

**IMPORTANT**

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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

<b>Collection title:</b>	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
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<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Lebor
<b>Forename:</b>	Rose
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Female
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	8 April 1940
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Cracow, Poland

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	2 December 2015
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	2 hours 43 minutes



**REFUGEE VOICES**

**Interview No.** RV159

**NAME:** Mrs Rose Lebor

**DATE:** 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015

**LOCATION:** London, UK

**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

**[Part One]**

**[0:00:00]**

*Today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2015. We are conducting an interview with Mrs Rose Lebor. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. Today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2015. We are conducting an interview with Mrs Rose Lebor. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.*

*What is your name please?*

Rose Lebor.

*And what was your maiden name?*

Rosa Deitel.

*And when and where were you born?*

The 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1940, in Krakow.

*Thank you. Thank you, Mrs Lebor for agreeing to be interviewed for the Refugee Voices archive. Can you please tell me a little bit about your family background?*

My mother, Regina, was born in Krakow. And she was a bookkeeper before the war. She married my father, name of Gedaliah, also born in Krakow. And he was a furrier. Both of these families had very large, they were large families like... most of them before the war; they had eight or nine siblings

each. And from my- on my mother's side, all I remember my mother saying was that her father had died from a heart attack when he was very young, like... in his 50s, leaving the mother with all the children to bring up. And so she became a trader, a market trader, to bring up the children. On my father's side, unfortunately, I have got no information at all. I have no idea what they were doing, what their profession was or their job was. I have no idea. That I have not been able to - to discover anything at this stage. Maybe one day I will, but at the moment I have got no information.

*And do you know where your parents, where they met and when they married?*

**[0:02:13]**

They married in Krakow. They married about...two to three years before the war. But exactly the details, again, I don't know. It's... since my father actually died during the war, my mother later on never talked much about him.

*When did your father die?*

He, he got wounded in the camp, and... in fact, no, I think he was wounded when he was in the ghetto in Krakow, when we were all put in the ghetto, at the beginning of the war in...in 1940. And then he died of gangrene later on in the hospital in Budzyn. This again is what my mother told me, because I don't have much memory of those- of those years either.

*Do you have any memories? You were born 1940, which was a difficult time to be born in. Do you have any memories of that time, or, what are your earliest memories?*

No, I- I was with my mother for four years. After the ghetto- After I was put in the ghetto, the whole family was - was put there, with my mother, we were sent to Majdanek, and there we were for four years. Now my mother tells a very sad tale. That she had another child, an older child, born before me. So when we were in the, in the camp... they separated the children from the mothers, but because I was such -so young, they said I can stay with my mother. And then she told the story, not to me directly, but really to my son when he grew up later on, that one day, some of those Nazis that were in charge of the camp got drunk. And they went into the - the barrack where there was about eight children, very young children, and they killed them all. They killed them - some with their hands, and some by taking them by their feet and throwing them against the wall. And... [sighs] I mean when my son told me this, I don't know really how my mother survived this. I mean obviously she lost all her family in the war. Hardly anybody survived except later on one brother who was a Zionist and went to - to Israel. He survived the war. But hardly anybody else. We don't know anybody else. So how my

mother survived these events, I don't know. How she survived the knowledge of my father's dying, not knowing that he had died, but only seeing his boots on somebody else's feet, is unbelievable. I mean, I don't...

**[0:05:28]**

*When was that?*

Well that was... towards the end of the war. [pause] Some of the stories that she told, she told Benjamin, she never did tell me. But of course Benjamin came along much later and they were maybe starting to talk. And she told him about events in Majdanek. I don't know if you know, but Majdanek was one of the first camps that was established near Lublin. And it was a 'Final Solution' camp. They had all the crematoria and everything. And it still exists, because by the time the war finished the – it happened to them so quickly, that they didn't have time to destroy everything. So in fact it's a camp that remains the way it was. I haven't visited; I haven't been there. But Benjamin said recently that he would like to go and see. I have been; I have been to see Auschwitz, but not Majdanek. So maybe I'll brace myself and I will go and see. But she was also telling about the horrors that they all had to witness. All the executions, the beatings that they had to watch... And these are things that my mother could never bring herself to tell me directly.

*So did she never talk about...her experience, or your experiences in Majdanek?*

She didn't tell me directly, no. She what– What she did say was that... she was lucky to have survived, but I think a lot of it she made her own luck. Which I think some people did. They found a way, a little niche, a little something to say or to do, that would make them survive another day. Now... she managed to get... one of the Kommandants to let her out of the camp and go and work in a family in Lublin. And as a, and would give her some food. Scraps of food, she would say. But, it allowed us to have a little bit more, and survive another day. So it was like surviving one day at a time.

*And were you, for the whole time, with your mother?*

**[0:07:58]**

Yes, she kept me with her all the time. When they were the, the roll call, she would put me under the bench, and then she would go out. And she would... stand near German women, women that maybe were not Polish, but they were there in prison for other reasons. And, and she thinks that that probably

helped her, not to be selected. So it was each time, it was hoping that she wouldn't be selected. Hoping she can go out and - and do a little work and bring back a little scrap of food. So I understand that, having survived such horrors. Who wants to talk about it? You really want to forget about it.

*But she must have had some help from the other women, from other people... with you?*

**[0:09:02]**

I think the help she got, is that they never spoke. They never mentioned anything, and that of course was a saving factor... In, in '44, when they reached- when the war was nearly finished, she said that she realised that something big was happening, because they were- all the Germans were in the courtyard burning documents. But it all happened so very quickly; they didn't have time to burn the documents. And then, all the inmates were put on trains, to be taken to Auschwitz. They were emptying the camp in this way. She then pretended that she was far ill-er than what she was. That she couldn't possibly stand on her feet and she... To be allowed to go...in the...what do you call it, obviously it wasn't the... in the car that the German was driving with the eight remaining children, or the seven remaining children. She then went with this German. And this is really what saved our lives, because instead of going by train directly to Auschwitz, he went by road. And, as they were crossing, outside Krakow, the woods in Krakow, the Russian tanks came through. So when the German saw the red flag, he knew his time was up. So he took out his gun and just shot himself, next to my mother. And the tank drove into this... what would you call it? Not a lorry, it's small, you know like the Army...thing. Anyway, they- thinking that it was probably full of German soldiers, but it wasn't. It was the few children and one wounded woman by that time, because she got wounded by all the - the glass, the splashing that happened. They didn't know what to do with us, so they took us out of there. Put us on the side of the road. [half-laughs at the absurdity] The tank drove off. But I think what they did, is they must have gone to probably into Krakow, and told the Red Cross. Because they came and then... took us in. ...To what I learned later on, was a... an assembly place in Krakow itself, where they put everybody that they could find there... and where later on, people would search for their families.

**[0:11:47]**

*But, it's amazing that you managed to survive with- you were so young. That you had the food, that you could eat the food given to you. I mean, did your mother feed you with milk, I mean...?*

No.

*I mean, probably not.*

No, no. No it must just have been little bits of bread. That's all there was. I mean nobody had much food. A lot of them just died of hunger. They died of overwork, they died of hunger, they died of disease... and... and yes, she said, "I was ill, but I got over it". So... yes, surviving was luck, and surviving was also that I had a very strong mother. I mean, in later years I have known she was a very, very strong woman. She said she was like her mother, and I'm like her mother. [half laughs] We are like- strong. But... I assumed that to be a survivor you had to be strong.

*Yeah.*

That's the essence, isn't it, of surviving? The weak ones had - had to die.

*And do you know, you said you had a sibling, do you know the name of your sibling?*

No. The mystery remains. When, much later on, I went to Krakow and I asked for some documents from the Town Hall. They sent me a document, with a child and on it is written that there was a child born to Regina Deitel, and Gedaliah Deitel, of the name of Ruchsia. I don't know. My date, but not my name. So there's a confusion. And, I don't know. Are the Poles playing tricks? Are they... trying to do something with the documents?. I have no idea. I haven't checked, I haven't delved any deeper into it. I don't know if I should. I mean, it's a long time ago. I don't think it will lead to anything except maybe just... pain?

*So you don't know whether there was a sibling, or...?*

Well, my- There must have been, because my mother would not have said that to my son, if there wasn't. So yes, there was. Now was this Ruchsia the other one, and they confused between me being born that date and the, and the older girl, I don't know. Because I was always called Rosa. It's only when I came here and got married, that I changed it from Rosa to Rose. To Rose, to make it more...European, you know. English. French.

*So what does it say on your birth certificate? Where- in Krakow, you were born in Krakow. Were you at that time, was it in the ghetto already or...?*

No, it was before the ghetto. The ghetto was opened...I was born in April and the ghetto was opened later, but not that much later. I think in June, July, something like that. Maybe a year later. No, I think it was about a year later that the ghetto opened. And in fact when people ask me about the ghetto in

Krakow, do I know things, I say, "Just look at *Schindler's List* and then, that is the Krakow ghetto". I don't know if you actually have seen...have you seen the, the film?

*Yes.*

And there is a little girl, that is in red. Well, that could have been me. It's exactly the same age, the same life.

**[0:15:37]**

*And did your mother talk about the ghetto at all? ...About her experiences?*

She- she never spoke to me about it. No. No.

*So all the information you have, you- is from later in life?*

From much later, yes, much later.

*Were there other for example, were there other children at all... You said there were children in the car, so who were those children, when you were driven...?*

Well...I don't know . I mean at liberation I was four. So, I don't know. However- However, if you'd like me to tell you the story, I will. Years and years later, I went to Miami on a holiday. And there we met...we went to a synagogue one Friday night, and we had dinner at the synagogue. And I got to know some people that had invited us. And, at that dinner, the Rabbi came over to see me and he said, "I understand, via my friend, that you are a survivor of Majdanek". So I said, "Yes". "And you told her that you were the youngest child, the youngest survivor of Majdanek". And I said, "That's what I understood". And he said, "Well," he said, "My sister-in-law, my wife's sister survived Majdanek, and she's a few months younger than you are." Which of course I was... amazed. And she lives in Jerusalem. So my next trip to Jerusalem... which happened the year after, I went to see her. And you know, we talked about it and whatever. Whatever she knew, but she also didn't remember much either because she was also only four at liberation.

