Kehl am Rhein, my grandparents. My mother is born Strasbourg, but it was German when my mother was born, and when it became French my mother didn't know why exactly, my grandparents went to Kehl am Rhein. Because the doctor said to my grandfather, who was a young man, 'The air will be better.' I don't know. That was the reason I was told. So, I must say, happiness was still – I have to remember that. [0:18:03] My mother used to go regularly to visit her parents until '38. And my grandparents,

they were not German. They were born with an Austrian passport. And the *Galici* came back, so my grandparents were *staatenlos*. How do you say in English?

Stateless.

Stateless. So, they were sended straight away with three children – my mother was one of six – to Poland. And these siblings had nothing to do with Poland, didn't know the language, were not born there or educated there. So, my grandparents were – my mother had a phone call, and I think – I don't know if it's a Sunday when she went or the same Friday. She had a phone call from neighbours from my grandparents, she should come immediately. She came. My grandparents were deported, and I think with the two youngest siblings. And my grandmother would say – she always mentioned it. My poor grandmother, she was preparing Shabbat meals, the noodles, you know, she cuts the noodles in the middle – taken in – I don't know where it was. They call it [inaudible]. I don't know exactly. But my sister, the eldest, she find out my grandparents were killed 1942 already. With the young - one son stayed in Poland. The two others escape. One escape in Paris, and in Paris he was taken in the – also deported, I don't know if it was from Drancy or from another one, to Auschwitz, and also didn't survive. So, my mother, she knew the people – you know, it was a terrible – I cannot say – I stayed as a child happy, but for my parents it was already terrible.

What were your grandparents' names?

Schwarzkachel.

Schwarzkachel.

Yeah. It's a funny name, *schwarz* and *Kachel*, I don't know.

[0:20:05] *Yeah, an interesting combination.*

And when my mother had to go – I don't know for what reason in Kehl, they described my grandparents – my grandmother like a saint woman. But people did – what did they, you

know, all behaved well. We were brought up be careful, we are Jewish, always greet nicely people. Don't make dirt, you know, in a flat, we lived at the – don't make dirt, if there were dirt my mother would throw it straight away. You know, also Jews, we had already if I remember now, I come back always that, you know, it was not brought up like other children. Let it be. I didn't do that with my children. Let it be, you know? Jews are not Jews in the flat, but we had to respect. I lived in a flat and I was twice – different flats – the only person with children. But I must tell you I respected it, but everybody this German was so clean you had to respect it. Not a German from today, they're not the same. But why would I say from the War, after this –

But Renee, what languages did your mother speak to her parents? Did they speak German, French, Yiddish? What did they speak?

My grandparents speak Yiddish and my mother answered in German. And my father – my mother wanted to speak Yiddish with my father, and my father said, 'Speak German because your Yiddish is too much German.' You see. So, we were not brought up with the Yiddish language.

So which was your first language?

My mother, she brought – the first language was French to be honest. French and German [inaudible] *Alsacien*, we call it dialect- Alsace dialect. It looks like the German but a normal German wouldn't understand this dialect. Looks a little bit like the *Schweizer- Deutsch*. We were brought up *bilingue*. [00:22:02]

Bilingually.

But not German. It was this dialect. And then in Saint -Junien we lost it [inaudible] nothing to do with this dialect.

No, then you spoke French. But tell us a little bit about your siblings. You're one of how many?

Five.

But at the time, when you were born you had older siblings?

My sister was three years old, and thirteen months later my brother was born. And then eight-and-a-half years later my sister who came in the world, the most dangerous- one or the most dangerous time. And then my brother came after the War.

And tell me a little bit, how did your parents meet? Do you know how your –?

My parents? Yeah, I know. My mother – we were curious. My mother had an aunt in Karlsruhe. All the family of my grandmother lived in [inaud]. Only my grandmother was one of six. Five left the *Galicie* [Galicia], or the Poland, and one stayed. He said, 'I'm not going out because nobody – here, everybody know who I am,' you know, *c'est* funny what people would say, and he stayed. It cost his life. The others – one brother of my – and sister for my grandmother, they survive. One he was hidden in Antwerp, I think, and my mother's aunt – younger sister from – second younger sister from my grandmother, she was in Strasbourg. But they were also *staatenlos* so they were arrested in France and put it in a camp from *staatenlos* and they escaped. They had only one daughter. They escaped with this daughter, and they went in a shop – they had no cards because in France you have cards with a big stamp 'Jewish' you know, in red. And they escaped. They have nothing, no paper, and they went in Nimes [00:24:01] – I will just tell you this little story – and they entered in a shop. My great-uncle, he needed shoes, he couldn't walk in the shoes what he had, and the daughter was a twenty-year-old girl. She fell in love with a man who sold the shoes, he was the shop owner from the shoe [inaudible]. So, you know, married very quickly and she got two children. One was one year, the second was eight months pregnant. He was deported, and it was a wonder they didn't take her. She was a highly pregnant, and indeed [inaudible] as a hobby, box- he was a strong man, and on the death march last day he passed away. So it was – so my mother's only sister, they had four brothers, she was married in Germany and a lot of German Jews left to Holland. You know, that is –

Yeah.

And they were straightaway – were in Holland, and they were also taken in this- what is it called- famous camp where they collect the Jews?

Westerbork.

Westerbork. And they lived in Nijmegen taken Westerbork and Auschwitz. And they both were killed in Auschwitz. So that my mother and two brothers escaped were alive. My mother- three, my mother and her two brothers, they escaped. They hide from one country to the other. They were young, twenty or twenty-one, and they made by chance in Italy. And Italy was very good. They organised a ship, a boat, and they let them emigrate to Palestine. And my two uncles, they didn't know, they met by chance before going in this ship. And then they couldn't go in the ship if they're not married, so the people just put their name down, took women, took men, it doesn't matter what, and marry them so they could go in Palestine. [00:26:09] In Palestine they were straightaway taken in the Army. And one uncle used to say, 'They said straightaway, 'We can see you come from Germany, you are punctual, and the shoes were clean.' And they lived in Bnei Brak, guarded, you know, like he was very Teutonic my uncle stayed like that.

So the two brothers survived. But you were going to tell us how did your mother meet your father.

Oh yeah, you see, what I do, I thought from one through the other, that's my weakness.

That's okay.

My mother's aunt lived in Karlsruhe and my father's aunt lived in Karlsruhe, and they both were very good friends. And they met. My mother was sixteen years old. So, my father were not interested, until my father was five years older, and then I think they met – the two aunts made a *shidduch*. They met, yeah.

And what business – what did your father –?

My father was always in textile. And my mother was – so a very good housewife. She went in a school, you know, where you go after the school, sewing and [inaudible]. For me she was a perfect housewife, yeah. And she had- you know, the War, I don't know, she couldn't do anything. My father worked first clandestine by [inaudible] to get food for us, and then he made – he was not allowed. Where we were it was a country from the gloves, the leather gloves and he handled with leather gloves. Would he be taken, it would be finished. But it was so abnormal a situation.

But only – he had a shop you said in Strasbourg.

Yeah.

Before the War.

Yeah.

What was it called?

I don't know that, what it was called before the War.

Okay, and where was it in Strasborg? [00:28:01]

No, I don't know if he had a shop, my father, excuse me. No, he didn't have a shop.

Only after the War.

It was the War – yeah.

But not before.

No. But he handled always in textile. I don't know if he's a *représentante* for a firm or what he did exactly, but my parents had a comfortable life.

And how Jewish was their lives?

Oh, very *frum*, yeah. My mother's parents was the *frumest* in Kehl am Rhein. My grandmother went to the *Mikvah*, you know. Nobody else had to go to Karlsruhe at the time. My mother always said she was brought up – both grandmothers wore headcover. My mother refused it, it was so terrible, the headcover. [Both talking at once] Religious, oh yes, strict *kashrut*.

And synagogue? Which synagogue? Do you have any memories of a synagogue in Strasbourg?

No, I don't remember. After the War, yeah, [inaudible] before the War, no.

Anything else you remember from pre-War Strasbourg? You said you went to parks or –?

I must tell you the truth. We probably went to parks. Yeah, we went to parks, I have to remember. Also, we went – in the summer my parents took us to the swimming pool. That I remember. We took – they call it picnic. I remember. That was in Strasbourg. And in the War we went also once having a picnic and we were bombed, and we didn't go any more to picnic. It was unusual, you know, until – before '42 the bombs, and then...

So tell us in Strasbourg when did things change? So, what happened for you?

'39 we were taken refugee. It was finished the normal life had an end and [inaudible]. I remember that my – I think I remember that my mother cried in the evening, you know, when we were in St. Dié. [00:30:05] And we had no normal life afterwards. And then my mother, she couldn't find a decent flat in St Junien. With her three children. She finds an attic, and in St Junien it was high *luxé* if you had cold water running. So that's why I mentioned the most primitive part. So it was no – my mother had to get down three stairs to collect cold water. If

you can imagine that, coming from a normal home. Strasbourg was very emancipated. It was the border from Germany. You had nice bathrooms, you had everything, and suddenly it was terrible. But when my father after one year came, he finds a flat where we lived all the years, who had cold water that was the high *luxe*.

So let's go back. Before we get to Saint-Junien –

Before the War. I remember that we had – I can't remember that we went to family, but especially remembrance, I haven't got.

No, I meant since '39 you said your father was taken to the Army.

Yeah.

Tell us a little bit about – what happened in 39?

I don't know if [inaudible] – if he could reach my mother. I'm not sure. If it was through the Red Cross. I don't know. So, my mother – we were then with my mother in Saint-Junien –

But your father was recruited to the French –

Yeah.

To the French Army?

But I don't remember which town, you know, funnily enough I never bothered to ask him where.

And you said before that with what's going on in Ukraine, it reminds you very much of your own situation.

Yeah, because –

Why?

Refugee taken from a normal home in the middle of nowhere, really brought all back what we went through. How difficult, how terrible it is. It's undescribable for me. Even as a child we suffered. [00:32:01] Seeing your mother unhappy and crying, you know, it is very hard. And she didn't cry in the day, she composed herself, but I suppose it was a – she had a big shock of losing her parents, and then this way I think was – we witness a big unhappiness I would say.

Yeah.

But my mother managed to cook for us, and to be – cleaned, dressed.

To protect you.

Yeah. And when we were refugee, we had no – we took somewhere, there was no furniture. My mother would take orange box – that I remember- she would take an orange box and she was very good and asked for – and took a piece of material and embroider it and made us like it will be a little piece of furniture. She was very, very – she made it homely, you know.

Imaginative.

Imaginative she was. It was no toilet where we lived. You had to cross two gardens to reach the toilet, but I always remember as a child before all that happened, that we were – went away from my parents, it doesn't make – it didn't make us unhappy because human being adjusted very, very – that I can tell you – very quick. The beginning was hard for my mother. I think the worst was because she was without my father.

So where – you said the first place from Strasbourg, what was it called? St Dieu?

St Dié.

St Dié. And why did you go there?

We were forced. You know, you couldn't choose. It was no choice. That was the – the people were directed there, and you had to obey. That I remember. No choice, as my mother would say.

And what was it? A village? What was there in St Dié when you arrived? [00:34:00]

First we were taken in a place, for me it was like a big hall where they put mattresses. It was not mattresses, it was straw. I remember that. We slept on straw for two nights. And I don't know if it was – I couldn't tell you, the rest how it was. I can't remember if we had food, no food, nothing, just that and–

And Renee who was there? Your mother, yourself...?

And my sister and my mother.

Yeah, your father was already [both talking at once] –

No, he [both talking at once] that one day he was with us, he was straightaway taken – the same time as my mother had to leave the flat, my father was taken in the Army.

So you were in this hall and then? Then what happened next?

Next we were taken two days later, lodger in a family. And I also never made enquiry which family, who it is. I regret it today. I don't know. My mother said always marvellous people because in the evening they called always my mother to- so she could sit with the family when we were in bed.

From the same – in the same place.

In the same place because two – that I probably [inaudible] the organisation for the refugee, you know, they put us there. I don't know.

And Renee, do you remember could you take anything? Any of your toys or any luggage or anything?

Yeah, my mother she took with her, I can tell you that. I don't remember toys, no. No toys [inaudible] I wasn't sure. The strict minimum that my mother take, I asked her – she took – you know, by the Polish Jews it was a *minhag*, the parents-in-law give to the couple a candelabra. And my grandparents they gave a big candelabra, a very big candelabra, and my mother always ask how she could take that. [00:36:02] And she took in a little duvet she said, she took this candelabra with her.

A shabbat candle?

Yeah.

Yeah.

And it was the big one. My brother, the youngest, he has it now.

They survived?

Survived, yeah. It was a beautiful candelabra.

That's what she took, amazing.

Yeah.

And you? Do you remember anything you took?

No. I can't remember anything. We had little rucksack what we take. At five years I was too young.

Yeah, so you left –?

I think some people may remember, no. I don't remember nothing about that, what we took.

So, you were there for two weeks with the family?

Yeah.

Yeah. Who were the family? Do you remember who they were or –?

I remember the name of the son. He was called André. I remember he was twenty years old, and my sister, the eldest, she was not happy. She called my mother. She wanted my mother. You know when my mother joined the family, so he gave her a telling off. I remember that. That I remember. He had a little dog and he put the dog on her duvet because we had three bed- was in bed what it was, sleeping next to [inaudible]. And then she was quiet, yeah. You know, that I remember from this family. I don't remember nothing about food, nothing.

And did they know you were Jewish?

Hannah doesn't.

Yeah [pause]. And then it was time you had to move on from there or –

Then we were – they organised us to go to St Junien in a train, and it was probably a very slow train, I don't know. It was – for me, it would take ages. More to – I can't remember. I always imagine it take one day-and-half, maybe probably less. [00:38:00] And there was no toilet. That I remember. That it was organised tins that we could go to the toilet. That I remember [laughs], and that is the only thing who stick in my mind, you know.

And you said, did some people manage to, or want to go back to Strasbourg or no, you wanted to go more into France at that point?

No, we had no choice. It was absolutely no choice. You had to be – you were sent where – you had to go where you were sent. No choice at all.

So even the place you went.

Even they would go to Strasbourg, it was – the Jews were not allowed to go back anyway, but nobody went back.

No, because at that point the Germans – Strasbourg became part of Germany.

Yes, it was unfortunately.

And where was your father fighting at that time? Did you know?

No, I don't remember. I don't know unfortunately. I have to ask my elder sister if she remember. She remembers less than I. She's three years older. But I don't know, maybe she knows, but I don't know. My youngest brother didn't even know that my father was incorporated in the Army, was sent in the Army. He didn't even know. My father didn't speak about it. It's funny.

He didn't talk about it.

No. Never spoke about his experience.

So it was '39. When did your father then join you in St –?

I imagine it was September '39, one year later.

So in 1940

Yeah.

And until then it was only your mother with the three children.

Yeah.

So how did she manage? So tell us about your life then.

But you know, I was a child of five. At six we went to the school. We went to school.

[00:40:00] I remember one thing. I had long hair and my mother – she – how do you call it?

You know, ringlet.

Yeah.

Ringlet, long hair, and when I came back from school my mother discovered – she never saw it before, she didn't know what it was, that – things – how do you call it, lice in my hair. That I remember. It was a very bad memory for me because my mother took me to the hairdresser, and I had my hair cut like a man. You know, short for to get rid, and I remember the name from the product, Marie Rose, at the time. That I remember. It was a terrible thing. She never cut me the hair afterwards, but I was – if I went near somebody with it, straightaway I had it.