*And how did she survive, like you? With her mother or...?*



The same. The same... She survived the same way. ...But then later on they went – at liberation they went to Belgium. They had relatives in Belgium. They went to Belgium. And then later on, much later she went to Israel, when it was already Israel. So that was a – that was a big surprise.

*So what are your earliest memories please?*

**[0:18:14]**

Well my early memories start after that, after - after liberation. In the actual... assembly place in Krakow, my mother met a man. Abraham. Abraham Kaliser was his name. He...he was a – he had been a Communist before the war. He had been married, and had a child, a little boy. And when- Before the war even started, they were starting to arrest Communists and they were harassing them. So he went to Russia - to USSR. And he spent all the war years in the USSR. Then when the Red Army came into...into Europe, into Poland, he followed the Army, like I understand other people did too. So he followed stage by stage he followed the Army, until he came into Poland. Went to Lodz; that was where he was born and lived. And looked for his family. Couldn't find anybody. Then he was told that there was a bigger place where Jews were put together in Krakow. So he went to Krakow, and that's where they met. They met and... I expect he fell in love with my mother, because they remained together for the rest of their lives.

**[0:19:59]**

*How old was your mother at the- at liberation?*

How old was she? I think she was born in... 1915...what would she be, forty? I can't work it out for a minute, I can't work it out. But she had this very young child of four, four and a half. So anyway he, he took us on. And from there... I think we were very lucky. That was probably our first bit of luck. We were taken on by the Americans... rather than by the Russians, because I understand later on that if you were under the Russians you really had a very tough time. That they behaved badly, more like pigs than human beings. But we were under the Americans. And the Americans did this unbelievable thing. They took us to a place called Bad Gastein, which is in Austria, right on the border with Italy. Right at the end of Austria. There's no road any further than that; the road stops there. And, and the American Army rented out all the hotels... and put us in the hotel, which meant that we didn't live under tents. We actually lived in - in rooms. We had a room per family. So we had a room, we had a bed and the three of us we - we stayed and we slept in that bed. But then ORT came along from Israel. Teachers came to teach us Hebrew, to prepare us to go to - still then, Palestine - in '45. We had food...not wonderful food, but we had food. We had heating. Marvellous. So the place was beautiful.

It was- I can't tell you how lovely Bad Gastein is if you don't know it. I don't know if you know it, but it's absolutely beautiful. In the summer, it's- I mean it's high mountains but it's green. And the houses are magnificent. The- It's a spa place. And they had a big, big reputation before the war, a long time, anybody that was somebody from royalty, to rich people to famous, to writers to musicians: they all went there for spa, for the spa. And in the winter, it got all magic - magic for me, because it was covered with snow. There was icicles hanging everywhere. It was beautiful. After four years in the camp it must have just looked magnificent. And the American Army who was - they were outside the town, they had an encampment in the mountains. But they would come in, they would walk in - into the town, and see us, and give us things. They would give us chewing gum. They would give us tinned milk. And they would also give a little bit of money. They gave some money to my mother, which she bought a little bit of material. And she made clothes for me and I think she also made some clothes for Austrians, and made a little bit of money. And in fact, they gave her some money and she kept... two of the coins, the dollars, in her wallet for a bad, a worse day. A day she really will need it. But she kept them. She never spent them. We- I've still got them.

*Was it a- Was it a DP camp or was it a...?*

**[0:23:55]**

It was a DP camp.

*Yes, and what was it called?*

A Displaced Persons camp.

*And was it called 'DP Camp Bad Gastein'? Or did it have a name?*

That's it. That's it. Yes, if you go to the internet you will find it under DP Bad Gastein. Absolutely.

*And how many people were there roughly, do you know?*

They were, at each time I think they had about 2- or 3,000 people. But people were leaving and people were - were coming. Some people were taken on boats, to go to Palestine. That was the whole idea, that everybody will eventually go to Palestine. Of course then started the problem with the British not letting the, the ships through to Palestine. And there were lots of unrest by the Jews in Palestine. They were demonstrating, you know wanting the British to open and let people through. ...And then we heard, it was filtered all through that ...some of the ships were sent back. And some

of the people that were not sent back were put in, in a camp in Cyprus, on Cyprus. So my, my father, my stepfather which I then called my father, said, "Enough. I'm not going to go; I'm not taking you any place where there's a camp. You've had enough camps. What we'll do, is we'll get a little bit of money together. We will pay ...somebody to take us across the Alps into Italy. We'll just leave illegally the camp." Because we were obviously not allowed to leave the camp. We had to be there until we could be taken to, to Israel... or Palestine, still then. Anyway, after two years, they, they had no longer any patience and that's what he did. He found some money... Did a little bit of handling like Jews do. He found something, sold something. He made a little bit of money and they paid ...this Austrian man. We weren't the only ones; there was a whole group. He would take a whole group. Get the money and take us on foot over the Alps, at night. Now that I remember, because that was pretty horrific. First, it was a very long trek. It was very hard. It was ...up the mountains. ...It took a long time. And then, in the middle of the night...we- there was a huge storm. And in the mountains I mean the, it's actually quite exciting, but, frightening at the same time. Because in the mountains when you get lightning and thunder, the thunder never stops because it gets reverberated from one side to the other; goes roaring on, just like a war, really. And it was pretty dangerous because it was deep and you could easily fall down, and indeed one or two people did fall down. But nobody could stop. Nobody could do anything. It must have been pretty horrendous.

*How many people were in the group?*

**[0:27:52]**

I think maybe a...a dozen. A dozen. I don't remember any other children. I just remember holding on. You know. My father was in the front. My stepfather, but I've always called him my father; it's easier because I've always called him father. He was in the front. My mother was at the back, and was holding on and this is how I made it. Half way through, before we got into Italy... we stopped in a cave where we spent some time and resting. And this particular guide said that we should leave all our papers that were given in Poland to the refugees. Leave them there, so that when we come into Italy there's no question asked. Why he did this, I'm not certain. I suspect, because later on we had an event that happened, much later, when we finished up in Paris, where it was obvious what he did with the- with our papers. I think he sold them. It was a whole traffic going on, not only do you take money from us, but then you sold the documents, the papers.

*So you left all your papers...?*

Well they were left- everybody left their papers in the cave.

*What sort of papers were they?*

They were identity papers saying you were so and so and... just saying who you were and where you came from. So that was left behind. And then – so we finished up in the – in an Italian – in the Italian camp. And that was not so good. That was not good. That was really ...filthy camp. Horrible food. Again, I think a lot of trafficking must have been going on with the food, because it was old and stale and I – I wouldn't eat it. And my mother said, "Look you've got to eat it. Whatever is in it, close our eyes and just eat it because that's all we've got." But my memory is really very bad of these Italian camps.

*In contrast to the first camp, to the Bad Gastein?*

In contrast to Bad Gastein, which... felt very civilised, I mean, we actually stayed in, you know, nice hotels.

*Do you remember from Bad Gastein, playing with other children? What memories do you...?*

Yes, of course! Of course. During the two years, the - the Israeli teachers, they introduced us to everything Jewish! To, to the religion, to – to Purim, to Hanukkah, to all that and of course we did. We had- We dressed up for Purim, we played in the- in the fields, sports. We did all that.

**[0:31:06]**

*And was there some schooling also?*

And there was schooling, oh, yes. Yes!

*So what were you taught? Do you remember anything from then?*

We were taught with Hebrew. We were getting ready... to have the language of the country we were going to. Oh yes, for two years we were taught Hebrew. And in fact, when I got to Paris I could actually read...I could read the Yiddish papers, because I could read the Hebrew letters. So I would read, and because I – I spoke Yiddish, I could understand what I was reading. So that was quite something.

*Speaking of language, so which language did you speak to your mother and your father? Was it Yiddish or Polish?*

It was.

*Yiddish?*

It was Yiddish, yes. I mean they- They would speak Polish to each other if they didn't want me to understand. We would speak Yiddish. My mother would speak- knew how to speak German. My father knew how to speak Russian. ...Later on when we first came to, to, to France, and I'll come back to this in a moment, they refused to speak Polish. They were so... very angry, against Poland, and the Poles, that they said it's not a language they wished to speak. So they only spoke Yiddish. Only spoke Yiddish. Anyway, from this Italian camp, my father went out again, and did some work. Did some... whatever he did. Got some money. And we moved on, to the center of Italy, where there was another camp. And then we moved to the south of Italy, and then we crossed the Alps again, but this one in Ventimiglia which is the border between Italy and France. And there it's the lower - lower Alps. It's not really as high as that. Not like when we crossed Brenner which was 1,500 meters high. There it is only a few hundred meters high. And the sun was shining and we were rather hot. So anyway we had also this illegal guide that took us across – paid, of course – took us across. And in Menton he said goodbye, and there we were! Now it's not exactly clear, in my mind... how my father got the rest of the money. I mean, they couldn't speak French at that stage. They learned later on of course. But at that stage they couldn't speak French. They could speak- Between them they could speak several languages. But not French. So, how did they get money to get on the train to take them to Lyon, because that was the next stop. They- We couldn't have travelled on the top of the train, because I was too little. We couldn't have done that. So we must have travelled inside the train. Did they pay for the tickets? Did they not pay for the tickets? [half laughs] You know as much as I do, what this is concerned. Anyway, in Lyon... they looked for work. And then they looked for maybe a relative that my- my father would have in Paris. And he did. He heard that there was a relative in Paris. He was a tailor and he said, "Look we'll go to Paris". So off we went again on another train. With how? I suspect maybe we never paid for the ticket. I suspect we just walked from – from wagon to wagon whenever the control came. We just- I think that's what we did, because I, because I know when we eventually we reached Paris they didn't have a penny. They had no money and they had nowhere to sleep. They had nowhere to go. But they went to the Jewish area which was then... Which is called 'The Pletzl'. It's still called 'The Pletzl', though it has changed. And there they met a friend, who said to - to my father, "Well, if you haven't got anywhere to sleep, all I can offer you," he said, "is the big synagogue, La Victoire, is empty. And on the first floor it's empty, there's nobody there. Just squat there." So that's what we did. We went and we squatted... in this place. And, and then he started working a little bit... doing his tailoring. And they got a little bit of money together. Then, they rented... a one room. Like a little studio on the sixth floor, in, in Paris. It was in Faubourg St

Antoine. Well that peregrination from Bad Gastein to Paris took two years. And now I sit here, and I listen to the news about the Syrian refugees. They get here in no time at all. How do they manage? Why did it take us two years? I have no answer to that either.

**[0:36:44]**

*But if I may get back a little bit. In Italy, where was the first camp? What was your trip in Italy? And how did you get- When you crossed the mountains, did some- did the Police come and say you have to go to that camp, or?*

Well, the- the guards were bribed... Either they were bribed, some were bribed and some would just look the other way. My father tells the story that the Italians were always like that. When we went to the market, they obviously knew who these people were. I mean we must have looked pretty awful. So they knew. And he said they would always like wave the things and sing and just push it aside – push it towards them, maybe a little bit of extra. So some were – they knew and they were kind. And some did it for money!

*But where were the camps? In which cities were they? Do you know?*

I can't remember.

*But eventually...*

But it was in the north- It was definitely in the north of Italy. There were several camps in the north of Italy. Quite a few. And then, there were some camps in the centre of Italy, where it was easier to get to - to the ships.

*But you basically made your way to Ventimiglia, which is in the south?*

Yes. Yes.

*And then crossed from there to France.*

Yes. That's what they did. They closed the camps in the north, and they opened them in the middle, and then...you know, eventually, eventually, it all closed down. But it took many years. I mean we arrived in Paris in 1948... I think it was maybe June '48 we arrived in Paris. And- and there were still

camps open in... '55 I think, I recall, '55 were probably the last camps closed in Italy. The Bad Gastein one closed earlier, it closed in '50. But the others in '55.

*And - and do you know, was it your parents' intention to go to France or...?*

**[0:39:00]**

No, originally it wasn't. Of course not. We were there for two years waiting our turn to, to go to Palestine!

*So they wanted to Palestine?*

Yeah, they wanted to – yeah, to finish up in Israel. But as I explained earlier on, they didn't, because our turn just didn't come. It was pretty slow, because we weren't allowed in.

*Yeah. Was there- Did they want to go back to Krakow...*

No, no never.

*...at all to - to look for...Did they know what happened to the relatives, your father, did...?*

Oh, yes, yes. They all - They both knew that they'd lost all their families. The both knew. However, my father was told in Krakow by somebody who had survived Auschwitz, that one of his sisters, sister Mina, had survived. And I know for years they searched, like, you know, people did. They searched through the Red Cross, they put adverts in the papers. You know: so and so searching for so and so. And they were not very successful in finding anybody. My mother, we contacted her brother... who was living in Haifa... But unfortunately, they never met up, because he never had any money to come to Paris, and they didn't have any money to go to Israel. So he died before they could do it. He died in the 50s.

*So they never saw each other.*

They never saw...No, they didn't. And I think my mother was always sad about it. She did mention about that and many times she was very sad about that. She also did some research, because before the war, one of her uncles had left... Krakow, and came to London. And he was a - a jeweller. A diamond merchant in Hatton Garden. So she traced him. And, well by then I suppose he was pretty old. He never married. And his brother by the way also never married. Talking about the end of a line.

Her brother didn't marry, didn't leave any children. The uncle never married. Didn't leave any children. And I know that in the – in the 50s... [clock chimes]

*One moment...Yes please.*

Well sometime in the 50s, this uncle died. And he'd left in the will, he had left some money to my mother. So by that time, they had accumulated a little bit more money, and they'd moved from their one room on the sixth floor, to a three room on the fourth floor. No lift of course.

*And in which area of Paris?*

**[0:42:13]**

Well in the- in the *Quatrieme*, which is now Le Marais, which is now called Le Marais, which is very near the Jewish area. The Pletzl. So there, the biggest room was their workshop, where they had the sewing machine, and the pressing table. And, and then one room was their bedroom and the other room was the dining room. And that's where I used to sleep in one of these convertibles. You took down the bed from the wall, you know, folded; and that's where I used to sleep. And they worked! They worked so hard. I don't think today people know what working hard is. I would – I would go to sleep at night, they would still work. I would wake up in the morning, they were already working. They just worked and worked and worked.

*And what did they do exactly?*

Well, he was a tailor, he was... a gents' tailor in Poland and then he changed to a ladies' tailor, which they needed more and was easier to get work. And my mother learnt... to do some sewing, so they worked together.

*And who were their clients?*

The worked for...for a retailing- no, no - a wholesale shop? Which gave them the work. My father would go and pick up huge bundles of already cut-up coats and suits, and bring it home and they would put it together, and then return it already made. They made beautiful clothes. In fact, I've got in my wardrobe still a couple of samples of what they made. They made for me...

*Yeah?*



They made beautiful things.

*So were you well dressed?*

**[0:44:14]**

Oh, I was very well dressed, yes. I was well fed. At that stage, food was very important. So, yes, so that was one thing we, we had. We had a lot of food, and they certainly dressed me well. They thought I needed to look like a little princess. All parents think that...but they did.

*Tell us about the food; you said there was lots of food.*

Oh, lots of food.

*What sort of food was there?*

Well, Ashkenazi food. She would make of course the traditional chicken soup, and mountains of ...*kreplach*...mountains of them! I've still got a recipe. I make it once a year; it's quite enough. What a job. Anyway, she would make that. And she would also make something which is *kishke*. Now, we all know *kishke* is stuffed with flour but she didn't do that. In those days you would buy the real innards of, of the animal. And she would stuff it with grated potatoes. But metres of it. And the few people that they knew, the cousin that they knew, and a couple of friends what they made, they would all come round to this little flat of ours, sit around this table. And there was this huge *kishke* wound like on a pile, round and round and round: two metres of it, or whatever! And I mean she spent hours doing it and... take no time to eat it. It's delicious. And she would make stuffed carp, real stuffed carp. Meaning she would take the flesh out of the skin and the bone, and mince it all up and then put it all back in again. This is what you call stuffed carp. When first I went here, to a shop, and I said, "Can I have some stuffed carp?" And they gave me these balls. I said, "What's this?" It's not my mother's stuffed carp.

*And what sort of circles did they- did they have friends, and...?*

...These, like companies, were formed, for people from different towns or areas of Poland got together. First, they were- it allowed people to get together and to talk about back home. Like the shtetl, the town...about. And they would also put on entertainments, because wherever the Jews went, they would go put a theatre into music and the singing. So they would organise things, and they would

go to that. There would be singing going on, and so on. These days this is finished, because obviously now a lot of people now are old and dead. And it's only kept really as a burial association.

*And did they join one of these?*

Oh, yes.

*I think they were called, Landsmannschaften...*

**[0:47:20]**

That's right. That's right. That's right. They did. Oh yes, they did.

*And that was important for them?*

It was important to every Jew! That's the only place where they could actually come together and I suppose talk to people who had the same experiences. ...So yes, it was very important. In fact, when I met John, and I married John, one day they invited us to one of these ...occasions. And it was very unsophisticated. And John who is an Englishman, and hasn't known anything like it. He thought it was like, you know: where did these people come from? It was that kind of thing. But it was very warm, and... and welcoming, and it was homely.

*Where did they meet, the Landsmannschaft - where?*

They met in different places. Little theatres, if they put on a show, the little theatres. Or they'll be...at the back of restaurants. In cafés. Some actually – whatever is left now – still meet Sunday afternoon in a café in Rue des Rosiers.

*Oh really?*

Sunday afternoon they... come and talk.

*But this must have been a big one, because it was from Krakow; they were from Krakow. So was it then the Krakow Landsmannschaft? Or was it? Do you know what it was called?*

I think it was Lodz.

*It was Lodz because of your father's...?*

**[0:48:57]**

Yes, yes, yes. It was Lodz. ...So...So '48, I was then eight. And there we started my little war with my parents, because they wanted me to go to - to French school, and I didn't want to go to a French school. I've been taught now for two years Hebrew; what am I going to do now with French? I want to go to Israel. You know, that's the language I now know, apart from Yiddish. So what am I doing here? Anyway, they decided they weren't going to go to Israel. That's it; they - they are settling in France. They are putting their roots down there, if possible. I have to go to school. Well so that was another not so pleasant step because I was much older. The children in France... they were six, when I was already eight and a half. I couldn't speak a word of French. I couldn't read anything in French. I looked ...different. I had this long hair in two plaits with a big white bow on top of, of my head. And I was sent to school like this. You know, looking all - all prettied up, but of course that - that didn't help, that didn't help. So the kids weren't very nice to me. So they started bullying me, and pushing me, and all sorts of things. And it went on for a little while like this. And then I had two bits of luck. One was the, in a...a teacher, in those days, girls went together. We were separate girls school, and in girls' schools there were only women teachers. And most of the time they were, they were Miss. They weren't married. And so this unmarried woman, to me looked to me like very old spinster, but probably wasn't. She was very kind, and she kept me after school time to teach me some writing and some spelling and so on. So... that helped a lot. And but I when she said, "Will you stay on and I'll give you some private lessons?" I had to tell her that my parents were not in a position to pay for it. And she said that she does not expect any money. So that was pretty lucky. And then my other bit of luck, was, as I was being bullied in the - in the playground and I was sitting there all by myself in the little corner. I was a very quiet child; I was always very quiet. Always sitting by myself in the corner. There was a couple of girls came over, and they realised who I was; they realised I was Jewish. And then they told me that they are Jewish, but they are Moroccan. And they, they...we couldn't communicate very much, but they kind of like calmed me down. And the next thing I knew when I walked out of school, where the bullying was even worse than in the, in the playground, there was this boy waiting outside the door. Later on, when I could speak a bit more French, I realised he was the brother. They went and told the brother, one of their brothers, what was happening. That this little Jewish girl was being bullied. So he came along, and every day he would wait for me, to take me home. It was nice wasn't it?