And did she receive some help there from an organisation or from anyone? How did she manage to live for a year?

It was a refugee organisation but exactly why and how it was, you know, unfortunately I never – was not curious enough to ask. I don't know. It was an organisation of refugee. Of course, she couldn't survive.

No.

I don't know how she did, and with the doctors, with everything, with – and my father after one year, he came back with a bicycle, and 1,000 kilometre he did by bicycle. And we three, my mother always remembers, mention it, we had whooping cough. Whooping cough? Whooping cough.

Ah, whooping cough.

Yeah, and my poor father couldn't sleep, all three at night, they didn't give anything at the time for that. So that I remember. I remember.

So he cycled 1,000 kilometres to find you. [00:42:01]

Yeah.

And then you said he found a better accommodation for you when he arrived.

Yeah, it was highly luxurious. Cold water in the flat. Cold water in the flat. Because St Junien, most of the people where we lived nearby, you could see it was everywhere - *Brunnen*, and how do you say, water outside.

Well. A well.

Yeah, everywhere you could see it was a –

And how do you remember interacting with the local people? You know, did you have some friends?

Yeah, my mother had – yeah, we had good friends from local. They accepted us. At first, they call *Alsacien* these people from Alsace, they speak the dialect, and they said a lot of 'Ja, ja.' And the people call the refugee, "le Jaja" [pause].

The Jaja.

'The Jaja take our jobs, the Jaja take that.' It was [inaudible] my father because – but they were nice with us, very nice. My mother always said nice things. She was very positive about the people.

And could your father do some work then when he was there?

No, I told you, clandestine.

Clandestine, yeah.

He was not allowed to do some work. I imagine they gave to the refugee allowance, but you couldn't survive with it. He did first – my father never knew what a garden is, but he learned it, and afterward he – when it was the opportunity, he did organise the business with the gloves, but it was not declared. So it was always – my mother couldn't take it, her nerves were very weak, but he did it until we moved – until we could do it official after the War.

So he produced gloves or –?

No, no. He sold them.

Okay. [00:44:00]

They were manufactured. I don't know if it was Limoges or where. Limousin was with gloves.

And that gave him an income.

Yeah.

What other memories do you have there of the village, or –?

Did I have a memory of the village? [Pause] Unfortunately, my memory is not the best.

I mean, maybe the question is were you protected by your parents? Was it quite a happy place, or was there already fear that you know it –?

I remember my parents were listening each night, Radio Londres, Radio London, Radio London, ta-ta-ta-ta. I remember, and very, very quiet, and they told the truth, you know. It was – I think the de Gaulle organise it. I'm not sure. They listen that. You know, children feel attention, but we were not – I cannot say that I felt unhappy. You know, it was part of your life, daily life that, and you accepted it I think. We had no choice. We accepted it like my parents had to accept it. It was no food, you know, it was –

Tell us about the food. So, what did you eat or what –?

I was brought up with a lot of beans, I remember. We could have beans, you know, all kind of beans. And for years and years I couldn't eat a bean [both laugh], and now I like them. It's so healthy, you know? We were never ill, and everything was very rich, everything go in the ground. We had two – where we lived, this house had two nice gardens with a lot of trees, you know, fruit trees. And my father he plants also – he plants even – my father was a smoker. He plants even his tabac. You know, [laughs] –

His own tobacco.

Yeah. So, it was nice memory. [00:46:02] We had the fruit we could eat, which was a very – where we lived called Avenue Voltaire but also Route St. de Bris a little bit further. It was a beautiful street bordered with trees, with fruit trees. I also dream about these big cherries. I suddenly remember the nice memory. You know, we often come and ate too much. We could eat – I don't think my mother could – needed to buy fruit because there was so many – oh, I don't remember the name of the apple. So, very nice kind of – France has beautiful fruit and the veg. I mean, even with no meat, so much meat, but we didn't suffer about that. What was also, we collected ourself chestnuts. When the autumn came, each night we had chestnuts or grilled or cooked in water. I remember that, and we loved it.

Healthy probably, yeah.

Flour. It was not flour now they say it's healthy, you buy it in a health shop. It was called *son* [German: Kleie, English: bran]. Something like *Ersatz* flour, *son* but it's a natural product. And my mother she baked with that. She baked for shabbat the *Rugelach*. You know what it is?

Yeah.

She baked, and we smell it already, and then it was no freezer [laughs]. We came home and we wanted them, and my mother said, 'Eat what you like, and when it's finished, it's finished.'

So you kept shabbat.

Yeah, kept shabbat, yeah.

Were there any other Jewish refugees?

Yeah, it was – oh yes, there were Jewish refugees there. And it was – the people there, they didn't know what is Jews, and they didn't know what is Protestant. They have no idea. So, it was a shed who was converted, shabbat for the Jews, Sunday for the Protestant. [00:48:03] That I remember, that is a memory that made me think about it. And the Jews, yes –

Renee, how many Jewish families were there?

I don't know how many, but it was quite a few. My parents were friendly with all the Jewish families.

How big – how many people lived there at the time?

It's 10,000 people.

Okay.

The *capacité*. I don't know how many, but my mother's best friend came back to Strasbourg. They remain the best friend until my mother passed away much – before this lady.

And they were together there.

They were always big friends, and this woman left – I remember that I was eight years old. I never notice if a boy was good-looking or not. For the first time I notice a young man, a good-looking. It was a son of this lady who was called Silberschlag. he was also like my mother, from *polnisch* parents born in Germany. Because the *Yekkes* [a Jew of German-speaking origin] didn't like the Polish Jews, and my mother even born in Strasbourg, was considered Polish Jews. So, all this people like my mother who was from Polish Jews, they were like – the Polish Jews themselves was like a big family.

Yeah, they were a separate community. The Ostjuden.

Yeah, the Ostjuden. But my mother had nothing, no affinity with the Ostjuden.

Yeah.

You know, to be honest she had no affinity, nothing- her friends were all like her, more or less. She had a few, but it didn't matter. By chance they were nice people, but she had more affinity with the people, same background. And this lady, she had only two children, and her son who I remember was a very handsome boy, looks like his mother, he was twenty-one years old. He was a student, underground, everything. And one day he was deported, and he never came back. [00:50:00] And he had a girlfriend who was pregnant, and when this – these people – you know, they were not like it now, all these religions together, not- it was mixed. She was not religious, these people, but still she was – when she heard her son's girlfriend is expecting a baby, she wanted to meet this girl. And when she met this girl, I

always remember- I was eight years old- she said, 'I can understand my Rudi. You are such a beautiful girl.' Can you imagine? And she stayed for this granddaughter in [inaudible]. I knew her. And the girlfriend of this young man who was deported, she married the best friend of this father of her daughter. And she stayed, you know, so Catholic. She went to Israel. I don't know, he had a [inaudible], what he was – he was highly intelligent man – which occupation he did in Israel. But their grandmother said – she had two boys with him, and she sends them all in this Christian school. She stayed as she was.

So your –

That I remember, the friend, and we had other good friends also. I remember my mother had a lot of friends. She was very – how do you call it?

Sociable.

Sociable, yeah. I don't know if the people from St Junien, the French, came to us. It was more the people like us, refugee, you know. She was friendly with them. When she saw them, speak nicely, or with our neighbours who were very good to us. My younger sister, she had no children. She ate each night with these people. They adored her. They were very nice with us, and my mother, she always apologised because in the War time you had no leather shoes, you had wood shoes. [00:52:03] And we were three and we were fighting around the table. It was a big room. Fighting around the table. My mother said – she was very strict. But this lady was working in the day, they were most at home. But otherwise, she always said, 'You have to respect people. You can't do that.'

Too noisy with the shoes.

Yeah. When you think –

You couldn't afford – there were no leather shoes available.

If you afford it or not, it was not available. It was thing so. I can't remember even these wooden shoes [inaudible], no memory about the wooden shoes any more.

So your parents had a sort of community of other refugees.

Yes, there was *shul*, my father went to shul. *Yontif* we went to *shul*, and it was '42 so I was also eight years old. It was before my mother gave birth. It was just – she gave shortly after Yom Kippur, or a little bit after, and she heard it's a roundup. And she sent me to this *shul* and she said, 'Tell them it's a roundup,' but they wouldn't take notice. They continued to *daven*. And thank God it wasn't at the time, it was a false – very often it was false alarm, and very often it was roundup by surprise.

So, when the did the roundups start? When you got there in '40 – you got there early –?

I know that it's '42. Yeah.

Yeah, from '42. So things changed.

Changed drastically dramatically.

And how did that translate to you as a child? Again, you were in school, you started school. You said you were six, so you started school in '41.

Yeah, it was like that. I think it was relatively quiet. It was – I don't know if it was with the Italian, you know, it was the war, the Italian join the German. [00:54:01] But the Italian were not like the German. For example, the border where we were arrested, just before it was Italian, and they knew that the Jews are going to Switzerland and the Italian didn't care. They let all the Jews who wanted to cross, they let – and as soon when Mussolini, I don't know, separated with Hitler – I don't know the story about that –

Yeah, in 1943 I think, yeah.

Yeah, and then the Gestapo took over and they were ferocious.

Yeah.

But look, this Marianne Cohn, she managed to –

One second. [Break in recording] Yes, so we were talking about 1942 and when things changed, and talking about your school, and how you felt that change. You said there were roundups. What other changes were there for you – experience from your –?

We always went to school, we didn't- that we went to school, and we went in nuns' school, the refugee didn't – the first year I was in normal school, and then when more refugee came, they made a school for refugee where the nuns taught us from Alsace-Lorraine, from Lorraine they were, the nuns. And they were playing – they were young nuns – playing with us in the break. They were nice. They always said – what did she say – 'If the Jews would know how good is ham, it wouldn't be forbidden,' she used to say. But we were exempt from the *catéchiste*. We didn't attend. But one day – if you [inaudible] me my memory from six years old – one day a little girl of six, she was the same age as me, we're the same class, she came out and she said, 'Dirty Jews, you killed our Jesu.' And, you know, my father he always taught us we are to – if somebody attacks you, you have to learn to defend yourself. And I was such a shy girl, abnormal shy, but I put my little thing and gave her a punch on her mouth and she lost a tooth. [00:56:06] And she didn't cry, but I cried. I never touched a child in my life after that. And I will just finish that we became very good friend with this girl. You see. But it was not her fault. She learned it. But I know that the Pape Roncalli [Pope John XXIII], I don't know if you remember that, you're too young. It was *Papst* [pope], it was only six months *Papst*, and he let it cross that the Jews killed Jesu. He had it cross. But I don't know, six months, it was only six months a *pape*. He was from a nice *paysan* [peasant] family, and six months after he disappeared. So, people said maybe it's the Mafia, the Vatican Mafia killed him. But the synagogue from Strasbourg made a special prayer for him, that I remember, because he was so – he did so much good for Jews because that was a departure of the *anti-sémitisme* was Jesu killed – was killed by Jews.

Did you ever experience other anti-Semitism from the local population?

Personally, that was the only one when somebody told me, 'Dirty Jew.' A six years old girl.

And what about your sister, she was older, what were her experiences in that time or –?

I couldn't tell you that. We were together, always together. She would tell you, I cling always on her. We were together. But for example, in – I will tell you a little story from Switzerland when we were in this Red Cross part. It was a hotel opposite the Palais des Nations. It was converted in Red Cross Centre. And there the – it was far away, shabbat, we were not invited by the Jewish community, but the Sunday we were invited. And my sister, she had a nice family, and I had a family, and they ask me if I can play piano. [00:58:02] Can you imagine? I went out from prison, and I was very sensitive. Today I'm astonished that I was so sensitive. I didn't want to go back in this family the next – the following Sunday. So I ask my sister to go with her, and she was not happy because I always clinged on her, you know. And she had such a nice family. But the Swiss had no idea what happened – that's what I wanted to say, but the people who ask you things like that, from my childhood, what – all together I haven't got the bad memories. Even from the nuns' school, they were- they let us be, you know, as we would say today. Didn't say anything. They would not antagonise us, didn't say anything.

And your mother had another child in '42.

Yeah.

So that must have been a [inaudible],

Can you imagine, she gave birth – I don't know. One brother or sister said in the morgue, but I think she gave birth in the normal *maternité* but after giving birth they put her in the morgue in case it's a roundup. It was very traumatic in the time she stayed in nine days. It was very hard, yeah, because my sister, she was not allowed to make noise, you know, when you are hidden [pause].

Do you remember the birth of the –?

Yeah, I remember very well. I remember what my mother wore when she went to – when she went to giving birth. I remember that. I remember very well.

And was there then a feeling it was dangerous, or was it a celebration? I mean, was – it's difficult to imagine.

No, I don't think it was celebration. That I am a hundred percent sure. It was one roundup after the other. I don't think parents had the heart to celebrate. [01:00:02]

So a very difficult time.

It was. And, you know, when I think both parents, my both parents lost nearly their entire whole family, my father was one of five, two survived. Sister went – married in Karlsruhe to Palestine at the time, and my father. And by my mother, there was his two brothers, and her. By chance, it was like a miracle when Jews escape- survive. I think each Jew from my generation has a story, a sad story.

And Renee, you said that OSE, the organisation to save the Jewish children, then tried to convince your parents to –

Yeah, they send always people to convince –

When? So since '42?

Oh, for years. Once they wanted to send us in *internat* [boarding school] but my parents were not allowed where we will be sent. My mother and father said they would never do that. And we heard later, my mother told me, it was bombed. Can you imagine? Then, you know, it was so terrible the people said, 'You have to give the change to your children to survive,' so a lot of people sent the children in the hope they will survive. We were very lucky. I tell you it's a miracle that I'm here. Thank to Marianne Cohn, and she was killed in a terrible way.

Yeah.

Yeah. A horrible way.

But your mother of course – your sibling, the baby, was too small –

Yeah, she was.

To be sent anywhere.

No.

So tell us about how did your parents then survive when you were sent away?

I think I told you my mother – baby came ill and she – because she was *génétique* in our family is the blood pressure, and she had angina pectoris. [01:02:00]

In the War?

I think in the War the blood pressure must decrease, I don't know. She became ill. And my father did hide it, my mother show it more, but my father he hide it. They were both – you can imagine sending three children away and – it happened. And my mother had friends, they lost – this woman lost all her children. It happened terribly. In St-Junien it happened, it was one family we knew very well, father, the couple, and two marvellous children, marvellous people, German Jews they were, taken, never came back. And one man also, his wife was not Jewish, but she was very short-sighted, and it was just before the – it was just before – wait a moment – the burning of Oradour[sur-Glane], and it was the worst SS with the black uniform and the black hat with the death head. And they marched through this little town, Saint-Junien, and the wife, this wife, the nice lady, and she called her husband, 'Jules, Jules, you have to come. I can't see who is walking there. Who are they?' And he went at the window, and he was – they called him, he had to go down, come out of the house, and he was killed.

Can you imagine? [Inaudible] Jewish, yeah. That was, I remember as a – that's what happened in Saint- Junien. Oh, many – when my father saw in the street the SS or Gestapo, he would hide. And my – and we, when we were from Limoges to Lyon, I also hide in the toilet when I saw them. I was a little girl. [01:04:00] We were – as long we live in Saint- Junien, you know, you live with your parents, you have- in German we say *die Geborgenheit* [security] – how you say? You feel safe.

Yeah, but once you are separated then –

Yeah, then it was a different life.

But Renee, did they feel – the OSE also that it was – the parents could hide better without the children, or was it to save the children? [Both talking at once].

No, only to save the children. Oh no, my mother would never – no, to save us. Because I mentioned it's so many children who are taken.