*Very nice.*

**[0:53:03]**

So, on one hand obviously I...I wasn't lucky because I lost all my family. And... the only survivor was my mother. But on the other hand, I was lucky because I got a second father, who couldn't have been any better than - you know - a natural father. I got protection from a boy at school. I got a teacher who helped me. So...

*And you stayed in that school?*

That, well, I didn't stay there very long either, because that was where we were in that little room on the sixth floor. And my parents by then had got a little bit of money together and they got their feet about- they knew where to go and find work. They then decided that they needed a room where to work. And that's when they got...another apartment - the three room apartment where they established their workplace. And that was not very far from each other. That was the other side of Place de la Bastille. First was on one side and this one was on the other side. But they never told me we were moving. So they- a lot through their life after that, everything was hush-hush. They wouldn't trust any authorities. So we moved, and I never knew we were going to move. One day, they just took me away from the school, the girls I'd made friends, and the boy that was my protector. And, and I find myself in a different area. I did try once, to run away. So I ran back and search for them, but I couldn't find them. And after, I got shouted by my parents I didn't dare running - running back again. So...Paris led to a lot of adventures, really. But it was hard. It was hard starting school, and not knowing the language. It's not like today. You know, nobody really would help. My parents certainly couldn't help with schooling. They couldn't help with the language. On the contrary. I had to be their interpreter. And there was a case, where we - we did have a problem. They had a problem. Because they were illegal immigrants... I mean France did not accept any Jews. They were illegal. But France being France, once you were in, they would take you to court. And they would condemn you, for being illegal immigrants. And they got condemned for two years...two years' prison, but not, they didn't have to go to prison... if they behaved themselves properly... during that time. But they had to pay a fine, a monetary fine, which was a lot of money. And they didn't have it, so they paid every month they paid a little bit. But they had to pay. Obviously no help. [laughs] No help. Any money help from the government didn't exist then. ...So, yes, that ...The second difficulty really was, not just being a foreigner, but being a young girl, having to be an interpreter to my parents. That was not easy. And I thought maybe it was just me because I was shy, but I know it's never easy, because recently I went to see a childhood friend of mine in Paris, and we talked about these things. And she said she also had to do that for her parents. She was actually born in Paris, so she knew French. And she had to fill in all the forms for them, and she had to go places when she was aged six, and she said it was really hard. So yes, it was a hard thing to do. Anyway, one day we were already in this big flat, you know, that three roomed flat. We had no bathroom in the flat, if you thought it was luxury. There

was no lift. There was no bathroom. The toilet was on the landing. It was one of these...  
*vespasiennes*, you know what English people always used to laugh and giggle about... that you...?

*You have to stand.*

**[0:58:02]**

You stand on it, yes. And yet you shared it between four flats. And there was no running water, so you had to take your own ...pot of water with you [laughing] as you were going, and a piece of newspaper, as was the tradition! But that's how we lived. With. I didn't know any- anything else. It's only when I got much older, and I met people that... were financially better off that I realised that maybe one could live differently. But until then, I didn't know. I thought everybody- Certainly my friend who I met recently, that's also how they lived.

*It was hard.*

And in those derelict areas where we lived, electricity had just come in! We still had the old gas lights on the walls! And the electricity was in the form of one wire. You know, that's in the 50s. I mean, life in the fifties was so very, very different.

*Yeah, but you said- Did you feel you did not belong?*

**[0:59:19]**

I didn't. I didn't want to be there. I mean as I said before, I wanted to- I didn't know what Israel was like, I mean. The first time I went to Israel was '58. And it certainly wasn't [half laughing] – it wasn't what it is now! Fifty-eight: the sand was flying all over the place still. But I mean the difficulty of being a child that just about knew French, because I, you know, very soon as you are a child you learn quite quickly. Within six, eight months you are able to, you know, speak... what is necessary. Then one morning, at six o'clock in the morning- I tell you this little tale, because it relates to us crossing the Alps, which I started telling you about. There's a knock on the door, because the police always arrives early in the morning, till? finding you in bed. And they took us to the police station, including me, because I was the interpreter. And there we sat. And they told me, that next door, in another room, they have a man, who tells them that his name is Abraham Kaliser. The same mother than than my father... Yes? So there is another man there, who is called Abraham Kaliser. The same mother, the same father, the same date of birth and born in Lodz. Now they say, we want to know which one of

these two is the real one. So...eventually so of course my father said, "I'm the real one!" You know. [inaudible]. "But the other one says exactly the same. Do you have any witness?" So...He did. He had a distant cousin that came along and pointed at him and said, "This is my cousin". So they said, "OK. We are going to let him go". The other man, he was caught... dealing with watches. And he had these papers. Now, I would swear, that he picked up these papers from that cave where we left them. Where they were sold, probably. And this man was so unlucky, that he had these papers of one of the rare people that survived! Of all the Jews that didn't, he had to pick: Talking about... bad luck. I don't know what happened to him. They probably sent him out of the country.

*Mnn. So they were not safe, your parents. I mean, even though they were in Paris it must have felt to them that ...you know, they were not...they were not French, but that... Did they ever become French?*

**[1:02:26]**

No, they didn't. They were given... status papers... Eventually, they were given status papers, which said that they would be protected by – by the French government everywhere except Poland. So they could never return to Poland. Because if the Polish said, "Well, you are Polish you know, citizen. We keep you", they couldn't do anything for us. So they said, "You cannot go to Poland ever". And no, the never became French, because they were always afraid of... of authority. They felt if they put themselves forward, if they asked for anything, they may find themselves in trouble. So better stick to what they know, stick to what they've got. They weren't going anywhere, anyway. But then of course eventually they did - go. But that stateless passport gave them the same right than French passport. Shall I tell you how we came to visit Israel for the first time?

*Just before we get there, I have just a few more questions. One is, we didn't talk about religion... were they religious? Before the war, what happened afterwards, you said your father was Communist?*

Yes, he was not religious. He was not religious. My mother was traditionalist. She certainly knew everything. She knew how to read. She knew, you know, all the – all the prayers and everything. She was a well-educated woman. But after the war, neither of them wanted to have anything to do with the synagogue. And...never did. The first time they put, they, they...they stepped into a synagogue, was when Benjamin was Bar Mitzvah-ed. Then they agreed to come.

*But...so they didn't do Shabbat or...?*

We talked about. I mean we talked about all the Yom Tovim and everything. Yes, that they would. And of course the food was there, I mean my mother would make you know, cheesecake on this, and Ponchkes on... and coming up with latkes. She would do all that, so I would know every holiday about the food.

*But not go into a synagogue?*

No. They wouldn't go to a synagogue; they wouldn't step into a church. No. They would nothing, nothing. No.

*Mnn.*

**[1:05:20]**

I mean it's understandable. Would you- would you understand that one could feel like this?

*After the war? Yes.*

I mean my father was a Communist before, so he already didn't believe in God before. How could he believe afterwards? And how could my mother believe afterwards? She said, "Where was God? There was no sign of any possibility of God". And she just stuck by this.

*Yeah, was there, I mean- They had experienced... loss. Did you feel growing up, did you feel that loss in the family? I mean, was it...?*

Well, I felt that loss. Nobody spoke to me directly. I was a...a very shy child and I didn't make friends. In early days, I didn't make friends at all. And... and I mean I was so kind of, non-existing really, that they sometimes would talk to each other when they got together with, you know, some friends, they would talk to each other. And not realising I was there listening. And that was my biggest shock in my life, is when...they- my mother told the story of my natural father, how he died. Until then, I didn't know that Abraham was not my father. [pause] They- they never told me. And ...because they didn't tell me even after, I couldn't, I couldn't approach them. I couldn't approach my mother and say, "You know, tell me more". Years and years later, when eventually I plucked up enough courage to ask her, because, I had seen a photograph. Her brother from Israel had sent her a photograph. She had no photographs from before the war. But the brother had sent her a photograph, a wedding photograph of her, with a man who's not Abraham. So I'd seen it! My mother denied. She, I said, "Look, you've got this photograph. Will you show it to me?" She denied that she had the

photograph. But it's, it was there. When she died, I found it in the box in the bottom of the wardrobe. And in fact I've still got it. But she would never talk about it. And then I plucked up courage years later again, and I said, "This time, I'm going to separate her from my father. I'm going to take her to Israel". By that time, we had a flat. We...we shared a flat together. And I said, "Right, I'm going to that flat, I am going to furnish the flat and you to come and help me furn-, but on your own. I want to spend some time with you." And then she had a stroke. So we never spoke... after that. That was finished. So would she have then told me? My guess is she wouldn't. My guess was that whatever were, was in her mind that she didn't want me to know. That she wanted me to really feel that this was my father, and this was my life and I should love him, and so on. Did she worry that I wouldn't love him? Maybe she did. Maybe she did. But she didn't need to, because I really loved him. He was a wonderful man. A wonderful father.