Yeah, but what did your parents then do? Did they go into hiding?

I don't know. Yeah, probably. That I never asked, you know. Probably.

Did they stay in their flat? What did they do?

Yeah, they stayed in this flat. I don't know, you know, I was too little.

Yeah.

It was only the last six months. I don't know. It was the most terrible time because they knew they are lost, and Hitler was completely crazy. I watched films about info. I haven't got for the moment in the television, my satellite is broken, but I watched the info, and now I saw how they are. They knew it, they lost the War, and Hitler gave them – asked them to kill

everybody who is on their way. And you we saw in the *ville* just people play in France la *pétanque* [boules], you know, this play with the boules, they play outside.

Yeah.

And all range of men they put them against the wall, and like that. It didn't matter, Jews or non-Jews towards the end. Or Hitler gave the order to the General from Paris, 'You have to kill – you have to bomb all the ornaments in Paris. Not one should be left.' And the General said, '*Jawohl, mein Führer,*' but he didn't do it. He got the biggest distinction from France at the time. They were so mad at the end that they were even more ferocious, what I wanted to say, with SCAR 44, with the children. [01:06:01] It was in cruelty. I cannot read what happen in Ukraine, but I think Putin applies similar cruelty. I can't say the same. Killing children, babies, bombed everything.

Terrible.

He had a good – I never thought in my life that a second Hitler will come around.

No, it's unbelievable isn't it?

You know, some people who are killed, they say the Ukrainian War is very big anti-Semitic. They are pro-Nazi, and I must tell you I was – I travelled quite a lot. I took part with Eddie Freudmann – I don't know if you remember the name – he's English and he organised Anglo-Saxon live in Israel, travel, and as I am alone since forty-three years when the children were out of the house, I joined time to time. I went to Russia, and I went to Ukraine, and that was – now there are many Jews, he said – 200,000- there were hardly Jews, when I was there. I can't remember if it was, probably before Putin – what would I want to say now? And I went to Babi Yar. And the guide was not Jewish. He explain that when they asked the Jews to come with valuable and they are putting – sending in safe in Switzerland. So they came and the Ukrainian make like a wall. They've organised a wall that nobody could escaped. And they killed – you know, and you read it yourself. And they thought at the time – we were told 34,000 but, you know, on this little monument what Putin bombarded, it was not written they

were Jews who were killed. Only people who are killed. And the Jewish people were out of their minds. And that, you know, they didn't keep it as something – they allowed, you know, continue this *ravin* [ravine] where they killed, they did the killing, continue to function as a park and as a – but still, you know, you can't [inaudible] eighty years later. [01:08:07] Not the same people. It's no point to – for me, it's terrible. I went to *Chabad* was there. We had a horrible experience in Ukraine. [Inaudible] was chosen for thirty people, they choose me. I was one of the first. I was pleased that I went through quickly, through the custom, or to go to join the plane. And he took my passport and said, 'Your passport is not in order, you have to stay in Ukraine.' And my passport, the visa, was made by Ukraine, you know, by the consular in Israel, *ukrainien*. And I had to stay. That was traumatic, I tell you, I was out of my mind. Out of thirty people, I have to stay, and the person in charge was not a capable person. Was a woman, completely incapable. I saw her many years after and I was not ladylike, I couldn't see the face of this woman because did nothing for me.

You had to stay behind?

Pardon?

You had to stay behind by yourself?

Yeah. One day behind. I was lucky. And I joined – I had – they ask – we had like a guide, and this guide ask her if she can look after me. She gave me somebody else, but the guide said to me, 'You know, your chef or the people who was in – look after you, they didn't give me any tip.' So, I said, 'Why did you not ask him [for] the tip. I haven't got much money because we gave it to this charity.' You know, one side [inaudible] oligarch and one side the Jews are so poor you cannot imagine. Had no teeth in their mouth. They joined an organisation from Israel, they send them this [inaudible].

Yeah.

But I was pleased, but I didn't know what did I have to do. I should give them \$100.

[01:10:01] I had no idea you give custom \$100. It didn't go in my head, you know. So I had

to stay. And this guide, she said to me, 'I'll take you in my flat, in a hotel there's no room,' I said, 'Oh no, I want to see by myself. Take me to the hotel.' And the hotel was empty. It was like a ghost thing. And the telephone, you couldn't phone automatic, you know.

Which year was that Renee? When was that?

Which year was that? I think it was before Putin. I phone my son-in-law, he's a psychiatrist in Israel. I said, 'Hillie, I need you. I'm out of my mind. What happened to me.' He cool me down, and then he said where I want to go, and I ask where—it was in Odessa, magnificent city. Kiev, Odessa, you cannot imagine how beautiful Ukraine is. I never imagined it's so beautiful, so green. And I ask, 'Which plane is leaving the first Odessa?' They said, 'El Al.' But I came with El Al because I came from – I didn't come by myself in Russia.

With a group?

With a group.

Yeah.

But it was terrible things. And I said, 'Oh, [inaudible],' I said to the guide, 'Can you take me back to the- *wie heißt das?* [what's the name]?' To the people –

Community.

Yeah. No, not community, these people who do so much when I am now tired and nervous.

The Chabad.

The Chabad. 'Take me back to the Chabad.' Chabad said, 'You didn't tell us that you stayed a day longer with nothing to eat.' I said, 'I don't mind I can eat some fruit.' Believe me, I was not hungry [laughs] – it was like that. And then I went, I left the next day in the afternoon, and they took me to the airport. You cannot believe what I went through. **[01:12:04]** And

two people who – I don't know, they were soldiers, or they were customers, with a machine, they – I was not allowed to join the normal group to go in the plane. They took me apart like I would be I don't know what. [Sighs] I said I wanted to do – once, I like to do cruises. I did a cruise in Russia. It was a cruise. The most primitive ship. But also – but now I said I want – so when it is – Russia is on the programme, I say for me, I will never put my feet there. It was not in Russia, it was Ukraine. Russia, I fell in love with St Petersburg. But it is a funny –

You had an adventure there.

I tell you, it was at the time very hard to live there. And people have no pensions. Sixty-year-old woman had no money, nothing, and they went on the street to sell the babushka. But they sold them so quick.

Yeah.

Yeah. It was a sad life. I don't know. And very corrupt. No, I'm not going to speak about Russia, no.

No. Renee, let's go back to Saint-Junien. I wanted to ask you about the address. Do you remember where was it?

Yes, I told you, I mentioned it to you.

Just say it again.

Quinze, Avenue Voltaire.

Quinze Avenue Voltaire. 15, Avenue Voltaire.

Yeah.

And that's where you stayed.

Still the same address. The house is still there. It's a shame that I didn't think to bring this photo.

That's where they stayed.

Yeah.

After – also after you left for the six months.

Yeah, yeah.

Okay, now let's go back. Do you remember then that day of leaving when you left your parents?

Yes, we all cried, I remember.

Tell us about it please.

I was very sad. I was a little girl of ten and it was the first time in my life that I left. That I was without my parents. [01:14:01] My father was one year left, but without my mother. Yes, we were devastated.

And what did they tell you? What did your parents tell you? Where you are going, what's going to happen.

Yes, we knew in Switzerland, that we knew. Our parents said we are going to be safe in Switzerland.

And did they tell you at that point not to say you're Jewish or what –?

No, my parents didn't say nothing.

Not at that point.

No.

No.

That was only the last *madricha*, poor Marianne, yeah.

So when you left, they told you, 'You're going to safety in Switzerland.'

Yeah.

And –

We were supposed to be to a ship that go, you know.

And were they saying – were they already thinking the end of the War is in sight? Did they feel it's coming to the end, so it's just –?

I think –

Do you see what I mean?

I know what you mean, but I couldn't answer the question what did my parents feel. That I could not – I suppose they must feel because they listen each day to Radio Londres.

So you were all crying. Your sister who was thirteen at the time, and you were ten.

Yeah, and my brother. We all three cried. And we were taken quickly. I don't even remember if we went by train or by car. Probably by train. There was no car. It was three cars

in the little town. The doctor's, the priest, and the Lord Mayor [laughs], so it was a train we took. It was only thirty-five kilometres, Limoges from St Junien.

And how many children went from –?

Thirty-two we were all together.

From the same place?

No, two, only two others. We were five. Two girls with us.

Who were the other two girls?

Jewish girls. One was the same age as my sister Helen, and the other maybe also the same age.

So five people.

Five, yeah.

Five children. And the others came from –?

You know, I didn't even ask from where. You know, when you're ten years old, that didn't bother me from where they come. **[01:16:04]**

And all were Jewish children?

Yeah. I remember only two names. I didn't remember – one name, I remember now. I didn't remember the other name.

And you said the age was two?

From three.

Three.

Some people said two or three, and this woman she was three and she came with four – there were four siblings. I don't know how old, I never read the story, how old her eldest from these four was. To send a child of three- hm? Some says two, but two or three, doesn't matter.

And then you said – so you were first met by the first madricha- leader?

Yeah. I remember her. It was a sister from one girl, from this girl from Saint-Junien who came with us. They were two *madricha*. I remember.

What was her name, do you remember?

Schieler [pause]. Yeah, Martha Schieler.

Martha?

Schieler.

Schieler, hmm-mm. And she came from OSE, from the organisation?

Yes, but apparently in St Junien, one sister came with us, and she was sixteen years old and worked for the OSE. But I think she was with another girl, but we didn't know the name of the other girls. I don't remember, I must say, I can speak only about me.

And how long did it take from actually leaving until you then went into those lorries to the border? Was that quite quick or –?

I think it was a few hours. I still remember that was a few hours. And you know this chauffeur, he didn't know that – I told you – I mentioned he didn't know that we were Jewish, and he was taken to the prison, and he was nearly – he was so tortured. I heard that he passed away very soon after. [01:18:02] I don't know the gap, but very soon, and this poor man, he was forty-two years old. He didn't know that – I am sure, I don't know. I was told he didn't know that we are Jewish. If it's true, I don't know the truth.

So at what point did they tell you not to say you are Jewish?

When we – straightaway when we were arrested, you know, she had the time – two minutes, or seconds to talk to us when she noticed the car stopped. And we went – she went down but not straightaway, until they ask for – I don't know how she went, how it happened, but she had the time to tell us, 'Don't say you are Jewish.'

So what did she say, do you remember? It's dangerous. It's –?

No, didn't say – I just remember she had not much time to say, 'Don't say you are Jewish.' That I remember. The only thing I remember. Afterwards she was taken straightaway, interrogated, taken to prison, probably tortured straightaway.

But Renee you also said you had a non-Jewish name.

Yeah. My name – anyway Koenig is not Jewish name. But they didn't know – little did they know, Koenig is not a Jewish name.

But you had also another name? You had –

A French name, Blanché, but our ID card was not even finished, which was a tragedy. They knew without looking on the ID card. They didn't even look at the ID card. They knew straightaway. Who is going clandestine border? Who will go through clandestine border? It was only the Jews, you know.

So do you think there was a tip-off? Was there a tip-off?

No, as I was told that the dogs detected us.

Uh-huh [pause]. And it was close to the border. You were almost –

Oh, yeah, very close. Really, nearly to Switzerland. [01:20:01] When you think about it, it's unbelievable this story, for me today.

Yeah. So just let's – a little bit more detail. So, they came, you were arrested, and then taken to the prison?

Yeah.

And tell us a little bit about more in detail what the – you know, where you were put, and –

You mean the prison or in this car?

Yeah.

I don't know, for me it looked very dark, and we had a tiny little wash basin – it was not wash basin, it's like a tiny, small and that was to wash yourself, to drink yourself. It was a – I don't remember what – the Lord Mayor I was told now he brought us food, but I don't remember did I eat? I remember – from my remembrance, I didn't eat. I was anyway a very poor eater. I didn't eat.

And who were the adults because she was probably kept separate, Marianne Cohn?

Yeah, completely separate.

So what adults –?

And I didn't see the eldest. I just was in a – I just was with my sister and my brother, and with other people but not the people from the group. That's what I remember. I don't know what the others would remember. I said to my sister, 'Did we cry in the prison?' She doesn't remember either.

And did they interrogate the children?

Yeah.

So tell us a little bit about that.

We were interrogated with a machine, you know, in front of you.

Machine gun.

Yeah. They said, 'Are you Jew...' – 'Put your name. Are you Jewish? Where do you live? Are you Jewish? Where do your parents live?' Each question, 'Are you Jewish?' We said, 'No,' but they knew we were Jewish. [01:22:01] And they said to my sister, 'Koenig is a German name, you must understand German,' and they said to my sister, to us, 'Geh' raus.' [Go out.] Remember that. And my sister didn't move. She doesn't understand. For thirteen-year-old, she was quite clever, yeah [pause]. I don't know how people can be so cruel, you know, when you think about children, to antagonise them. [Inaudible]. Little details, you know, I can't remember. When you are trauma you don't even remember this.

Of course, of course, but you said you remember you heard the screaming from –?

From the jail cell. This scream I will never forget. It will go with me to my grave. That was terrible. The first time I notice something terrible, you know. And this lady, she came – yeah, I remember she came, she speaks to us, gave us good word. She was a Jewish woman, she was – they were all Jewish who were there. And with Marianne they took Jewish – I think Jewish – two Jewish people with her at the same time.

And tell us a little bit about Marianne.

Yes, but I read a letter also where she – from her parents who ask her, she shouldn't do that any more. She promised it is the last transport she does. Her parents begged her not to do it. Marianne was from a German Jewish family from Mannheim, and she was from a secular Jewish background. And the parents emigrated – not emigrated, went to Germany, to France I think, to Paris, and to south of France or on the Spanish border. [01:24:01] And they had two girls, and they were not brought up Jewish or secular Jews would say. But they joined the scouts and that they learn what is Judaism and what is Jews. And she joined then the Resistance, Marianne.

So she had – that wasn't her first mission. She had brought out children –

Two hundred people she saved. That is a lot. The parents begged her stop to do it. She wrote a marvellous poem, but I don't know it by heart now. She was – you know, it doesn't exist, people like that. Like – can't describe how she was. Very, very special. Giving us – after this terrible torture, tried to give us good words, you know.

So you saw her in prison?

Yeah.

She came and talked to you.

Talked to us. Gave her a few good words. And we saw – once when she said to us, 'Children, you can say everything,' after the terrible – after this torture.

What does it mean? She thought they know at that point –?

Yeah, I think so. You can interpret like you – we as children, we couldn't interpret it at the time. In fact, we knew we are lost. Even I as ten years, we knew we are lost.

You thought that's the end now.

The end, yeah. Hundred percent.

So is this because of the Mayor of Annemasse? He basically saved you.

He came – each day he came, and he looked after us. I don't remember what he said, you know, that I don't remember. He was a man of forty-four years old; he was a little bit over – not overweight, but a little podgy. He was a good man. And you know what, I mention it to you, one night I couldn't – sometimes I can't sleep. [01:26:02] I don't sleep very well. And I said to my daughter, 'You know Noemi, I make myself so much recrimination. I never said thank you to this man. I know it's too late, but maybe to the child. He has children or grandchildren.' And she contacted – she's very efficient Noemi – contacted immediately the *mairie*, the Town Hall from Annemasse immediately, and they invited her for the liberation. A few months later it would be the liberation from Annemasse where they do a big thing. I should come. And we came, and we – the commemoration is very small. Annemasse was on the same square, and there is the best from the Lord Mayor, Jean Deffaugt. And you can – if you put there, you can hear him even speaking.

What's his name?

Jean Deffaugt.

Jean Deffaugt.