[1:09:11]

*But you overheard the conversation, you said?*

Oh, yeah.

*How old were you when you overheard that?*

About nine. Nine, ten. I mean, you understand. At nine, ten you understand what's going on.

*Sure.*

Younger children understand. You talk in front of them, you find they understand what is being said. Yes, of course I understood. Of course I understood. I understood that he also lost his wife and child. They never spoke about it.

*Well, it was their way of coping, I assume...*

Yes.

*Of not talking, ...*

Yes, yes.

*Which is difficult for a child.*



Yeah.

*So neither of them, you never had a conversation with them?*

No, because having denied that he isn't, he is a stepfather, how could I ask him about his previous life? Of course he spoke about being a Communist and his hopes and he thought that it was all going to change for, there wouldn't be any anti-Semitism and that Communism would be the answer to it. And when he went to Russia he thought there would be no anti-Semitism. That he spoke about. And of course after the war when it was all this Stalin and so on he was like, you know, he was distraught. So we talked politics at home. There was a lot of politics. There was Yiddish newspapers. At that time there were still papers printed in Yiddish. And there was of course...there was "Libération". And there was papers that he would buy, and we would talk about it. But nothing personal, family – nothing. Except of course he had to tell me about sister Mina, because she was alive, and... and what happened was...that he- they used to go every week shopping, in this pletzl Rue de Rosiers. And there they would meet other people. Other as well. And they would be there, and they would all stand together and talk to each other. So one day passing one of these little groups of men that was standing, my father heard somebody say something about a family 'Fuchs'. So he went near them and he said, "I understand you're talking about a family Fuchs." He said, "My mother was Fuchs." So they talked and talked and talked. And one of the men said, "Your sister Mina, that you were just telling me about, she is alive. She is in Israel. I don't know where she is, but he said, "I know she's there and what's more, with her..." she had a cousin, a young cousin that also survived Auschwitz. So he said, "I'm going back to Israel soon, and when I'm there I promise I will research her for you." Well, months went by; nothing happened. So they assumed that either didn't find her or didn't bother to do what he promised to do. And then one day I came back from school, opened the door, and there they were sitting. He was sitting at the machine and my mother, you know, was with a garment on her – on her knee, and they were both crying. And they just got a letter saying, "My darling brother. I'm your sister Mina." [pause] So you can imagine I mean it was like... both of them crying. I mean. I think it's bad enough when you see a woman crying. But when you see a man cry, it really is heart breaking. Anyway they were both crying. And then my mother said, "That's it." She said. "I never managed to see my brother." She said "It's not going to happen the same to you. We are going to go and see your sister." And they did, with the bit of money they had, they bought a ticket on, on one of the ships 'Theodor Herzl', that left from Marseilles. And we went to Haifa.

[1:13:49]

*The three of you?*

That was '58, the three of us. That was '58. Now, that was not... what you would call a luxury cruise. We couldn't afford first class. [laughs] We travelled as we travelled, you know, the three of us on these little bunk beds. I mean since, I've been on, on several cruises. And, you know, they're comfortable, and good food, and and all that. But I tell you, the cruise I remember the most is this one.

*And what was it like to arrive in Haifa?*

Well, that was tearful. We arrived in Haifa. There was Mina, with her new husband, Efrogim, with a cousin, Paula, who she then adopted as her daughter. Who was also of course my father's cousin too. And any friends that were their friends, were there. Because anybody that came, they had to be met. So they were all there. And of course you stepped off this ship and everybody was crying. They were crying and crying and crying. And when we left, they were crying and crying and crying. And this went on for years. And when we went back later on, they were crying and crying and crying ... They always felt 'Last time we will see you. We may never see you again. We never see you again.' Today, people don't cry any more. But then, everybody always cried. So, arriving was, if you like, joyous crying; departure was miserable crying.

*And there they must have talked about the past. I mean, and by then you were older, obviously.*

Not in front of me. Not in front of me. They would get me off with a, a neighbouring girl to take me to the beach. Yeah, of course they would talk. Not with me. I had to go off and... enjoy myself. Go and have a swim.

*And at that point, were you still thinking of going to Israel? By then you were eighteen.*

No. By then I felt quite French. ...I was French. I had planned for my life. I had studied computers, the very early computers. And that's what I wanted to work in. I felt that was the future, and I wasn't sure which languages were the most important, but I thought two would be very important. One, English, and one probably German. So I set myself up to - to deal with that. So I came as a visitor. And of course it was hard days, '58. They were in a little place called Kiryat Motzkin, on the sea. ...The houses were standing in sand! Mina's husband...was a, a butcher. And all I saw of Mina was always this little woman, sitting there plucking chickens all the time. All day long she was plucking chicken! And he was a big man, with big arms, and he was carrying these big bits of meat you know. And was clapping and clapping and clapping. And they never went anywhere! Never went anywhere. They - they once or twice closed down and took us somewhere - you know - on the visit, but most of

the time they just worked and... Like my parents, I saw them sewing all the time, I saw Mina plucking all the time. But they worked themselves up, you know, they... And now of course Kiryat Motzkin is a huge, it's a huge city, I mean, it's a...

**[1:18:04]**

*But by then also your parents were settled in France...*

Yes.

*I mean they didn't have any intention of going to...*

No, no they didn't.

*And for you, when did this transition happen for you, of becoming French, or feeling...?*

Well, I started schooling at eight and a half, so by the time I arrived at eleven, which was a year and a half, I was nowhere ready to go to grammar school. Because then was this grammar- At eleven, you either went to grammar school or - tough luck. So I couldn't pass the exam. But I went to a...a training, what is it called? A...?

*Vocational school?*

Yes. So I did a- I did a three year course there. And there, I met young people that I got on well with...Beginning to get on well with. [coughs] Sorry. And... I also met... a Jewish couple... They were much better off. They- they had money; they lived in a beautiful area of Paris in the Seizième Arrondissement. The Sixteenth district. And they opened my eyes to what really- Jews that had money, how they could live in Paris. They lived very well, they travelled... they, you know, they were cultured and so on. So, I enjoyed this. Knowing them. [coughs]

*Shall we take a little break?*

**[1:20:00]**

*We're continuing the interview. We had a little interruption. So we were just talking about that time, still in Paris, when you said you met that couple and you started kind of seeing what life could be in Paris, for some other Jews, or another Jewish family.*

That's right. That you could have a good life. You could have a cultured life. And, by that time of course my French was very good. And I...I felt secure in Paris. And really I hadn't had any other home. This was really my first home. And so... I felt quite comfortable. And I was considering becoming French, but my first... task, as it were, was to learn languages. Now, I'd started learning English at the school and I went to evening classes. And I thought well, I need to really listen to English in England. So I came to London. I came to London, and I stayed with...with a cousin of my father's here. An elderly couple. And that's when we met, when I met John.

*What did your parents say when you said you're going to go to England?*

Well, they actually were not against it. I was quite surprised. They seemed to take to him immediately. He came to Paris to visit me; I went back after my time in London. I went back to- to Paris, and I started working. And I really didn't have that idea of coming and living here, because I didn't want to leave my parents. I was their only daughter and I was very much aware that it might upset them very much and I didn't want to really upset them that much by going away. So it wasn't really in my mind to do that. But John kept on coming, and talking to me, and saying, "Look. I'm not that young". He said, "I cannot wait for you for ever." He said "You've got to make up your mind." So I spoke to my parents and my parents, it was obvious that they liked him very much. And they said, "Well, if you have to go to London, it's not that far." You know, they said all the right things, even if they didn't mean it, they said the right things. And... and so I thought, OK. I will marry this, this person. And I went and spoke to my boss and I said, "I need to work off my time, because I'm going". He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to London. I'm going to get married to an Englishman." He said, "What?" - said he. "You're going to get married to an Englishman? There's not enough French boys here for you?" I said, "That's not exactly true." He said, "I'm telling you and I'm warning you: a man you will always get, but a good job and a good prospect that you've got here, may not come your way that easily." [laughs] That was not so nice, because it did put like a little doubt in my mind a little bit. I thought, Well, I'm on my way; I'm doing well. And now I've got to - now I'm changing. I'm changing home again, changing country again. Where I have got, where I have got no, no roots. No understanding. And no...in French you call it "*atom crochu*" [hooked atom - meaning good/personal chemistry] No...no feeling really for the English. I knew nothing about the English really, except the few months I spent here which wasn't really enough. So I was really going to an... unknown territory.

[1:24:23]

*But what I meant when at the beginning, when you said you were going to England, just for a few months, that was OK with your parents?*

Oh yes, it was fine. Because I came here with the idea that I'm going to improve my English, and that will help of course in the job that I was intending to...my career. In my career. And they knew that I was very strong on having a career, because, before John, very young, I was already engaged to somebody in Paris. And, I broke off, not because I wanted, because he didn't want me to have the career and I wanted to have a career. I broke off for something else. But I said to my parents, "I just want to have a career and I'm not you know, putting things in my way not to have a career." And then I did. Then I did. And I just...I married this Englishman.

*So what job did you have? You said you were working in Paris when you went back to England. What were you working as?*

In England?

*No, in Paris.*

I was working on computers.

*Doing what exactly?*

Doing accounts. They were the only computers that at that time existed. They were the size of half a room. There were twelve columns and that was... the big thing... at that time. But I was right. This was the future. I mean we know. We now know that IT is the future. It's kind of exploded out of...of recognition to what originally it was.

*Yeah. So which year- when did you then come and marry?*

I got married in June '62, 1962. So I exchanged one life for another, and... I left my life in Paris. Mind you by '62, life in Paris had – had somehow changed as well. My parents were still living in the same flat, so...I think we'd just had our phone line for the first time. We still had no television. We still had no inside toilet, but we did have a small bath. So that had changed. And also I think what had changed was, they got the first fridge. First fridge. Until then, every morning, my father had to go down four flights, and buy a block of ice. And that was [inaudible]- that's what everybody did. A little van would come, with huge loaves of ice, and you would just hack off. You would have one metre of ice every morning, and on, and put it in a bucket and that would suffice for a whole day, to

put your butter on it, your milk on it, you know, any perishables. And then the next day, you'd go down and have another metre of ice.

[1:27:30]

*Amazing. And did you always stay with your parents? You didn't live elsewhere in Paris? You stayed with your parents?*

Nobody lived anywhere. What? A nice girl would go and live somewhere else except her parents? No, no. That was unknown. Unknown. You stayed with your parents until you got married.

*Yeah.*

And I was very young anyway. In '62 I was only twenty-two. Yes.

*What ambitions did your parents have for you? What did they want you to do?*

To get married to a nice, rich boy. What ambition? Of course, I said to them, "Look, I'm eleven. I haven't passed my exam. Give me another year, and I'll try again", you know, "I've improved my French", and so on. They said, "What do you need this for?" You know, you get married and you have children. What do you need this for? They didn't mean it in a nasty way. This is how it was. Girls got married, and they would find the best possible shidduch. And I suppose for them a lawyer was a wonderful shidduch, I suppose. But I don't think it wasn't just that. I mean to be truthful I was slightly joking, because my first fiancée, he was an accountant. And that was also a very... respectable Jewish profession. In fact, it still is today. So it wasn't just that. They - they liked him. You know, he was a nice man. And he liked my parents straight away as well. He was very fond of my parents.

*And what was it like for you to come to England and... settle here?*

Well, settling here was pretty difficult. '62 was the last year of the big fog, and I mean the big fog. It's the kind of fog that you used to talk about but never realised what it was, when we laughed: "Oh, London is under fog". You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Nothing. People would stop at our address and say, "Look, can you put us up for the night, because we can't go home." Cars would be left in the middle of the, of the street, but you know that was the year- That was a horrible winter. And we were in a flat, in Neasden, which was nothing like where I lived. I mean it wasn't a

luxury place like it is today. Le Marais today is, you know, something very smart, and you need to have a lot of money to live in le Marais. Then, it was very, very working class. Lots of Algerians were living around us. That's how we were living. ...But you went down into the streets, and you had the most wonderful bakery, butcher... You had...these carts in the street with vegetables, fresh vegetables every morning from the market they would bring all the vegetables, all the fruit. You had the best, as far as food was concerned. And there I was in Neasden. Nothing! There was one little shop that was selling... fruit and vegetables. And when I saw an, an aubergine, I was so excited! I said, "Can I have this?" And... and the greengrocer said to me, "Yes, but how do you cook it?" And then I saw some garlic so I was even more excited! I said, "Can I have this?" And he said, "Yes, but let me wrap it up in a newspaper for you because it smells." And that was how it was! ...So yes, it was very very different. I mean. Neasden also was really like... [laughing] the end of the world. And we had this flat. In the living room, we had a little electric fire, with a couple of bars. No heating anywhere else. In those days nobody knew about central heating; they thought it wasn't healthy. When I say, "Look I didn't have a very luxurious flat. My parents were living very simply." But we were never cold! We had a big, kind of... - a *poile* – a big oven, where you put coal in it. And the place was beautifully warm. I never suffered from cold. So here, I was suffering from cold! I was undressing in front of the bar. This - this bar, running into the bedroom, into the blankets, shivering! I spoke to my mother; I wrote to her. And I said, "I am freezing here..." And this and that and the other. Within two weeks, I got an enormous parcel through the post. And in it, there was a huge eiderdown in goose-feathers, and pillows. What with that and my husband, I was warm. After that, I never suffered from the cold again.

**[1:32:34]**

*Tell us a little bit about your husband's background. Where is he from- what was he from?*

Well his father... came from Russia. He came... at the beginning of the First World War. And he married a lady who was already English-born. So from his mother's side he's second generation. His father- His father was a real Russian little... hot head, he was. Nice man. We got on well. And ...he joined the Young Communist Party when he was about sixteen. And he remained there. And... he got, he was very political. And that I think is probably what attracted me to - to him. He wasn't religious but he was political and he was a Socialist. He was on the Left, and so was I, and I thought that whatever fight he wants to put up, was worth putting up, and ...working for the future. Whatever you may think about it, but that's how I felt at those days. Where my first one, he was religious, he wanted me to have a kosher home and all this business. Quite different. So I - I took to the religi- the political side much better.

*Were you politically involved at that time or...?*

I – I, no. I wasn't part of any, of any group, but I was very much aware. I was what maybe you call a 'fellow traveller'. But that's not surprising, because in France, at my time... a quarter of the population was Communist. And amongst those, were the best artists, the best writers. Lots of industrialists. You know. People of standing, and of value, so that's not so surprising.

*So you were drawn to...this I mean you were impressed.*

Yes. And, and my father was, and we talked about it. And in the fifties... Paris was just reviving. It was just- it was still after the war! As I said, we had hardly anything. I mean you never changed beds. The bed you had, you kept for your life! Only you changed the, the mattress, which was made out of wool. Have you ever seen mattresses made out of wool? Inside it's wool, and it's got kind of little buttons out of wool. So, if after ten or twenty years, it got used up, what do you do? There were people that used to come to your courtyard, with a carding machine. You would throw your mattress down to- down from the fourth floor to them. They would undo the old material. Refresh all the cotton, card all through. New material, and you had a new mattress. You. That's it! They brought it up, you paid them, and you had a new mattress for the rest of your life! That was the kind of thing one did.

[1:35:54]

*Yeah.*

When I came here, and I saw all these little houses, three up and two down, they all had bathrooms. I said, "Are these people rich? They all have bathrooms?" And John had to explain that everybody has little bathrooms. Although [laughing] some working places up north, they store the coal in the bath! But they have a bathroom.

*And did you want to work when you came or what, what did you want to do?*

Well, my English wasn't good enough, and I really didn't know how to go about. And John was of the opinion that we should have ...a sharing in tasks. He is the man who goes out and works and brings the money in, and I am the nice little wife who stays at home, and cooks, and hopefully has children. [laughs] And does whatever else...you know I may, I may wish to do. Which indeed I did; I did other things too. And he said, "Well you need to get to know London. You need to get to know the English." And I didn't know how to cook. My mother had said, "In my home, you will not cook. You'll have enough years to cook." So when I first married, I didn't even know how to fry an egg.



My first meal was egg and chips and it was a disaster. I invited a couple of friends. She looked at this egg and chips, put it in the dustbin and she said, "Let's start afresh." That was the beginning of my marital life! [laughs] What with being cold, not knowing how to fry an egg. But John didn't worry. He said, "You'll learn eventually." And I did. So I had plenty of time to learn to cook. I had plenty of time to go out and, and get to know London, and museums. And the eventually my English got better; we went to theatres, and...

*And when was your son born?*

Hm?

*When was your son born?*

He was born in '67. We, we moved to this house in '69. We moved to this house in '69. We bought this large house – a five-bedroom house - with the idea that I was going to have several children. But after Benjamin, we stopped there. One of the reasons I think was because he was born deaf, and it was really quite a shock. And I decided that I needed to spend time... to help him. I wasn't going to have him go to a special home for deaf kids. I wanted him to be able to take his place in a normal life. And that meant a lot of time spent teaching him to talk. So we had to decide that English was going to be the language. We have to forget French for the time being. And after that, I just didn't get pregnant and that was the end of that. In those days, if you didn't, you didn't. You know, you didn't go through a lengthy process. You just accepted it. And so we had more time for him.

**[1:39:11]**

*Yeah. When did you find out that he was deaf?*

Well I realised pretty – pretty soon, maybe when he was maybe eighteen months, because he never went above the, the 'gaga' stage. You know, like children go 'gaga'. And I saw the little children around that was able to say 'Mummy' and 'Daddy' and so on. And I said, "Well mine looks pretty intelligent. It doesn't look as if there's something wrong with him, that way. Why can't he speak?" So, I didn't know why. I've never been with people that are, were hard of hearing, so I didn't know. So I took him to the doctor, a local GP. And the local GP jangled a set of keys in front of him. And he said, "You see? He turned his head. Go and have another six, and you won't worry about him." But I carried [on] worrying, and a friend of mine eventually- In fact, a German friend came, and she said, "Have you thought of having a hearing test?" So I did, and that's when we discovered it. ...So that was quite hard. It was quite a shock.

*Yeah, because it meant you had to teach him yourself, or...?*

Well- well I did. As I said before, because I didn't want him to go to a special school. I wanted him to be able to be schooled. I don't know if I did right. It's difficult now to to assess. All I know is that in spite of the fact that he had this enormous loss of hearing, I mean one ear he cannot hear, and the other one is eighty percent loss. So with that little hearing he's got, it's quite a miracle that he speaks as well as he does. So I- we managed that, between John and myself we managed to really teach him how to speak well. And everybody, all the specialists are always amazed, how he can speak so well with such little hearing. So on that side we've done well. But on the other hand, being a deaf child in a normal school, you are open to being bullied. And, I suppose being the child that he is, of a Holocaust survivor, which he is, he wouldn't tell me. He would not communicate with me what was going on at school. He did with my father, though. And he went round there and he told him eventually that he is being bullied, and there was this boy... Where I said, "Oh, you must be a nice boy. You must not pick fights. You must..." you know? My father said to him, "What? You are bullied? Next time you raise your fist to him and hit him hard. As hard as you can." I didn't know any of this. Next thing I know I'm asked to go to school. He had done exactly that; the boy was on the floor. Benjamin had a scratched nose. But he wasn't bullied by him anymore. But all through his schooling he... he encountered difficulties. Which again wasn't easy for me, because it was a reminder of the difficulties I had at school as well. But he succeeded very well in spite of teachers saying that "I should pray to God that it's not worse", and "he'll never be able to read", "he'll never be able to do this"- He reads, he went to university. He's done well. He's a good businessman; he speaks well. And recently, he has had a cochlear implant. Do you know what that is?