Deffaugt, *oui*. He was a very special man. Because Marianne was killed before him. She was killed and he stayed – and this one who plagued with the [inaudible] that he will put us somewhere which he did and that he made a deal that they should leave us now, free, and he helped them to escape. He had this horrible tortured. And I don't know – they never find – I don't know. I'm not – I should persevere. I didn't find his first name. Is Meyer, so I couldn't – Google him page and page but it was not him.

Meyer?

Meyer, yeah.

So after how many weeks did he – the Lord Mayor then take you out of the prison?

Not long. We were not long in the prison. I don't know exactly how long. I would no make a little – not long. Because we were like a prison. We were in these homes where we are taking like prisoner, but it was not the prison. [01:28:00]

Right. And that's when he was in charge of you, the Lord Mayor.

The Lord Mayor, yeah.

So what was it? What location? Where did he take you?

It was called Monnetier-Mornex also nearby, you know.

Monnetier-Mornex?

Monnetier-Mornex. I remember the name. I'm wondering myself because unforgettable.

There you were prisoners, so you couldn't move around. You didn't go out.

No, no, completely – and we didn't go for walks or nothing. We had to stay. It was like a semi-prison but not like the prison.

And again, who were the adults taking care of you?

I don't know. For me, it was very strange people. A strange woman. She looked ugly and she was in her thing ugly. That all I remember as a young girl.

So there was one woman in charge.

No, we were – I was – I don't know. I was afraid about this woman [pause]. But, you know, when I was in the prison, I have to tell you that when we were taken it was one boy, they put him on a bridge or how you call it, they lie him on whatever. He was lied on a piece of wood, or whatever, and they beat him because he said – 'Where do your parents live?' We gave a false address when they said, 'Where do your parents live?' But he said Nancy and Nandy, they knew it was like Strasbourg. It was no Jews in Nancy. You know, Alsace-Lorraine, it's too province. It's like Lancashire or Yorkshire. So, they knew that in this province Lorraine, Nancy, it's no Jews. And he said, 'My parents live in Nancy.' And he was only eleven years old and very overweight this boy. I remember his face, everything. His name I know.

[01:30:00] There were two names I know from the group. He was called Michel Sonnstein. That I remember his name.

Michel Sonnenstein?

Yeah, Sonnstein perhaps. And he was beaten. Oh, I tell you.

But survived?

He survived, yeah, yeah.

So they didn't touch the children – I mean, they didn't –?

Us, no, we were not beaten, no. We were very lucky because there was this man, the torture man, special. Can you imagine, a man whose job is to torture people? It's for me unimaginable, but it exists. I said unimaginable, I am stupid. It exist all the prisons now.

And the prison was called –?

Le Pax.

Le Pax.

Prison du Pax or the Pax.

Does that still exist?

Yeah. I was there. That's why I wanted to show you the photo. But, you know, after the War they – was small, they transform it again in a normal house. And now, it's not finished, they transform it again in prison. And they want me – if I want to go in. I said, 'Excuse me, I don't want to go in.' Noemi went in. But it was not finished. I didn't want to see that again. It's finished that.

No, too painful that.

No. We were well received, and the grandson is a man who – from sixty-nine at the time. Two years ago was it? And he was very, very nice person. Described his grandfather, his grandmother. He said his grandfather did all that thing to his grandmother. And they have also a material shop. But he saved a lot of people this man. And his children, or his son, didn't live, but the grandson was a man of sixty-nine. And the great-grandson – I have to mention that – the great-grandson from this Lord Mayor, or great-great, this little boy saw me. I don't know if somebody told him, and he gave me the hand, he push his little head against me. [01:32:03] And never – none of my grandchildren showed me so much affection like this little boy. And when I walked down the stairs, up, everywhere, he was next to me. And I said, 'Oh, is this the great-grandfather who send him to protect me?' Because – and, you know, but the film was so small they didn't say the best part, nothing. Antagonise the whole day for a few – and what I was very sad, they didn't mention the name of Jean Deffaugt, which I mentioned a hundred times that is the main person really who deserved to be mentioned in this film.

To be acknowledged.

Yeah, they didn't acknowledge him. And then they me ask I should – if I would speak. The Lord Mayor from Annemasse asked me if I would speak, yeah, small speech, but they ask me, the BBC or whoever did it, I should say one sentence in English which I did. Didn't take anything about that. They didn't say- Noemi spoke very well in French on the main square. Didn't take anything about that. A few minutes thing – I don't know, I find it funny, but it is what it is.

So, in that time Renee, was the prison for you the worst experience of the six months?

Yeah.

Of that separation?

Yeah, that was definitely the prison. The prison, interrogation, already started in *au Pad-de-L'Echelle*, you know, when they started to interrogate us. You cannot imagine as a child to see these people. It's like they will kill us.

Yeah.

I really didn't see the story, seventy-five years, it's very hard. I am not so fluent, coherent. I apologise. Should be more coherent.

Sorry, to ask you all the details but, you know, it's important.

Details I can't – [01:34:02]

But you have many details.

Details, yeah.

Yeah. And Renee so after the prison you went to these rooms, and again in terms of time, how long did you spend there?

In which rooms?

With the Lord Mayor, those –

No, you mean now in Annemasse?

No, no. At the time, after the prison –

No, we didn't spend time with him. He came to see us a few – very short time. No.

Yeah, but I meant you were taken to another location.

Yes. He took us to another location, yeah. He took care about us.

Yes, and then how –?

He came each day to look after us.

So how long did you stay then before moving on?

Mai, juin- it might be all together – I don't know how long. I have to be – I would lie. Maybe somebody in the group who give testimony because I don't know. I just know the liberation from Annemasse was 20 August, and we were already in Switzerland, were taken.

So at what point were you taken to Switzerland?

Yeah, I think before – was it after the liberation? Maybe it was after the liberation because he was afraid they can come back, the Lord Mayor.

And the group stayed intact. The same children then went to Switzerland.

Yeah we were separated. My brother was not with us any more in Switzerland. He was with us in Switzerland, but in another department for boys. And then it was the *épidémie* from *diphthérie*, croup, you know, *épidémie*. And it was November, it was very cold, and my sister said, 'Let's sleep together in the same bed, so we will have two blanket.' We only had one blanket. I said, 'All right.' [01:36:00] And the next day she was so ill, she was taken in *quarantaine*. She had the croup, and if you believe it or not, I didn't have it. I didn't get it, thank God.

So what was the feeling when you went to Switzerland? Did you understand that then –?

Yeah, we understood it's liberty, that we understand.

You under –

We understood.

Do you remember the – you said the liberation of Annemasse?

No, we were not there, no.

You were not there.

No.

You left before.

No, we never saw Annemasse, we went just out for the photograph with the Lord Mayor. All the children with the Lord Mayor, and I never saw Annemasse really at the time.

Who took a photograph? What's the –

That is organised from the Lord Mayor, you know, from the Town Hall probably. The liberation. That was a liberation from the – no, we – hundred percent, we went to Switzerland after the liberation because we were not allowed to go out of the – no, it was probably.

So there was a photograph taken.

Yeah. Yeah, two photograph. It's a shame.

Okay, we will – don't worry. We can do it another time. I'll take it. And then afterwards you went to Switzerland.

Went to Switzerland, yeah.

And in that time I assume there was no contact with your parents. Did you know whether your parents were still alive?

Not at the time.

Did you –?

No, I don't think we had contact, no. It was not like today. My parents had no telephone in Saint-Junien. They had a telephone in Strasbourg, but everything, you know – their life was cut off completely. When I think about what my parents went through- it's unbelievable.

And Renee, when you went to Switzerland you said the people didn't understand where you had come from.

No, in this family.

Tell us a little bit about it. Yeah.

Went to see the family. They were nice. Gave me a nice meal, but started to interrogate me, where my parents are, that I said nicely. [01:38:03] But when – they asked me quite a few questions, and when they ask me if I play piano, and I said, ‘No,’ they said, ‘Why?’ So, I was – as a child, I tell you, I had a shock because I knew what I went through. How can these people ask such a question? I don’t think that the people were thinking to tell a teacher that you learn to play piano. It was such a hard time. But, you know, in Switzerland I heard that people had no idea what happened. I had to forgive them. And then where my sister went to this family they don’t ask her any questions. Didn’t ask questions.

Yeah. And the people who were in charge of you, were there any psychologist or teachers or any – was there anyone trying to help the children?

It didn’t exist my dear, psychologists, you have to forget completely. No teacher. Maybe the religion teacher, maybe in *Genève* [inaudible] teachers. It was –

You say there was Red Cross in charge. Who was in charge in Geneva?

I don’t think – I don’t remember there was Jewish people in charge, but maybe because it was Erev Rosh Hashana, we were Rosh Hashana, and we were Yom Kippur there. And Yom Kippur, my sister was so ill, and she was thirteen, I was ten, and I said, ‘I’m going to fast for her.’ And my first fast in my life, which I continue to fast, I was ten years old. Then when I came back to my parents a year later, I said to my mum, ‘I’m going to fast,’ she said, ‘No, please don’t fast. You have time, another year.’ I said, ‘Mama, I fast last year, I fast so well.’ And it was true. I fasted better than when I was older when I fasted, because she couldn’t so I had to fast for her. It was fast, and I remember – [01:40:00] I don’t know, it was nobody really who looked after us, and they made us a little – after the fast, they gave us as a meal – I remember, that I remember – little *tartelette*, you know, mini, little piece of pie. And we went in kitchen – we were only a few people who fasted, very few, we went in the kitchen, and they had cold potatoes there, and we pinched the cold potatoes. That I remember. And it was not very nice after Yom Kippur to pinch, but there were nobody to ask the permission.

And was there any schooling there or not?

No. No schooling, nothing, no.

So was there rehabilitation kind of thing or –?

I don't remember that there was – we went for a walk. I remember that once a week we had to eat – we had a fruit day. Lunch was probably – I don't know, lunch and evening meal, one meal was cooked fruit, and one meal was raw fruit. That I remember.

And was it only Jewish children again?

No, no, no, no.

No.

We were very few Jewish children.

Okay.

Very few. I don't know from where the children were. You know, I didn't ask anything. You know, when ten years – I don't know how people are today, are much more advanced. I have a great-granddaughter, she's nine years old, she is probably much more advanced than I was at the time. We didn't ask who and what, you know, you didn't bother so much with – so many children, I didn't have contact with much, and only with these few little Jewish who I knew.

And when did you then hear from your parents or –?

I don't think we heard of our parents until the Red Cross fetched us.

They came to fetch you.

The Red Cross, they brought us in our – to my parents.

And as you said, you were with your sister. Your brother was elsewhere. [01:42:03]

It was the same, we were separated. Girls and boys were separated, yeah.

Okay, but it was – what was it called, the place where you were?

Centre d'Henri Dunant.

Centre –?

Centre d'Henri Dunant. This is one of the head of the Red Cross, you know. It was a hotel. I don't remember which name, but when I was now in Annemasse, I never went to Genève. I went to Genève, and I said, 'I want to see if...' – I knew that this place was located opposite the *Palais de Nations*. It was a beautiful view of the *Palais de Nations*, and I wanted to see if this hotel exists. No, it doesn't exist. Of course, after eighty years, should exist.

Right. So, do you remember what, one day you were called saying you were going to be moved or –?

We were – I think we were very, very happy, you know, when we were told we are going back to the parents. That was for us – we understood, of course you understand. See Mama and Papa.

Renee, I think we should – because we've reached the end of the War. I think we should have a break now.

Yeah.

Is that okay?

Yeah.

[Break in recording]

Okay Renee, we got to the end of the War, so maybe we can pick it up from there.

'44.

'45, where you were in Switzerland.

No, I was until '44 in Switzerland, November '44.

November '44.

Yeah.

Okay.

We came home.

Oh sorry, so then we got the chronology wrong. So, tell us again.

I was in Genève until I think November '45 – '44, not '45. '44.

Okay. So, you came back to –?

To Saint-Junien and joined my parents, and we were fetched by somebody from the Red Cross, and they brought us, or he or she brought us to my parents. [01:44:02] I think it was a man, if I remember well.

Okay, and tell us that you – do you remember that journey coming back to Saint-Junien?

Yes. Coming – wait a moment. The journey coming back from Genève to Saint-Junien?

Hmm-mm.

Yes, it was a long journey, but I don't remember much. I think I slept – I don't know if it was night. It must be a night journey because I can't – I have no remembrance at all of that.

And what was it like to see your parents again?

Oh, yes, I think we – my parents I remember, they cried from joy, you know, they both cried. They were so – we were all very happy. We children were happy. I remember my parents, you know, they hugged us so much, you know, it was a big hugging thing. They were happy, we were all so happy, you know, because it was like a miracle that we all survived. My parents and us children.

And your sibling also, your parents were with your little –?

Yeah. My little sister. She's born '42 so she was only two years old. I don't think she realised, no. [Pause] She was lucky she didn't realise what happened.

Yeah. And then how difficult was it then to start a sort of normal life again for you?

The children, I don't think we had a – we don't have a trouble to start. It went like- automatically. It was smooth, that I remember. We adjusted very well to our new life. I know, you know, life taught me, the human being can adjust in any situation. I thought the worst and the happiest. We were happy. We were happy to be home, so we adjusted very well. [01:46:02] It was happy, everybody was so happy. But I remember when my mother, she had the news that her parents are not alive. That was terrible, and it was – a lot of Jews, they all learned the same time, relative, relation family is not there any more. And it was like – we say in French *un deuil général*, you know, it was like a mourning, a general mourning.

And when was it? When did they find out?

That I cannot say exactly the date. I have to say the truth, I don't know. It was after the War. The happiness find us, and then to find out nobody – most of the family is not alive any more, didn't survive, that was terrible. But, you know, it was at the time – how do you say it – a mourning, a general – everybody had family who didn't survive. I don't know if it helped, but [pause] – we never had *shiva*, never saw *shiva* in my youngest year, never. Because a family, they all were not there. We always – everybody ask me how we were with the children from Saint-Junien, we envied always the French children or Geneva, they had grandparents, they had aunt, they had uncle, where to go. And we had nobody. That I remember.

Because you had your parents.

We had no family.

Yeah.

I mean, the parents is normal, but you have grandparents, uncle, aunts, where you can go. Cousins. Nobody.

But when you came back, did you start the school immediately afterwards in Saint-Junien?

Yeah, I think so. The best thing to do, you know, straightaway. What would my mother do with us at home? [01:48:02] Better to be busy.

And at that point was your father then able to work officially at that point?

After the War he was allowed, yeah, but before, no. Yeah, he probably switch on normal.

And did he stay with the gloves, or what did he –?

No, after War he went to Strasbourg, he went back to the clothing department that was his love. You know, it was no – Strasbourg didn't cater for gloves. I don't think so, no, he didn't do it.

So was it clear for all of you at that point that you were going to go back to Strasbourg?

Yeah. We were all looking forward. My mother was – ah, my parents couldn't wait. My mother – back, you know, to normality. It was not a normal thing how my parents lived.

But it must have been difficult for them also to go back.

Probably. I think so. It was not the same any more, you know.

And were you sad that you had to leave the village, the town?

Saint-Junien, no. No, I was not sad. Because, you know, your parents go and are happy, automatically – no, I think we adjusted quite well. I don't remember that I was sad.

And when was that? When did you move back to Strasbourg?

It must be '46. Couldn't tell you exactly the month, maybe October, or September, I don't know.

And did your father go first to arrange – to make arrangements or to – how –?

Yeah. I think my father went first, and afterward then my father came back, and my mother went.