[1:42:57]

*Yeah.*

And that has made a big difference ...to him able to hear sounds behind his back; things that he didn't even know what the sounds were at the beginning. It's only two years old, this thing. He would say, "What is this noise?" He wouldn't know it's a bird. Or he wouldn't know it's a... woman walking with stiletto heels.

*It changes a lot.*

Yeah, it makes quite a difference to...

*And how did your parents- what relationship did they have with your son?*

Oh, they loved him, they adored him. It was one of the reasons why they moved here.

*Tell us about that please. What happened to your parents?*

Well they just decided one day that they were getting older. I was getting ready to have a child. They had to go up and down four flights of stairs which was getting difficult. The coal was always delivered in the winter in the cellar, so they had to take up that four floors as well. They said, "Well, we've only got one daughter. We're going to move to London." We couldn't change their minds. We said, "Look, why don't you rent something here for six months. Come and see if you like life." "We will like it. We will like it." They came. And John's father, who was a tailor, a gents' tailor, he introduced him to Hardy Amies, tailors, you know, famous tailors in... in...where were they at the time? In the West End anyway. In the West End. And he brought a sample of his work, and they thought it was very good, so they employed him. And he worked there. First my mother worked and then she retired, and he carried on working...for...

*And he managed with the language; how did he manage with the...?*

As he said, "You don't need to speak English to do a nice piece of work. All I do is, I sew. And in the end, I show them what I've done. And they say, 'That's nice' – that's it!" And they learned. Well the moment they decided to come- when I got married they bought a television. That was the replacement for their daughter; they had the television. And, on Sunday, there was Connie and somebody teaching them English. So they started learning English on their television. And in fact they could speak English... after a while. My mother could write in English, she could write in French, she wrote in German.

[1:45:37]

*So how old were they when they came to England? ...Roughly - roughly - I don't need the precise year.*

[Rose is laughing] ...Maybe fifty-five, something like that.

*And did they have a good life here or did they...?*

They had a very good life. First they were in the flat. They took over our flat, which still had only then electric fire. Then they bought a house near here, the other side of Gladstone Park, so it was easy to – to commute from one to the other. One could still do it in those days. They bought a four-bedroom house and they had a garden. They were very happy. They had apple trees in the garden, so every autumn they baked apple cakes, apple strudel, apple fritters, apple compote...apple pies, for the whole year! For them, and for me! My friends would come and say, “Where is your mother’s apple cake?” They were known for their apple cakes.

*And how- Did your relationship change with them, or how did - in later life, how, - were you close to them?*

Oh, very close. Very close. Very close. I mean, I think my mother was Benjamin’s second mother. He would go after school, he would run to them, and they would come here and... My mother would cook the major meals for, for the holiday, you know she would carry on making her roast ducks and kreplach and all that stuff she would still do.

*For which holidays? At that point did you celebrate...?*

Jewish holidays!

*So you did celebrate...?*

By eating! [laughs] Now, we did have... Seder-nights. “That,” I said, “Look, I’d like. I think it’s a happy time and I think let’s do it. I like all the little things and all of that.” So my father agreed, and of course he knew everything. But with him, it lasted a long time. He was used to - from his father - to do the full treat. You know, it wasn’t any shortening. I said, ‘Come on, we’ve had enough prayers. Enough prayers. Let’s eat!’

*Did you join the synagogue yourself, with your husband? Did you become members of a synagogue?*

**[1:48:00]**

We did. We did. When Benjamin was about... eight, I think, we took him to Israel. That must have been the second time we took him to Israel. And there were other kids and people were talking about Bar Mitzvahs and this and that, and he said, “What’s this?” And so we explained. And he said, “Am I going to have a Bar Mitzvah?” And I said, “We don’t think it’s particularly necessary.” So he said, “But I want to.” So I said to John, “Well that’s it. If he wants to, then that’s- we have to find a

synagogue.” And we did; we joined the Liberal- Preston Road. We joined the Liberal at Preston Road. And that’s where he was Bar Mitzvah-ed. And the rabbi was very nice. I wish I could remember the name of the rabbi. John would remember; I just can’t remember this minute. He said, “Look, your son can have a special dispensation. He doesn’t have to go through the whole thing. He can do…” So I spoke to Benjamin. He said, “Oh, no,” he said, “Oh, no. Because then it wouldn’t be a real Bar Mitzvah.” So…[laughing] we slogged through this one. And he had a real Bar Mitzvah, and that was when my parents came for the first time, to synagogue.

*Mnn.*

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. That is not true. That is wrong. The first time they came was when I got married. Because John’s parents insisted we had to be married at the synagogue. We had a big- You can see the, the wedding thing. We had a big to-do, you know? In white, and a top hat. Can you imagine a Communist in a top hat? Plenty of laughs, came that way. But the parents wanted that – his parents – so we did.

*And where? In which synagogue?*

In the Old Brondesbury Synagogue which was then in Chevening Road. It’s now a mosque. [laughs] Lovely synagogue. So we had a synagogue wedding. So that was the first time that they actually went to a – to synagogue. And the second time was all these years later, when Benjamin was thirteen.

*And with your son, did you ever talk about your experiences...during the war? Did you ever talk about your family background?*

Yes. [pause] Yes, I did. I did and we do. We do. He’s a great talker. He likes to remember things. And he talks about his grandparents a lot. About my parents, particularly. He was very close to them. And he talks a lot. And then probably that’s why my mother told him things she didn’t tell me. Yes, he does- he does talk and in fact it was his idea that we should go to visit Majdanek.

*Tell us about it please.*

*Mnn?*

*Tell us a little bit about it. When did you go?*

**[1:51:06]**

No. I haven't been.

*He wants to go?*

He says that we should go together to Majdanek, to visit Majdanek. I only went to Auschwitz, 'because that was the- the year when John became Mayor, by coincidence, the London Mayors' Association had a trip, to Poland. And so I said to John, "Well, two things are going to happen at the same time. "One,"- That was in the year 2000. "One,"- I'd never spoken to anybody about my childhood experiences. None of my friends have ever asked, so I've never said anything. Nobody knew anything. They only knew I was Jewish and that's about it. And...and in fact, they all thought I was born in Paris. Because that was a good way of not having to speak to people, if they said to me, "Where were you born?" If I say to them, "In Krakow", that already opens the door to a story, which I wasn't ready to start talking to them, unless they were interested. But I never felt they were, so I always said Paris, and that finished the story. "Oh, you're born in Paris. You're French." Finished. But that year was the first year when they started having a Holocaust Memorial. And also that was the year where... they did the trip to Krakow and Warsaw and of course visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau. So I said to John, "We've got to do both. You know, if I'm going there, I want to find out, maybe some details about my, my parents. And at the same time, a lot of people will know, so we may as well make it official. So the first organised Holocaust Memorial I spoke about it, and I told everybody about my background. That was the first time. But... interestingly enough, it is not, maybe people are interested and maybe they are shy. But to me it looks, where I sit, they're not interested. In John's book, it's his story, so he doesn't speak much about me. He's married to me - OK. And he says that I'm a Holocaust survivor. When people read the book, even my French friends, they read the book. They are interested in his Communist past. Some of their parents were Communists too so of course they are interested in hearing from him how it was. Nobody asked me - about me. Nobody asked, "What's", you know "...Holocaust?" "From where?" "From what?" "How?" - Nobody.

*Why do you think that is?*

I don't think they're interested, really. It's...it's what happens to other people.

*And what made you... so to speak come out or say...or decide to say that...?*

Because there was this Holocaust Memorial starting. And I said, "Well, I can't ...go to it, and pretend I'm not a Holocaust survivor. I've got to say I'm a Holocaust survivor." I felt it wouldn't be honest.

I've got nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing to hide, really. If somebody were to ask me I would have replied, but nobody did!

*And subsequently have you joined some association? Are you in touch with other survivors? Or are you active at all in that...?*

**[1:54:54]**

No, but I don't think there is much. There is a, a, what is it, a Holocaust survivor – What is it a...?

*Centre...*

Centre. But that is really for people who are in need...to be helped. Well, I'm not at the stage of needing any help. So...

*So you haven't been looking- you haven't been looking, for example, for other child survivors or...?*

No. I...no, not for that. I would have liked...when I first came here, there was still a Jewish theatre. But it was really more or less moribund, because they couldn't find any young people that could speak Yiddish. And...the Jewish population doesn't speak Yiddish, so they're not really that interested. But she did interview me, and she was interested because obviously I was young, and I could speak Yiddish. My Yiddish didn't please her. You know, it wasn't a good enough Yiddish. It was a...a non-educated Yiddish. [laughs] ...She told me, but she said, "Never mind," she said, "we can change that." You know, she can teach me how to speak proper...proper Yiddish. Like John's father, he also speaks, spoke 'Proper Yiddish' compared to - to me. And my mother...Oh, you know, the Galizianer... Don't you know there was all this rift between the sections? Well the Galizianers were kind of, in their eyes, the less educated. That's what he said to my mother, actually. He was always a charming man, John's father. The first time we met, they made this beautiful tea, you know, in their house and everything. And they spoke as much Yiddish as both of them could remember. And at the end he said, "Regina," he said, "you are a very charming woman for a Galizianer."

*In Yiddish? Can you remember what he said in Yiddish?*

...Not – not, not really, but that was, that was - you know - the gist of it. So we went home, and in the street my mother turned around to me and - and she said, "Don't you get upset about being called a Galizianer, or what your you know, father-in-law- to-be has said," she said, "I was an accountant in a big town of Krakow. He comes from a- a little shtetl- a one-cow shtetl." But she never told him that.