[01:50:00] *Did they move to another flat?*

No, because everything was stolen so they had to find out who has it – to find out people who had their furniture, to give them back.

Could they retrieve anything?

I think some, yeah. Not much. They steal everything, the people, lots of people.

What could they retrieve?

I don't remember. I must tell you I don't remember at all. Today I would be curious. At the time as a child...

And did other survivors come back to Strasbourg? Did other families come back to [both talking at once]?

Yes, everybody came back. All the people came back, you know, nobody stayed – I don't know any people, Jewish people who stayed.

So how many – then when you grew up in Strasbourg post-War, how big of a community was it?

Strasbourg was a very big community, but I couldn't tell you how many. It was an important community.

Yeah.

They had a beautiful synagogue, you know, it was burned down. It was a big community. Still a big community now.

So, it was slowly to- they build it up again.

Yeah.

And then in Strasbourg did you go then to secondary school and –?

Yeah.

So were there any Jewish schools in Strasbourg?

Much later, when – my younger sister and brother, they went in the Jewish school, but when I went it wasn't. They only built it later. Yes, my both brother and sister went. It's better, you know. You know your own surrounding, you're not one-off. It's easier not to be one-off.

And was it difficult for you to be in a non-Jewish school or –?

No, because I was never in a Jewish school, so I didn't see the difference [pause]. **[01:52:02]**

And you said your father opened this business?

Yeah. He worked – my father was a very, very hard-working man, yeah.

And it was called? The –?

Le roi des vêtements, yeah. He was very well-loved, he had already a few generation who came to him. Three generation I believe. He was very pleasant, nice, so, you know, he was a good businessman and he liked people.

And what was he selling or what was it?

Clothes, you know, women and men's clothes. Ladies and men, you don't say women. Ladies and men.

Yeah, and where, where was it in?

Strasbourg also.

Which part?

It's called Schiltigheim [pause].

And at that point did your parents talk – they didn't think of migrating elsewhere to Israel or to [both talking at once]?

No, not at all. Even my mother had two brothers in Israel. The two, only one who survived, and she didn't see them – she went – I think she didn't see them for twenty-nine years. Or how many years – the War – before the War, you know, they left. It was at least twenty years. And I organise them a trip to go to Israel by boat at the time. My mother couldn't believe it. She said, 'Is that my brother? That's not my brother, the old man.' And they were, you know, young boys. In Israel that time, you age quicker, the sun dried out. One brother he stayed German, he died very young, was fifty-eight years old. Heart disease was in our family. And he married a– his wife, my aunt, she was from the Russian border, and she was blond. [01:54:02] And she told me he had to have a blond woman, you know, the German thing in his head. And he had – he lived in a bungalow, and he build it himself. He waited that he has money to buy the, *le terrain* [the land]– how do you say it? And then he take – afterward he economised to build it, build it himself the bungalow with a nice garden. And the fruits were also – the insects couldn't destruct his fruit, everything was enveloped. He always- remained German so his wife said it's terrible, how he remained German. They went to eat what he had by my grandparents. That's not in German, but he had a nice library. He had cleaners. You know, we cannot imagine, when his wife – she was lucky, she was a nurse, so she was very clean. I find it, it remind me- I didn't see a place like my uncle so, you know. The other brother was not at all the same.

So did your parents sort of – did they identify with Strasbourg? Did they feel attached to the city?

I suppose so. My mother was already – she was not brought up, but she was born – it was the same Kehl than Strasbourg. I think yes. I wouldn't say yes. But my father, he came from Poland, or *Galicie*. When he was eighteen or nineteen years old he left, and then he went to

live two years in Karlsruhe, and then he was twenty years old, he said he wants to see France. And he went to France, and he went to Bordeaux, and he fell in love with Bordeaux. He always told me that. And when he met my mother, he wanted to live in Bordeaux, but my mother said – [laughs], [01:56:01] ‘He want to live in Bordeaux- without me.’ She said, ‘I wouldn’t marry you,’ because she was very attached to her parents, so they didn’t go to Bordeaux. It was terrible – I tell you, not many Jews survived in Bordeaux, to be honest, so they – [pause] my mother and father were a very united couple. My mother always wish she shouldn’t – that my father survived her. She was very attached. They were very good couple.

Close.

Yeah.

And did she help him in the shop as well? Did she help?

Afternoon. She wasn’t the *caisse*, you know, she wouldn’t have to work or to do that, no. She helped with the payment.

With accounting or payments?

Yeah.

And what other memories have you got post-War of Strasbourg?

Post-War, what memory I got? I went to the scout. I was very happy to go to the scout. The Jewish scout. They help contribute to my happiness. I had nice Jewish friends.

And there must have been other children with similar experiences to yours. Was that talked about at the time or –?

No, never shared with any of – never shared this story. I tell you, seventy-five years buried from the moment I left this part in my life – the moment I went back to my parents, I never

spoke about the past to – and nobody spoke at the time. But, you know, I have to tell you that my sister she heard that a girl from our group, she was nineteen when we were arrested.

[01:58:05] I was ten, she was thirteen. That she survived and she live in Israel. And Muriel find her, and she took me to this lady. I phoned if I can visit her. But I don't remember what I wanted to ask her. I wanted to ask her a specific question but, you know, I don't remember. And when I came there, she told me, 'I don't want to talk about that.' And I said, 'Later on in life...' – I didn't understand straightaway – I didn't want – I said to her, 'Look, I talk with anybody. It's the first time I wanted to ask a question which – I was only a little, I don't remember.' 'No,' she said, she refuse. And I thought maybe she was even raped. You know, the elder girls, I can today imagine.

Yeah, [pause] [both talking at once].

So that was the only person who I contacted after this tragedy.

And your sister and you, the two of you?

She never met anybody afterwards, no.

And you didn't speak about it, the two of you?

No, no, seldom. I must say seldom. Sometimes I ask – I ask her that once if we cried in the prison. What we did in the day, because I thought she has better memory. No memory at all. Doesn't remember if we cried, doesn't remember. Probably it was a terrible adjustment, if you believe – can you imagine you come from a normal surrounding and you are like that? Terrorised like animals. Worse than animals.

And what changed then for you that you started to talk about it? Or talk about the experience?

I must say, it doesn't change. I know it's my duty to say it now. That's my duty, but I very much dislike to speak about it. [02:00:00] I said each time to – you know, to my – when I

speaking about it, I have a few nights where I can't sleep or it comes back, all that horrible past. I hope not tonight, it comes back. I said to my daughter – 'Oh Mama, you have to do it.' She convinced me. I said, 'You're right. Your generation have to know.' [Pause] But, you know, I went once at the convention you call it, in Bruxelles where it was supposed to be a meeting – it was many years ago. My sister organized it, and how she is, in the end she didn't go, but I went. It was a meeting from the survivor's children *Les Enfants Cachés*. Hidden Children. So, I said, 'I'm going.' And I thought – we went specially to see children from my transport, other – people who were the same time as me. You wouldn't believe it, I arrived there, and I ask the person in charge. He was from Strasbourg, Jean [inaudible], I ask him, 'Where are the people from France, the French?' It was all different countries were represented in Bruxelles. 'Where are the French?' *Les Français, où sont-ils?* He said, 'There are no French.' Can you imagine, the Jews as they are? They even had probably difference of opinion, they didn't come. So, I was so disappointed because I thought to exchange, you know, their view and my view. With these people I will talk, you know, but they didn't come so no chance. Then we were separated in small group, we could speak to a psychologist. Some, and some to a psychiatrist. And some people they said they wouldn't talk about it not even – also not to a children, nothing. And so, they said, 'Why did you not want to speak to the children?' They didn't want to hurt the children. And very seldom that people needed to speak about it. I didn't meet there anybody who wanted to speak about that. [02:02:00] So they were all – we were all nearly in the same position. But now, you know, it's so many years, it's seventy-five years I think, seventy-eight years, so I think I should be liberated, but I am not. I must tell you the truth.

Emotionally.

No. I have some bad, so terribly bad memories, you know, that you want to – I said I wanted to bury it and finish, not to speak my whole entire life. On the other hand, I said, a lot of people were like me also. But my husband he was told, you know – I told you about this professor where he did – you know, when the medicine student do one subject after the other, when he was in psychiatry, he was recommended to write it down, to liberate it- helps to liberate him. He didn't speak, but a few nights a year he used to tell me, 'This night I was in the concentration camp in KZ,' he used to say. But he was very active, he was a president of

the people – the Jews and the non-Jews who were in KZ, concentration camp. He spoke twice in the – he spoke twice, ‘*comment- qu’on dit le mairie*’, in the –

Municipality.

The municipality from Munich, and he spoke each year in Dachau. And he organised the monument for the *deporté*, Jewish in KZ in Dachau. But he never put his name. He was very modest.

Tell us his name. You haven’t told us your husband’s name.

I told you. Israel Bornstein. Ernst Israel Bornstein, yeah.

And how did you come to meet him?

I met him at the bar mitzvah in Strasbourg. I was introduced to him.

He had some relatives, or how did he get to Strasbourg? [02:04:00]

He had very good friends from his – friends who came from the same town as his grandparents. So –

And at that time he was already living in Munich?

Yeah, he was already established, you know. It’s a long time ago.

And what did you think about that, moving to Germany?

It took me a long time make my mind. And, you know, I write to him, I said, ‘I can’t leave – I have to leave it, I can’t leave.’ I don’t know what I wrote. I didn’t write, ‘I can’t live in Germany,’ but I left him. And then he wrote me back a year later. If he could meet me. And my father said, ‘You never met such a nice man as this one,’ [laughs]. So, I met him again

and I made my mind because I told him, 'It's nothing to do personal.' I had such a dislike I cannot tell you. But the neighbours who were very good to me, my neighbours in Germany, fifty years my neighbours, she always said to me, 'Frau Bornstein, I'm so happy I'm born after the War.' She's seventy-three or two.

So you decided you will be able to live in Germany.

Yeah, it was very hard. I tell you, I was looking, then my husband said, 'Or you can live in Strasbourg,' and I come for the weekend. I said, 'It's not a good...' – first I look already where I can live and then I said, 'It's not a good idea. Young children want to know their father and,' I said, 'it's not a good idea. We wait.' But my- to say the truth. My husband had a sister in America. And he went to America, and he said – it was a man who never had time, not a minute. He said, 'I should stay and make the arrangement to emigrate to America.' So, I went to the – what is the name of the Jewish organisation? Who say what terrible – now I don't remember the name. [02:06:02] The big organisation – Jewish – you know the name? Big Jewish organisation America.

HIAS.

Yeah.

HIAS.

I went there and I said, 'I would like to emigrate with my husband. I would like to emigrate.' And, you know, they receive me terribly. But I said, 'Look, I am not a *Schnorrer* [beggar], I don't ask you for money, I ask you for help. My husband is double graduated. How can you help me?' They were really horrible. And then I went to the non-Jew emigration, and he was so nice this man I cannot tell you. Sometimes it's – but, you know, I can't say the organisation – just on the person who you meet. I don't know, maybe she didn't like my face. Look, I was very young at the time. Didn't like it, or – you know, because a long time, people didn't like the survivor. I don't know if you know the stories. Didn't like – in Israel also not. Until the Yom Kippur War, then they knew how it is to be taken by surprise. I don't know, I

imagine that. He didn't tell me. My husband, he used to earn his money to be a student was very small, stipend he call it, very small money. So he had to – he send the document about the Nazis in this organisation, HIAS, and I met the man with whom he dealt. And he said to me – and we met, I was with him when we met this man, and he said he thought he's an old man, he was so clever and so good. He wrote for this *Yiddishe* paper – what's its name – I don't remember the name now – *Forward*.

Forward.

Yeah. He wrote, and my late mother, she was near Strasbourg with my parents. It was a Sunday, they were in the country, and they saw a man not far sitting, and with a journal, Yiddish paper, and they saw the photo from my husband. [02:08:10] The article who he send to the *Forward* was printed in the French Yiddish paper what's called '*Notre chemin*' - '*Unser Weg*'. So, he was very active. Not like Noemi, you know, because he had – he was very active in his profession, but also looking people who are survivor who are in difficulty. One man came, he came – and he will take them in the middle of his *Praxis* [practice]. He came, he said, 'Oh Dr. Bornstein, they want to cut me my *Wiedergutmachung* [compensation]- my pension.'

Restitution.

Because he said, 'I had money for my lungs, and they think I am clear.' So, my husband, he wrote a letter to the professor. He said, 'No, I'm not...' – [inaudible] – It took time, I don't know when at the time. He wrote a letter to the professor in this department for lungs, if he agreed to see this patient. And he saw this man and in fact, this man had *caverne*. You know what is *caverne*? Hole in the lung. Very ill man. And he did a lot of – oh, a lot of good things. All these people who came to him, there were so many lonely people, you know. One particularly, he waited that he leaves the *Praxis*, and it was already nearly eight o'clock when he came. And I used to say, 'Look, you work for the German government. What are you doing?' I said, 'You have to think about a little bit of your health.' But he never complained about his health. But he would give time to all these people. There are so many people who were so – unhappy people who couldn't readjust I think to normal life. [02:10:02] Even

some who are successful in business, but they were – something was wrong with them I think, a lot.

But Renee, was it also because he had good German? You know, I'm thinking of a lot of survivors in Munich, from Poland, they didn't have the same –

My mother was educated in Germany which I told you. She said the letter he wrote me, my German was not very good, and she said that's your command of the language.

That's what I mean. Probably, you know, he could really help other survivors because they didn't at the time speak good German.

Yeah. Oh, he wrote for them also, yeah.

You know, I would assume.

Yeah, not because they couldn't speak proper German, because they didn't even know where to go.

Exactly, exactly.

He directed them and he helped them.

So was he active in the community itself as well?

No. One part yes, he was in the community, but I don't know if it's active. It was part of – a member of the community. Not member, active member. And ten years after he passed away a person in Munich saw me, they said, 'You know, after ten years what your husband suggested come only through now. He was a very idealist, straightforward man.' And a lot were *so verdreht* [twisted, complicated] and I don't know what I would say. I always said, 'Leave it,' it was always, couldn't sleep after the night. I said I would leave all of this. Session in the *Gemeinde* [congregation] it was. But then he'll ask afterwards. 'Listen to me,'

I said, 'nothing what you suggest comes through, what's the point?' We were not – I don't know. But he was a man who needed to be busy, you know. His daughter is like that. Every night my daughter is busy. He was like that.

So the America thing didn't work out. You didn't emigrate to America.

No, I will tell you why. He would, but when I came back my parents said, 'Oh, our daughter who lives nearest from you. [02:12:02] It will be common market, please don't go.' And my mother didn't need to say it twice. So I said to my husband, 'We wait for the EU – common market.'

And did you get used to living in Germany?

Yes. It took me years, but I got used.

And your children? Two of your children were born in Germany?

Nobody is born in Germany.

Ah.

I could not tell you. It was terrible. I couldn't make *c-section*, we say in French. It was very hard. My girls are born in Strasbourg, and then my mother was very unwell when I had my son. I never dreamed that my son will – that I will move to Manchester. He's born in Manchester. My sister, the eldest, she said, 'When he come, you can have the baby in Manchester,' and my husband made a special insurance, you know, for hospital. And will you believe it, they wouldn't accept the insurance. Paid the insurance, they wouldn't accept the money of the in – that we complain. They were very nice. Yeah, I had my Alain, but I wouldn't dream a thousand year at the time when I gave birth to live here. Then I went back to Munich to the consular, English consular, and I said, 'Well, my son is born in Manchester, so he's British.' And this woman said, 'Why for do you want him British? You are French, your husband is German. What for?' I said, 'That's my private thing.' I was very shy, but I

had that- because afterwards Lady Thatcher, she abolished it in '79. That a lot of people came from Germany who I know from Munich, giving birth, that his child has a British nationality. Because it was still, how you call it, a big thing. People didn't want to be German at the time.

So you didn't want to give birth in Germany.

No. And I had a very nice gynaecologist in Germany. You know, I went always in hospital, in the university hospital. [02:14:02]

But the idea of giving birth – you didn't want it in the passport.

I went to the doctor there, but I didn't want to give birth because I have such a – I told you that, I had a terrible hatrence. I didn't want my German in Germany. But afterward, you know, third one [sighs] – the two girls, Strasbourg, yes, it was so nice to be in Strasbourg in our home town. Wonderful doctors, you know. I was just lucky to have such kind people, you know. At the time you were treated – when you gave a baby, it doesn't matter who, you were treated like a queen. I stayed one week. Today after one day people leave hospital.

So when you lived in Munich did you go to Strasbourg a lot while your parents were –?

Yeah.

Yeah.

I gave a lot, yeah. The first year I bought a card universe, a student card so I went each week, the first week. Oh, it was – I had nobody. I was alone, you know, and my husband was a man, he was busy, he worked the whole day, and then I had that. Until I had the first child, then I was better, I couldn't go each week. And he likes me- my husband said, 'You can go, go from Monday to Thursday evening.' I came to prepare shabbat, and that was it. And then I didn't go when I had the children so often. But all the Yom Tovim I spend to Strasbourg. I was very, very attached. But, you know, I lost my father three months after my mother, so

Strasbourg had not the same meaning any more for me. And to brought up children in the Jewish was much easier in England than Strasbourg.

Yeah, so my other question was, what identity did you want to give to your children? I mean, you're from Strasbourg, they lived in Germany –

I will tell you some have three nationality. [02:16:01] Alain is French, is German, and he's English. And Noemi is British and French. Both can have French and German because I am French. Muriel has three, but Noemi, she didn't bother. She had no time for that. No patience to go in the *ambassade*. But Muriel and Israel went to the French *ambassade*, to the German *ambassade*, and they didn't do it easy. Wanted to see my marriage certificate, my birth certificate. But me it was not difficult, but my husband was difficult. So, she could have said, 'Tell them to give it without your father's birth certificate.' They should address – I don't know who to address in Poland. Will they give it to me or not? So, they did it without my husband's birth certificate. Send his death certificate – no, it was not enough. He's not here any more. So, Muriel is three nationality and when the Brexit came, she's very happy. Then Alain did it, the nationality, the passport because of the Brexit, not to queue. So stupid all that, beside the point.

But apart from the nationality, what identity – what was important for you to –?

I have two. Straightaway the French consular said I should take German nationality. I think today in Bavaria you would have to choose. At the time, they convinced me – I didn't want to have German nationality – they said, 'Yes, take it. You will see for different reason you have to take it.' So, I have both, but depend where I'm going. If I go to Germany I will travel with a German passport. Otherwise, I travel with a French one.

And how would you identity yourself today?

I'm French. I'm not German at all, no. No. I don't think in German, I'm not German, but I must say that I have to say the truth that now I like Munich very much. Give me a much better quality of life. [02:18:01] I told you it's small. I don't drive so in Manchester I needed

always somebody to drive. I needed – you have no subway. You have no communication. It's much more difficult. The buses or tram. So I took a taxi always to go anywhere I want. And if I want to go in Munich – now I don't do it any more, but cinema theatre, always cinema I went. You know, it was in the – it's that cinema in the famous hotel where they had this conference. The world conference. It is a hotel, and they have a cinema. You're like in a private lounge. So, I could go easily there, very often they had very good films.

So how did you get to Manchester? We have to –

To my sister's. I told you that.

Yeah.

Two sisters. I was – you know, in Munich I had no husband any more. So I stayed one year, I had –

Sorry to interrupt. He died very young.

Fifty-five. It's young for me. Very young. Unexpectedly, heart attack. And he knew, you know, months before. He was a man who never went to see a doctor, but one month before he notice he's not feeling well. So, he went in one of the big centre, cardiology centre, not far where we lived. They didn't help him. Then he went to Grosshardern. This is where Lady Di's father went for his heart. No knowledge at all when you think about it. He had terrible pain and they didn't see it's the heart. They thought it's the stomach. So we went on the way to go to England I wanted to send the girls to a summer school because we planned to go in a year time. The year I came, we planned to come to England, but he – and so I wanted to send them in a summer school, or in a – that they learn English. [02:20:03] And we were on the way to England, and he collapsed. And Noemi, she was so young, she was not even twelve, and she said, 'Mama, Papa is so white, not well.' She noticed it before me. So we went, straightaway called the ambulance, stopped, and he was sent in the hospital. We were- then we spent the night in a motorway. It was too far from the hospital. It was a little city next to Paris, and they had no hotel, no room, no empty rooms. We stayed in this motor thing until I

find a room. Then the priest came to the hospital. You know, in France the Catholic priest, he came, said, '*Comment-allez vous?*' I said, 'I'm really in a terrible situation.' But I took my daughters to England, to London, that my sister – one of my sister came to fetch them in London, and I went back with Alain. And he – then I went back to this hospital. He was well, a few days in hospital, and then came the priest and he said, 'How are you?' I said, 'I'm not well at all. I don't feel terribly. I have no hotel. It's so far away. For me it's a hotel in a motorway.' So, he said, '[Inaudible].' He said, 'I have to tell you *Monsieur le Curé*, I have to tell you I'm Jewish.' He said, 'So what? You're a human being. So, what, I help you.' And he took me to his best friends who were the second Lord Mayor in this little town, and they gave me hospitality. This Lord Mayor- this *Curé* was so nice man. I only saw him once. I couldn't say thank you enough. [02:22:02] Anyway, I went two nights and then they said in this hospital where I was, they can't see what it is, they can't see the heart because the enzym were not going high for him. They don't know what it is. Maybe the stomach. But they couldn't speak English, he could speak English, they couldn't speak English, couldn't communicate. I was the interpret. Then they said, 'Oh, it's a German doctor here, a nephrologist.' They called him and he spoke to my husband, to me, and I told him my husband was a man who never complained. He must be in terrible pain, heart pain, didn't see. Then he wrote a – he said, 'The best is your husband has to be going back to Munich.' He has to be *repatrié*, you know, how do you say it? He has to be – will be better in his own surrounding. And it was called the [inaudible], it was a terrible car. 2CV Citroen from Paris to Munich it was agony. I had just a hysterectomy shortly before. I'm telling you it was horrible. Anyway, we – but this nephrologist, the German doctor, he wrote a letter. My husband was a very *energique* man. He said, 'Give me this letter, what did he write?' And he wrote, '*Dr Bornstein se croit. Dr Bornstein denkt, er ist nahe von seinem Tod und seine Frau teilt ihre Ansicht mit*' [Dr. Bornstein thinks he is near his death and his wife shares this view]. I didn't hear my husband complaining. And, you know, one week exactly after this letter my husband passed away. I could sue them for I don't know what, but I had no, you know, no head. I had such a shock I cannot tell you. [02:24:00] But a month before when he started to feel not well, he said, 'I think Renee, they don't want to tell me the truth.' So, I phone – he said, 'Phone them,' and he listened what they were saying. I said, 'I'm worried because my husband doesn't feel well. I never saw him in this state.' They said, 'Your husband is all right, and he will live well over eighty.' And I tell you, shortly after – because at the time

cardiology was there only since the last thirty-five years, that cardiology. I wouldn't be alive otherwise, because I have the same as my mother, angina pectoris. Blood pressure, cholesterol. I am careful, I have much less, but today the cardiology improved a hundred percent. And the day before when he – I went on a Sunday, he said, 'You know Renee...' – he was [inaudible] this man, 'bring me the correspondence.' Oh, it was a bag. I said, 'I only brought you one bag because it's two.' So, he said – and I arrived with this bag. He said, 'Oh Renee, I'm so sorry I disturb you. I feel terribly unwell.' And so, I said, 'I'm going to phone the professor.' He was in a private unit, and I went to the nurse, I said, 'Would you please give me – phone the professor. My husband feels unwell.' 'But the professor was here this morning. Your husband – he find your husband fine.' The professor find him fine, so she wouldn't give me the number because she said it's Sunday. So, I said, 'Have you got a telephone book?' I couldn't see the telephone book. I said, 'Give me the telephone book'. And I phoned him myself. So, he arranged, he came, and he made my husband in the intensive care, and the next morning he was not here any more. And he told me also, 'It's nothing...' – the professor thought it's the stomach, would you believe it? Completely false diagnose. They said then it's a hidden heart attack, oh, it's very seldom. [02:26:02] I should give permission to do, you know, the *obduction* [autopsy]. No, I said, 'I am Jewish and I'm religious and in our religion it's forbidden.' Oh, what they gave me for lecture I cannot tell you, but it went here and out. I thought this man suffered so much with them now, I won't do that. And then he's buried in Strasbourg. [Inaudible]. My husband buried Strasbourg at the time because I didn't fly unfortunately, so he's not in Israel, not. Now, Noemi always- now – [break in recording]. A few years ago I said to my children, 'I want to be buried in Israel. Will you help me?' I said to Alain, the boy, to organise that. Oh yes, yes, he would organise it. But then I ask Muriel to organise it, but he phoned once – I don't know, he would organise it, and when I went to Israel, I went regularly to see my daughter, and I said, 'Muriel, now let me go to the *chevrah kadesha* [Jewish burial society] I want to find out.' They made me pay my grave in Strasbourg when I transfer my husband – when he was buried there. I said, 'I will not be buried in Strasbourg, who will come to Strasbourg for me? My children, it's an imposition.' And in Manchester I didn't pay the burial thing, which is not so expensive, but I didn't pay. And now for a few years ago, a few years ago I decided I'll organise that in Israel. So, Noemi said then, 'Let's transfer Papa there.' So *chevrah kadesha* is a very honest man, I judge him. He said, 'How long?' I told him, he said, 'No.' After fifteen years and it was over

four – it was forty – thirty-nine years. He said, ‘No, it’s nothing.’ So, Noemi said, ‘Well Mama, I will.’ So, Noemi, she want to do it. [02:28:01] ‘Do it but wait that I’m not here any more. I couldn’t face the second time that thing.’ [Pause] Now that is not so – life is not so easy. I had to fight in my life for everything. And as a woman on your own, it’s very hard. Now I think – very often I say, ‘Alain, you have to come with,’ because if my imagination is correct, they have no respect for an old woman. [Laughs] It's worse than for a young woman. And when I was young I had no – Alain was a little boy, I had nobody to go with me. I had to stand on my feet.

And what was it like for you to come to Manchester then?

It was very nice, you know, really nice. Because I came in a warm community and Munich was ice cold. Really ice cold. You know, for *shiva* nobody would come and see the friends, parents of the friends. We’d take the children. Nothing, you know, I cannot describe it. It was really not a nice experience. And my husband was so – gave so much in this community.

But you said you made already plans with your husband to emigrate.

Yeah, a hundred percent.

For both of you, you didn’t want to have the children there in Germany [both talking at once] or was it –?

No, he didn’t interfere that. No, he wanted to give them a Jewish education very much, because he was brought up in a very strict – he was not like his grandfather, a [inaudible], you know, he was brought up by his father. His father was a *mizrahi* and he had to study behind the back of his father. My husband’s father had to study behind the back of the grandfather because he was so – you know, like now you find them here again this generation. So, he was brought up in a normal [inaudible], or a nice I think for God and the world it is good. Not fanatic. [02:30:01]

So for him it wasn’t Jewish enough there in Munich.

It was not at all Jewish. The children need to be with other children so on the shabbat I walked in this Jewish centre, was not so far away from where I lived, and we went there, and they were little children. My children were ten and eleven at the time, it was one year before he passed away. And he went in this centre, and it was shabbat, was music, and the children were dancing together. So, my husband he said for the *Shaliach*. He said, 'How can you do things, on shabbat?' I remember how he said how do – is there nothing else to do than that? To do things like that. And I exactly remember he said, 'You can't leave again this room. You can't get again this room.' And that made a decision very quick for my husband. They needed – children, they need a normal, healthy youth. There's nothing there.

So when you moved to Manchester you did what you would have done [both talking at once]?

In Manchester it was very difficult because it was extremely religious school or a school where no level – is now very high, but at the time no level at all, and completely unreligious. I had no choice to send them in this religious school. They accepted me even I had no head cover. I'm telling you I would never do it in normal because I am not – it's not me, you know, I'm normal and I don't pretend – and all this hypocrisy the children said, they don't watch television. In the books, you know, nice books which I read, English books, they tear the pages, it was so – because I don't know. It was young girls. Nothing was bad. And the children watch the television. [02:32:02] First we had no television because my English was too weak, I didn't understand. Then my sister said, 'Renee, you will never learn English if you don't have a television.' So, I bought it [laughs] and, you know, at the time it was not much television, when I'm – forty-three years ago. And I always said you just watch this and this programme. They were very good. And in Munich also, only Sundays when it was raining, we had only programme on a Sunday if you remember – you don't remember, you were a little girl. Forty-two/forty-three years ago, forty-four, it was only television on a Sunday. And the news in the evening. And I let them watch *Pippi Langstrumpf*, you remember?

Yeah, I remember Pippi Langstrumpf [laughs].

I let them watch that, but they were good. It was a different life in England, you can't compare.

And tell us, how did your sisters come to England? How did they –?

They married. You know, the eldest – I told you, the eldest, she married a man – my both sisters married German men who came here, came in England through Hitler. The eldest came when – he came '38 or '39, '39 he came as a sixteen-year-old boy, and his mother met somebody by chance in a bus or in a tram, and she said to his mother, 'Send your children to England,' and she gave the address how to do it. And so, he was sixteen, and a little bit later his brother was eleven, he was sent then to England. And he was always grateful to England that they took him.

And where did they meet, your sisters?

My sister, it was – as I said, it was his aunt – my brother-in-law had an aunt – wait a moment. So, his aunt was a sister-in-law of – the sister-in-law of my mother's aunt. They were not family, nothing, but they knew – this woman knew the family of my mother, so they met.

[02:34:02]

And so when did they move here your sisters?

'53.

'53. So, by the time you came they had lived here for –?

Oh yes, they were established. They'd already – my daughter has two children. One was already married. Oh yes, she likes England my sister. And the other sister, the youngest, she met her husband through the eldest. He was a friend from the younger brother of – he's from Fulda. He died also. They both died. One died a few weeks ago. He said, 'Renee, please God, I make a party when I am a hundred.' Human beings think and God decide.

What was his name from Fulda?

[inaudible] Weinberg.

We interviewed him.

You in –?

He's in our archive.

Yeah?

Yeah.

Martin Weinberg.

What was his first name?

Martin.

Oh.

He would be –

Maybe not. Martin Weinberg.

He would be ninety-one now. He passed away, and she's a younger sister, she's seventy-nine.
I don't know if he will –

And Renee, your sisters, did they join the same religious communities? Were they as religious as you or –? Your sisters in Manchester.

The men were more religious.

More religious?

Yeah.

Uh-huh.

My brother-in-law, they both were more, but my sisters are all right. They're also religious. We're all religious.

Which synagogue? Where did you go to in Manchester?

Vine Street and Stenecourt. I lived opposite Stenecourt. You know Manchester?

No [laughs].

I lived opposite the synagogue so when Alain was a little boy, he could go by himself.

Right.

That was terrible, you know, when it was a bar mitzvah or *aufruf*-synagogue, he didn't want to go because – I said, 'You are a little boy, you can sit next to me.' No, he would sit next to the men. [02:36:00] And then the men will ask him, 'Where's your father?' And that was the end. He couldn't go after that when he was a little boy. He couldn't take it when they ask him, 'Where's your father'. But where I went was a very nice – he was also from Czechoslovakia originally and Reverend Brodie. And when he went, he was eight years old, and he charged two gentlemen to look after him on shabbat. I didn't know he passed away this – and my son, he never told me that two men looked after him. Recently, six months ago, he said he met a man who is now – who was the age I am now, he thinks, and he looked after – he said he looked after him. This man, I didn't know this Reverend Brodie organised that somebody looked after him. He was a very, very nice man. And in Munich you had an ice-

cold Rabbi, Rabbi Grünewald I think, one of his son [inaudible] Rabbi. Terribly ice cold. First of all, he was not a trained Rabbi. He was a librarian in Israel. You know, [inaudible] that I met in Manchester also belonged to one community with an ice-cold Rabbi, but he was a headmaster of Alain. But the other one, here when he went to this school, he wanted to join the synagogue, so I joined it too, but always stayed also with the first one opposite me. But now I don't – I go rarely because I cannot stand, I cannot – it's too much for me. Manchester is small, you know, it is where Jews live, but the town itself is small, but it's not only a town or – it's not London, it's not an interesting city for me. It should be interesting enough for – but now what I am doing, it should be interesting enough. I do nothing now. I used to like to go theatre, to do concert, I used to go in the winter. [02:38:02] Each month at shabbat used to go to the concert. Now I don't go by myself. My life changed, I'm very tired in the evening, but in Munich my daughter Muriel, she comes with me. We go to the theatre; we go to the opera. It's a different life, you know.

But also your children now are all bilingual or trilingual or –?

Yeah, Muriel, she speaks well German, well French, and Ivrit- English of course. English, French, German and Ivrit.

And which language did you speak to the children when they were little?

German because their father didn't speak French. And they didn't want to speak – Alain, until – he never – the girls I sent very young – they made me long time recrimination. I don't know, they were six and seven, and I send them in a French camp. It's in [inaudible]. I don't know if you know near St Moritz where the children camp. Do you know the [inaudible].

What are they called?

[Inaudible]. Ultra-orthodox. And I sent them there, and they learned French there.

Right.

And then I spoke French. And Alain the rebel, he's not French, he's German, '*ich bin Deutscher*' [both laugh]. After all the [inaudible] he speaks French, but the girls speak better than him.

Right [pause]. And your grandchildren? And great-grandchildren?

No language so far. No language. Then this one, Talia, will be the *madricha*. She said she went for shabbat *madrichot* invited five girls. Married with a very clever man, and he introduce him, his parents are French, from the French Swiss, so she could say, '*Ma grand-mère est française.*' [02:40:01] She said to me, she was very proud. No, they don't speak – not interest at all. Even I speak with the mother French, not interest. And now, when – she's now twenty-one, our one granddaughter, married with a boy, the mother is from Belgium and she says, 'She speaks all the time in front of me in French.' But I said, ', you should – I can imagine that you understand. You heard me speaking all the time French.' 'No, I don't understand, not everything.' And I don't know why she does that, the mother-in-law, speak with the family in front of her who doesn't. Sometimes funny people, you know.

And Renee, we talked briefly about your husband's book.

Yeah.

Which he wrote, you said, so he wrote it because somebody suggested that it will be good for him, in German.

The professor in psychiatry.

The psychiatry. What was it called when it was published? It was published in German?

Always, *Die Lange Nacht, oui.*

Die Lange Nacht.

He probably – he wrote it in '57, so it was straightaway after the War. The fact was really accurate. They are real, and now Noemi had it translated in French. The editor, I think he lives in Israel, France, he said, 'It's a book you can compare it to Primo Levi and Eli Wiesel.' It's a very well, accurate, the description, everything.

And what reception did it get when it was published in Germany?

Oh, but it was very hard to have it – I remember that, very hard to have it printed. They didn't want to know about this theme. You can imagine.

Because it was before its time. I mean, it was before all this interest was there in the Holocaust.

Yeah, there was absolutely no interest.

Yeah.

But he find somebody, an editor, and he re-edit it a second time because hardly had books. Re-edit a second time in German. [02:42:00] Then Noemi took three years to translate it in English.

So what made Noemi do that at that point? To look at the book.

She decided – I don't know. She didn't – she stopped medicine. She had a job, she couldn't – you know, she had four children. Three were in – the youngest one in the nursery, one was ill, couldn't go and work. The husband had always to stay home and not her. And it was – I think it was very difficult at the time. I don't know if – [inaudible] wouldn't say that. And she had offered a job. And the jobs, you know, it's not eight to five, nine to five, it is longer. And nights very often, once a month was it. I always said, [inaudible] I was afraid who calls, you know, you never know. Anyway, she dropped it and when she dropped medicine she straightaway decided, she's thirty-six years old, she's going to translate the book of her father. It took her three years because his emotion is very hard. But she still speak about it.

Yeah, and what did you think at the time of that? That the book will now have a sort of second life?

I was very pleased, you know. One side I was sad that she dropped medicine, to say the truth. On the other side I was very proud that she does that for her father. I said, 'He would be very proud of you.' She did it and now she organise it in French. And other Slav language took it over, but I couldn't tell you which language. She doesn't know. Nobody – she didn't ask.

And he wrote the book and was it something he talked – did you talk to him, to your husband about his experience or –?

Never. Never. Noemi's so grateful that she had a normal childhood. Never about – and they ask him, 'Papa, how was it when you were young?' He said, 'When you're old enough, you read my book.' And he only spoke – he rarely spoke about his grandparents – his parents. [02:44:06] And they said, 'Why do you not speak about your parents?' He said, 'They are too holy.' He spoke about his grandmother which he adored.

Sorry, what did he say?

He adored his grandmother.

No, before –

The parents were too holy to speak about them. He wrote very – it's very moving but, you know, it's very – maybe very hard to read. Some people read it quick, but I think it's hard. With his fact exactly, you know how it was. And Noemi met a man, he mentioned him in the book, a man who was with him in one of the camp, and Noemi – and this man's son, he find by the internet, Noemi. And she was in Miami also for Holocaust last month, and she – he said Noemi should contact – she contacted him. She had a lot of people who were very enthusiast about the book, yeah.

And did you find because of the publicity on the book that then you started to think more about your experiences or –?

No.

No.

No.

But you participated, you were in the film with Rob Rinder and – tell us a little bit about that.

Yes, Noemi she was determined that I have to do it. Yeah.

What was it? Tell us a little bit about it.

I told you, I was very disappointed that they didn't take the main part of the – they took very– I was very pleased that his story is known, especially that Marianne Cohn is known as really heroic so much. I think it's important that people knows what happened, you know.

And they took you to Annemasse. Tell us a little bit about – they took you –

Went to Annemasse, yes, for one night, one day. [02:46:02] And yes, we were [inaudible busses] and straightaway with the grandson of the Lord Mayor who was a very nice man, and with the Lord Mayor actual from Annemasse who invite us for a meal in the evening, and they made – Noemi spoke. In the photos you could see her. And they made a big fuss. Journalist interviewed me. Two journalist from different papers. They make a big fuss. I didn't need it, but I'm glad I saw it. I wanted to say thank you, you know, to this – at least to the grandson. It's a shame. I said to him, 'I am ashamed I didn't do it in time.' I didn't think about it, you know. My sister, she wrote him to say thank you, and he answered "*votre Papa d'adoptive*". He was really a father figure, yeah, was a nice man.

And was it the first time you had gone back to Annemasse?

Yeah. I never wanted to go back. The place where I was not wanted to – last I would go back.

And you said you – in the prison – you didn't go into the building.

No.

You couldn't.

It's a terrible memory, you know, that's the worst memory in my life. Something hurt, you don't want to speak about it. But now I think it's a duty to speak about it.

Yeah, you said that before. Why do you think it's your duty? Why?

The young generation should know what happened, you know. And the other one, you know, that each human being can be very evil, you know. The German were educated, highly educated people, and the SS was partly lawyers, doctors, who were part of this ferocious *régiment*.

And Renee speaking of traumatic memories, how do you think your experiences affected or shaped your later life? [02:48:07]

I don't know. I cannot answer this question, I don't know. It shaped my life probably [pause]. I don't know, you know, because if it did something to my life, I was not conscient, I have to tell you that.

You were not conscient.

Because I dropped – it was like dead, you know, this story. For me, I buried it like it didn't exist, so I don't think it had time to do – to have an influence of my life. So, what I think.

But for example, do you think it affected this child – the separation, it affected for example, the way you parented your children, or things like that? Or you said you didn't fly, you didn't like to fly. Do you think that's to do with it?

No.

No.

No, I don't think so. That I'm hundred percent sure not.

Okay.

That was me. I have different *meshugaasen* [craze]. I could never go to the Cathédrale de Strasbourg. I was thirteen years old. I never could look from the heights to down, you know [pause]. I don't think it affect me because, you know, when you bury something, it doesn't exist. It didn't exist in my life any more. Seldom. I must say the truth, my grandchildren – Israel and Muriel has four children, and when they were fourteen/fifteen they were asked in school to speak about the grandparents, where they were. So she ask me, and I didn't say the story in detail, I just say – remind two names. Marianne Cohn and Jean Deffaugt. That's the two people I owed my life. [02:50:00] As a little girl I was [inaudible]. And they went to Yad Vashem with the teacher, with the school, and the school told the story about Marianne Cohn, how many children she save in the last one [pause]. And she said, 'Oh, my *safta* [Hebrew for grandmother] is one of them.' [Pause] Otherwise I rarely – hated to speak about it. I had to tell them, yes, when they were in school. Even in England they had to say about the grandparents.

So you focus on the positive –

Yeah.

Side, rather than the –

Negative, no. I don't think children want to hear the negative to be honest.

[Sighs] Well, it's the challenge, isn't it, of Holocaust education in some way.

They have to know it, yeah.

They have to know it, but you want to tell a positive story somehow, inspirational.

Even me, you know, it is – to mention it, it hurts me, you know. It's difficult for me to mention this story. Even my grandchildren. But my great-grandchild, I don't know. She said something when she was elder. She's nine years old. She's a gorgeous little girl. She said she would like to know my story and she will read it, she said. She would like to read it.

Uh-huh, and have you ever thought of writing a book or –?

Noemi wants that. This interview is for Noemi. She thinks – Daniel Finkelstein ask her to have an interview. Did you know?

Yeah.

She ask her, yeah, he ask. So, I said, 'I don't know if I am able to give a proper interview, if I can answer the questions,' because my memory is – nothing is really clear. Some things are absolutely clear, you know, and some things are gone.

But you were a child also. It's a child's memory. [02:52:01]

Yeah.

That's why I think it's – sometimes, you know, as interviewer we want to impose a chronology, but even that's not possible sometime because you, you know, don't remember necessarily in a chrono – and you didn't understand what you were experiencing at the time either.

No, not at all. We knew it was horrible. That. As a child you know it was terrible. From A until Z, the moment we left our parents it was a horrible experience. They didn't let us go in school, and we were not long in Limoges. I don't know, one or two weeks maybe, and they didn't let us go to school because we were hidden Jews. So, we had to go in the garden, on the field, and it was the season of the asparagus. That I remember very well. It was the season of the asparagus and we had to take- *comment-dit le mot reserve-* you know, the – around the asparagus, the weeds, the weeds.

Yeah.

We had to take out. My sister took some asparagus out [laughs].

Could you eat the asparagus [laughs]?

She took, not to eat because –

Oh, by mistake.

No, she was angry that they let us do that. She was thirteen, she had more [inaudible] than I. That they let us do it, yeah. I didn't even keep it. They had to keep us busy, you know.

Well, it's snippets of memories. There are some things you can remember.

Remember, yeah. Or going to Limoges. I don't know if we went – we never went out on the convent from Limoges, we stayed. Also, so it's like a prison, you know [pause].

And that's when the nuns told you, that it's better to be baptised.

Yeah.

Quickly.

You know, when you think about it, but they do that, you know. The Jews is a contrary, we don't baptise quickly, three years it take, and they wanted to baptise us.

But it's interesting that you didn't want to. [02:54:00]

No.

That you must have had a very strong Jewish identity.

I must say, the Judaism must be something very deep, you know.

Yeah.

Because we were not educated like today. You know, I went to school to the nuns. Here they have the Jewish education, they have the *kodesh* [religious education] which we didn't have at all. But Judaism is very deep, I always say that. You know, we know – it's funny, yeah. I don't think children will let them baptise, I didn't know any of them.

And did you go back to that monastery in Limoges, no?

No. It's funny, I don't want to see anything back. I'm not – no. It will only hurt me, you know. I don't even know the name now, I don't remember. My younger sister went to Saint-Junien, she went to Limoges, but she didn't visit anything. I wouldn't go – it's something, you know, I can't explain. I don't want to be remembered about that. You know, what hurts you in life, you close it.

But you said because you locked it away you think it didn't have so much impact, but sometimes, you know, there are traces. Even if you lock something away it's there.

Probably, probably. You know, it's – probably. I have – I don't know. I don't trust people so easily. That's also – I don't know if it's from the War. I don't trust. And I also suffer from

angoisse – how do you say *angoisse*? Anxiety. I don't know if it's through the War or it's natural. I always suffer from anxiety.

About what? General anxiety?

Generally. It was hard to bring – you know, because when I had my husband, we did everything together, and suddenly everything was on my *responsabilité*. I find it very hard. But I said: God gave me wonderful children. That was the biggest *mazal* I had in my life. I don't know how I would cope. They're still good with me. [02:56:00] It's not easy to have a mother, you know, to have a mother on your own. And if I would have – some people are lucky, they have all their children around them [pause]. One of my biggest *mazal* that I have good children. I always say, thank – each morning I thank God that I have that.

And a big family.

Yeah. *Keneinahora* [no evil eye], thank to Marianne, eleven grandchildren, until now I have nine great-grandchildren.

Fantastic.

And probably only two grandchildren married – three grandchildren have married only.

So everyone has a lot of children.

Yeah, and the eldest, Orly has five, ten – ten is the eldest, nine – he will be eleven, nine the second, twins of six, and one of two. They're gorgeous his children I'm telling you. And he's a young Rabbi, the husband, in Raleigh Close – hard job- I tell you. Organise the Friday night party for forty single – you know, where shall the people meet? You know, it's Jew from or not from, normal people, you know, say they would like to do that. He's very – he wants to give a lot, you know, he's a very good Rabbi I must say this boy.

And Renee, do you think it impacted on your children, your story, or –?

I don't think so. I never told them my story. I never mentioned it when they were young. My daughter will tell you, Noemi, she's grateful to me.

Yeah.

No. Why should I? I always told the only thing, you know, when my children and my grandchildren, even now the great-grandchildren, when they are ten, always I remembered where I was, you know, the same age. [02:58:03]

When they turned ten.

Yeah.

Yeah, it's a sort of turning point.

Yeah.

For you, it was.

It was for me, a big one. Oh, thank God it is freedom, you know, long should last this freedom. It's a horrible thing. You can't [inaudible] really. Now with Ukraine it makes me – I can't read all these articles. So, I go to bed with this news, you know, with the last news.

Yeah, you know, some people say it retraumatizes –

Yeah.

Survivors, when you see similar things happening.

Yeah.

It brings back the memories.

I analyse myself. Firstly, I read that from Ukraine, my blood pressure jump sky high. And it was- aggravated me, because it brought back all these horrible memories. But that is even worse because look, he bombs – I don't know what he does. He send his own people in the death, but he has very big machine, the modernst from the modernst. The artillery, the weapons. Anyway, we hope the best. We hope God should be help. Should be freedom.

Yeah. Renee, is there anything I haven't asked you which you'd like to add?

Now in my memory, no. My memory is now blank. I'm sorry [laughs]. I couldn't – I think you do ask me everything what you had to.

Well, you have covered many, many things [pause]. I know your daughter appears also at the Imperial War Museum at the end there with her daughters, yeah?

Noemi?

Yeah.

It was one with the daughter and one was this one Talia from here.

Yeah.

Talia she was *-ich glaube* [I think]- in London school, and for last year for the Holocaust day she wrote for six girls – you know, she organise a remembrance day Holocaust in her school. [03:00:07] And the teacher wanted to take second generation and she said, 'No, take first generation. It's more important.' She organise it, and then she wrote – she made like a – she represented it with six different pictures, small pictures, and she wrote all the speeches to the other girls what they have to say. So I said, 'Now Noemi, you have somebody who will properly help you in the Holocaust,' meantime.

And Renee, I wanted to ask you actually did you feel because your husband was a camp survivor that you could sort of talk about your experience less? What I mean is, sometimes –

Yes, that's true. I would speak less because when I was younger, I never told him the story because it disturbed for so much this man, so much more. But, you know, the psychologist where I was in Bruxelles, he said, 'You should never compare- which is true- your suffering. Everybody has his own.' But I shouldn't compare, but I don't regret that I didn't tell him what.

Because I think that happened quite often. You know, when you had couples where you had a camp survivor and somebody on the Kindertransport, a hidden child, that you felt it's not comparable, and that's why people spoke less.

Yes. So that's why I didn't mention. And my children said they were – especially the eldest, she was grateful we never spoke about the past. That the children – they said, 'Mama, we're so grateful we had a normal childhood.' You know, I would never dream to antagonise them with these stories.

And they had grandparents, they had your parents.

Yeah. Oh, my parents, they adored them, you know. [03:02:00]

Were they close?

Yeah, because they spoke *loshen* [language] my mother [laughs], [inaudible] her *loshen*? That was even double. And we were the nearest to my parents.

Because she spoke German. She spoke German –

No, we –

[Inaudible] –

No, we spoke – we were the nearest also in distance. My sister didn't come so often. My mother didn't want my father to speak Yiddish because it was too much German- Germanic.

Yeah, and you said you went once to the conference on child survivors. Did you join any other groups? Are you part of any child survivors, Hidden Children, anything?

No, because my group were French, was completely – was not there. Nobody from France accepted me. They were different. Also different, you know, people – we had little groups where we could speak. People didn't speak. I didn't hear anybody speaking from his own experience. They spoke to the psychologist or psychiatrist, whoever we were – they allocated you. Then I learned, you know, you shouldn't compare. But still, I don't regret that I didn't tell my husband. It's better we had a normal life, you know. Life was so full. He was a man who worked each day full. I looked after the children.

It wasn't – at the time, didn't seem important.

No.

And now, would you like to meet other people who – child – French child survivors or –? To just talk or –?

Yeah, but I have my best friend. She lives in Paris. We are both from Strasbourg. We used to meet twice a year, but we never spoke a lot about the past. She was Périgueux, we were near Limoges. Sometimes, you know, some – her father was once – he was denounced by a Jewish man who is super- now. [03:04:06] After the War he was super-orthodox– he's not in life any more. And he worked, you know. People did it for money. To denounce. A Jewish traitor.

Yeah.

And she told me sometimes that her father was lucky to escape. He escaped. But otherwise we – her also not. We don't speak, rarely about War time. I had another one – no. The few friends I have, we don't – I have to be honest, never speak. After the War, not at all, it was taboo, and now also now we are all old. And in Munich which I meet, each when I was not part-time in Munich, they were all survivor from camp. Never I heard one person speaking about the camp. It was taboo completely.

That's so interesting, yeah.

And it was nice because it was normal conversation. Nobody wanted to live in the past again, you know.

It was sort of there, but not talked about.

And [inaudible] –

People knew –

Yeah. Oh, they all knew.

The survivors knew.

Oh, they knew, of course. One person, she was a very good friend. I saw her really shortly before she passed away, and she – I never asked her if she had brothers or sisters. You know, sometimes it's hurtful. I never asked. But I don't know, suddenly – she said something, and I said, 'Did you have brothers and sisters?' She said, 'I had only one brother, and I was nineteen when...' – she was in Auschwitz, and she did the death march to Bergen-Belsen which they did from Auschwitz. And she met her brother. She was nineteen, the brother eighteen. They were Hungarian Jews, so the Hungarian Jews were less – you know, in the concentration camps, and the Polish Jews. [03:06:04]

Yeah.

And she said she met her brother for the first time after War was finished, she saw him. He was eighteen and he passed away the same day. And then I was oh, what should I do, what should I ask her? And she was in Israel and my – Muriel and her husband invite this lady to spend Friday night with us in Israel in a hotel. And she came, and afterward she cried because it reminds her of her own home, you know. I don't think after Auschwitz that – she was very Jewish, brought up a child, she had a child the same year as Noemi. In Jewish school they were. Munich had only primary school, so they spend – she was in a [inaudible], she brought all the different WIZO and groups she was part, but I think she was not religious. So when she saw that, it must remind her, her home, you know.

Renee, I wanted to ask you, you've lived in so many different places. Where would you consider yourself – where's home?

It's a good question [pause]. I don't know to be honest. Where is home? They are all my home. They are equal, you know. I must say, I have no preference. They are equal. Because first of all I have three children in different parts [pause]. Couldn't say which is my home now, it will be – maybe I'm a funny woman, but I have to say the truth, all equal. France is – I like France still. It's something in me, you know, who like this country, but I wouldn't live there. [03:08:01] So it will be – I like England, I'm very happy here I have to say, thank God. I have to say the truth. When I think about it, I wanted to live in Israel. I said afterwards, 'Oh, I have no strength.' Another time, you know, four times to change the countries, very hard [pause].

And Renee, do you have any message for anyone who might watch this video, this film in the future?

I hope never – the famous phrase- never again, never something – such atrocity should happen again. Unfortunately I'm very sad what happened about Ukraine because it reminds me that terrible past. I hope it will be soon finished. We only pray for peace. People should be well, and healthy.

And what do you think should we do now, if we take it seriously, to learn from history? What do you think should we do now, faced with this Ukraine crisis? Do you think we can do something as individuals here in England for example? I don't know.

Like what you do. Just to take somebody in your flat. That is already a big thing.

Not yet. I just filled out the form [laughs].

Yeah, but it's marvellous to even have the idea to do it. That is a good thing, but what also can we help? We can't go and fight. At my age of state would be finished and you wouldn't fight either.

No.

We can't fight, so that the way humanity help is very nice. To be able to give humanity help [pause].

And what do you think from your perspective, as a child who had – you know, was sort of in hiding or, you know, imprisoned, what do you think will help the children of today who are going to have a trauma, you know? [03:10:10]

I must say, I feel a lot. Whenever I switch on the television and I see a war in Africa, wherever it is and I see the children who are badly treated, I cannot tell you how much it hurt me terribly. It affect me really. Each time it's the same. No endless. Nobody learn something from the last horrible war. Really [inaudible]. Look now in Ukraine, they are killed, they are – when I see the new-born baby who lie on the floor, their body, it hurts me terribly. I don't know how I couldn't – I am not in a position to say I would help. How would I help? I'm not even able to. But it hurts me, and I hope it will be soon finished. That people have – everybody deserves freedom. To be honest, it's unthinkable why this man does such a horrible thing. No value of human life. But his wife he send in Switzerland, his children.

But Renee, what do you think helped you to live with your experiences?

To be better, you know, to be good with the people. Try to do my best to avoid that people become bad. To give them the good side. I learnt that you should be good to each other. Give your best. To be helpful. [Inaudible] a little bit. That's all what I think, you know. It's very hard. The children should have a better life. I always said the children – my wish was the children should have a better life that I have. They should have first of all the freedom, peace. [03:12:01] Peace, that is – always was for me the biggest thing. Peace and health, and that's all what we say Shalom, and the health. That's the biggest thing in life.

Yeah.

My grandson was three years in the Army. I also had sometimes heartbeat, I must tell you, more than once.

Yeah.

It's very hard. I feel a lot now for this – it doesn't matter for which mother loses her son, I feel terrible, I feel a lot with it. Until he brings them up until – and then to lose them in such a horrible way. For no reason if you think about it.

Yeah. Okay Renee, thank you so much for –

It was my pleasure.

Sharing your story.

I'm not very eloquent, but – unfortunately.

You are very eloquent, thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

No, you did a lot. I'm very grateful, you did really a tremendous hard job. With me it was not easy, but I did my best usually [laughs]. I never spoke for such a long time, [laughs] I must

say than today. Even my daughter said, 'Oh Mama, you speak too much.' But what I am sorry that sometimes I jump too much from one subject to the other.

That's part of your – how you remember.

My life, my remembrance, yeah.

Yeah. Well anyway, thank –

You know, Bea, I hope I don't need to– I wouldn't be able to speak so soon about that for a long time now.

Okay, I hope –

Yeah, it's funny – excuse me – it should traumatise me not any more, it's so many years. But now with this Ukraine, you know, when I see the children, when I read today the children without parents, it upset me terribly. I cannot describe it how it upset me. [03:14:02]

I understand, and I'm grateful that you decided to talk, although it is difficult for you.

No, it was – you're very kind, you had a lot of patience, both of you, I say, 'thank you'. Because maybe it is good for the future generation to know about it, to avoid that. But how can we avoid it? That's a good question. These evil people. You know, and Noemi she spoke about it, in each people it's evil. It's why, you know, there are people who you say very often Jekyll and Hyde. Can be so good and suddenly...

Yeah, let's hope –

Yeah.

That somebody will learn from history. Thank you again Renee.

To be honest, I have not much – don't learn from history. Look what happened now, after so many years.

Yeah.

It's unbelievable. I can't – it's like a bad dream that, and it's reality.

Yeah.

We hope the best. That our children have a better future and that they should live in peace and tranquillity. You know, it's already – each day, each human life has its problem. Everybody wants to get away with his own life, and not to be confronted with such evil. [Voices in background] It's my daughter-in-law [pause]. [Door slams] **[03:16:04]** [Break in recording]

Renee, can you please introduce the young gentleman on your left?

That's my lovely grandson, Joel, who I love very much, who is very, very kind with me. Very thoughtful. I'm very impressed always with him. He's a very special boy in my heart.

Joel, your grandmother just shared her story with us. Do you know your grandmother's story? Have you heard it?

I know some of it, not all of it. More my grandfather's story 'cos my dad's told me a bit about my grandma's story, but I don't know all of it.

And are you interested in her story?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Yeah. I think it will be interesting to learn about it 'cos it will be – I'm sure it will be different to what my grandfather's story was, so it'll be quite interesting to see how it was. 'Cos everyone's got a different story, so – and when you've got someone who is close to you, it's quite interesting to hear what their story was.

And did you learn about the Holocaust in school for example? Have you –?

Yeah.

Learnt little bits.

Yeah, usually around Holocaust Memorial Day we all go to assembly, and they teach us about different people every year. Recently, we learnt about someone who dressed up in the soldier's uniform and got food, and different rations and things, for the people that were hiding with him.

Okay. Anything you want to say to your grandma here? I don't know. Sorry, to put you on the spot [laughs]. [03:18:00]

I'm very glad you're staying with us at the moment, it's very nice.

It's very nice to say that [laughs].

Renee, have you got anything to say? I know you have many grandchildren. Just one representative of this –

I have eight granddaughters, and the minority are the boys. And Joel is very special. He's my youngest grandson. The others are a little bit older.

Hmm-mm. Okay, so maybe in the future you can watch this interview, and then ask your grandmother some questions yourself. Renee, can you please describe the photo in your hand?

It's my father, my mother. The first one is my eldest sister. She's three years older than I. The middle one is me. And next is my brother, is one year younger than I.

And when was it taken roughly?

1939.

And where?

In Strasbourg.

And tell us a little bit about your clothes.

My mother did all our clothes herself.

Lovely. Thank you.

Pleasure [pause].

Yes, please. What's on this photo please?

The family. All that I can describe. My husband, my children, myself. Bad Mergentheim in a happy day.

Which year Renee?

Oh, I've no idea. To be honest, if I didn't write it down, it's terrible, and now I have no idea to tell you the truth. 'Cos you see my son is two years old, maybe 2013 – thirteen –

[03:20:05]

'73.

Yeah.

1973.

Yeah, [inaud].

Okay, yes please. What do we see on this photo?

I think it's a journalist who interviewed me, or is that a photograph from a journal, from a newspaper?

Yeah, somebody's interviewing you, or taking a photo.

It is at the Town Hall.

Of?

Of Annemasse.

And why were you in Annemasse?

Because of the celebration of – I don't know how it's called now – from the liberation. The celebration – excuse me, celebration of the liberation.

And was this when you went with Rob Rinder for the film, My Family, The Holocaust, and Me?

Yes.

And you went with your daughter Noemi.

With all the three children.

With all the three children, okay. So, we're going to look at some of the photos from –

All the three. And that is the Lord Mayor and [inaudible] –

What do we see here please? That is a statue.

That is a statue from the Lord Mayor, Jean Deffaugt, who saved my life, saved the life of thirty-two children.

And the statue's in Annemasse?

Yeah, in the main square of Annemasse.

Yes please. Renee, who is on this picture from Annemasse?

Are my children, Noemi, Muriel, Alain.

Tell us where, sorry to interrupt. Noemi is one the right.

Yeah.

Top left.

Yeah, and Muriel is underneath. Muriel, myself, and Alain. And the grandson of the Lord Mayor, Jean Deffaugt. The others are...

So the grandson is on the left of Noemi.

Yeah.

And the two others?

I don't know the name now.

Right, okay. And this was in Annemasse, 2020.

Yeah.

Thank you. Okay?[03:22:00]

Which one you want?

Renee, this one on the left. It's you –?

It's the grandfather of – no, it's the grandson of Jean Deffaugt the Lord Mayor, his little boy – his great-great-grandchild, and me.

And he looks very attached to you, the little boy.

Yeah. Which I never met before. It's very funny.

2020 in Annemasse. Yes, please Renee, who is on this picture? It's the wedding picture.

It's a picture. It's – wait a moment. [Inaudible].

The bride and the groom.

Can I see it please?

No, because we're just filming it.

I can't –

Just tell us roughly who is on it? Is it all your family?

All my family. My children, Noemi, Muriel, Alain. Noemi with Danny, Muriel with Hillie, and Judy's with Alain. All the grandchildren.

And when was it taken?

I think last year, one year, June '21.

In London?

Yeah – no, in Manchester. [Inaudible] in London. Manchester.

Okay, thank you. Please Renee.

Die Lange Nacht is a book my husband wrote straightaway after the War, but it was '57 when it came out. It was published 1967.

And this is the first edition?

Yeah.

And now it's translated into English, French –

In French, and Slovakia I think. What did he say- Czech?

Hmm-mm. Okay, thank you so much, and thank you again –

Pleasure.

For sharing your photos and your interview.

That's my pleasure. You work both, Bea and Frank, very hard. I'm very grateful to you.

Thank you.

Thank you. **[03:24:01]**

[End of transcript]