*Good answer.*

**[1:57:34]**

But they got on very well. They got on very well. I mean first- When he first met me. When John's father first met me- Well, he always wanted John to marry a Jewish girl. And John always went out with non-Jewish girls. And I think he was engaged before to a non-Jewish girl. And the parents were terribly upset. They found him some really nice shidduch , rich girls. He didn't want; wasn't interested! Money wasn't his – his thing! So when he then introduced me, they took one look at me and they said- and he said, "She's Jewish!" He looked at me and he said, "*Du reddst Yiddish?*" So I said, "*Yo, a emes Yiddish.*" A real Yiddish. From that moment, I was fine. He decided I was Jewish.

*So they were pleased?*

They were pleased about that. They weren't pleased with the fact that I wasn't rich. But they had to put up with it. Which they did.

*So we were talking about your being a survivor and not – not really saying it. So do you feel that if there had been more interest, you would have talked about it more?*

I think so... I think so. I wouldn't have said lies. So I would have talked about it, yes. It wasn't easy for me to come forward, and who can? Who will say, "Oh, by the way, let me tell you about my childhood"? It wasn't something that I – I could do. But if somebody were to say to me, ask me outright, "And how was your childhood?" I would say so.

*And do you feel now...would you like to speak to school children, let's say, or...to be involved in Holocaust education or do you still feel it rather...?*

No, no, not really. Not really. I don't feel that way. I haven't thought about it. But, I no, I don't feel I don't want to talk about it. I have talked about it to, as I said, I've talked about it officially. An official... meeting, and the local paper has written about it. So yes, plenty of people now know. But they don't ask. They don't ask any details. They just know.

*And did it come up when your husband was the Mayor of Brent?*

Yes, that's when it came out.



[2:00:13]

*And throughout his time, did it come up again, or did it...?*

You mean amongst the Councillors?

*Yes.*

Not really, no, not really. Not really. ...I don't expect Councillors to be interested. They're only interested in their own politics. They will talk about what will further... themselves. So...that's...

*They're interested in politics, yeah.*

That's mainly their conversation, and their interest.

*Mnn. And do you think that one reason for you for maybe not talking about it earlier, is that being a child survivor is quite a difficult thing, because you know you had the experience, but you don't have your own memories, so it's quite a...? Maybe the word 'difficult' is wrong, but you know, it's a very specific experience.*

Yes, you mean if I were to talk to somebody about it?

*Yes.*

Well I would have to say, I don't remember. But any memories that I have, have been told... by my mother.

*Yes, or for example to go to the Holocaust Centre where you have let's say, all the people who, you know, have memories. I don't know. I think it's an interesting thing to be a child survivor.*

Yes, well I'm a survivor but I don't- They have got more...more permanent memories than I have. Because either I don't remember, or I've wiped it out.

*Yes.*

But it...it cannot be talked about because as far as I'm concerned, it's not there.

*So that leads me to the next question. What impact, do you think, did it have on your life, to be a survivor?*

What impact it had on my life?

*Yes, on your later life.*

**[2:02:20]**

That - that is very difficult to ...to reply. I don't want to kind of say something that may be badly interpreted. But I've lived longer in England than what I've lived in France. I don't know if I'd married in France and had the same life, if I would have found relationships with people easier. I don't find relationships here easy. Now I've got a lot of what is called friends. I possibly wouldn't call them friends, but that's what people call them here. I've got loads and loads of friends; certainly I've got loads and loads of acquaintances. And I had far more twenty years ago; they're beginning to die out! [half laughs] But loads. But I never felt they were close. The fact that they weren't so interested in me. The fact that they could go on for a long time before picking up the phone and finding out if I'm alive or dead, has made me feel that they are not close. And they don't care; they - they are different. And I think maybe English people are different. It's maybe- It's not something that they do. But that doesn't help me. The fact that it's something that they don't do, doesn't make me feel happy. When I go to Israel it's the other way around. I arrive in Israel, get to the flat, the phone rings. And I've got to lie to them, sometimes. They say, "What are you doing tonight?" If I say, "Nothing," they say, "You're coming round here. You are having dinner here, we're picking you up, we're taking you here, we're taking you there..." So I've got to lie and say, "I'm busy tonight" to have an evening on my own! If not, they'll be around all the time. But I like it... I like it. I'd much rather say to somebody, "Look, I'm very busy. I can't see you today. I'll see you tomorrow or next week", than not have anybody to phone. Now is it because it's me, or is it because it's how it is? I think a lot of it is me, my personality - what people see in me which I don't. But they see something that makes them a bit hesitant. And I think a lot of it is their personality. They don't think of ...of saying something...something close. Saying, you know, "Are you happy?" "Are you upset? What are you upset about?" "You are depressed? Why are you depressed?"

*So is it you are saying that you are looking for a closeness?*

**[2:05:07]**

Well that is what I like. That is what I would have liked. But I find it... I don't find it easy. And it hasn't been easy because of Benjamin. Because I have also found that... people never understand deafness. They understand blindness. They are very kind to blind people; not to deaf people. This is probably why deaf is always associated with dumb. Deaf person isn't – isn't automatically dumb, but they do. And they don't have any patience. And that also made my life difficult. That I felt I wasn't surrounded by a lot of love and help, when it was necessary. Now would it have been different in France? I don't know. It would have been different in Israel. It must be different in Israel, and I give you an example why I say that. We had a couple of really good friends. They never had children, couldn't have children, didn't have children. They never went to Israel. For years and years and years we would go. We'd come back and say, "You must go. You are Jewish, you must go at least once. You go, you come back you tell me you didn't like it, didn't like the Israelis. You wouldn't be the first one to tell me this. There are plenty of people who have been, and they've said, Oh, the Israelis they are too rough, they are too this, they are too that. It's not for me. You must go." They wouldn't go. Eventually one day he said to me, "Rose, I'm fed up you nagging me. I'm going. I've got a cousin in Karmiel. I'm ringing him up, and I'm going over there." And they did. They both went for a fortnight. They came back. And then, he shocked me by saying- I said, "Well how did you like it?" He said, "Well I'm going just to tell you this. I'm studying at university. When I get my degree, which is another two years, I'm packing up, I'm selling off and I'm going Aliyah." Well, I was really shocked about that. I said, "You are sure?" He said, "Absolutely." So I said to John, "Look, two years is a long time; let's wait and see." Well they did. They did. So they went to Israel; they went on Aliyah. They settled. They bought a flat. They settled. And after six months they came back to London. They stayed here. And they said, "Rose," they said, "we want you to sit down and listen to us." They said, "We'd like you to... We'd like to apologise to you, for all these years that we kept on saying to you, you are too sensitive. Now we are in Israel, we understand what a friend is, and we are sorry we haven't been a better friend to you." Until today, they say they have never had such a happy life with people. Such nice people. So warm to them. So 'When I need-', they are there. They are not alone. And this is people with no family, no children. On their own. And they are not the only ones to say that. They then said, "You must come and live in Israel, this is your country." Well I feel passionate about Israel, but it hasn't happened.

*But you say you have a flat in Israel?*

We used to have a flat with my mother, yes. She put down the deposit and I paid off the mortgage.

**[2:08:49]**

*And how did that come about?*

Well they used to go and visit, you know, Aunty Mina and, and the family when they were growing up, the grandchildren of Mina's. And...and I said- And then I was in business by myself and I was making money. And my mother said, "Oh, wouldn't it be nice to have a flat?" I said, "It would be wonderful to have a flat." So she went out and found something. She said, "Do you like this?" I said, "It's wonderful!" It was in Netanya, overlooking the sea. So she said, "Look, I've got so much I can put down a deposit, but I haven't got enough to keep on paying it. Can you do it?" I said, "I can." And that's how it came about. So... we bought the flat. I paid it off, and they went there every year and spent their holidays there. And they were very happy. And so were we. We also liked it there.

*So was it important for your parents?*

Oh, very important for my parents. They loved it. And we, we love it. We love going to Israel, we like being there. ...I'm not so sensitive to the Israeli character in the sense that, OK if they push me, all right they push in, you know, I'm queuing and they push in and I say, "Just a moment, I think I'm before you." And they understand, they move away. Oh, English. [laughs] But I accept it. But I think the younger generations are very different from the previous generations. They've travelled; they've seen how things are abroad. They've learned about food and cooking. And they live more comfortably and nicer. They've got more means, a lot of them. Not all of them of course, but a lot of them. So they've changed. The character of them has changed as well.

*You said you became a businesswoman. Can you tell us a little bit about that?*

**[2:10:39]**

Yes. I- After ten years I got really quite fed up being a mother, looking after the house. I had bought a place in France, and I'd renovated that. And I felt I'd come to the end of doing 'house things'. I wanted to... get back in the – in the working world, so... I also wanted to use my French. I felt I'd lost contact a little bit with France. I was very keen on going back to where I felt my roots were. ...So, I felt that through various circumstances, what I could do, is ...open an agency, by which I rent out houses in France. So my owners would be French, and my clients would be English and Americans. And I had some contacts – it's a bit of a long story to tell now, but I had some contacts. And... I started off in a very modest way. I've got a room upstairs, so I had an office. And I started ...with so many houses, and then I realised within a year or two that I was being very successful, and I was increasing the houses, and the owners liked me. And I had lots of clients and ...and it just took off! So I kept it for seventeen years, and then, being a good Aries, I got bored with it. [laughs] I jumped into it and I got bored with it. And Benjamin grew up, and because he didn't have any French,

he – he couldn't, he couldn't take over the business even if he wanted to. He went into the City. One of his big dreams was to be a trader in the City. You could not persuade him, or dissuade him, that with his ...difficulty in hearing, it's not going to be a place for him. He managed to get himself a job there, and he worked there for a couple of years. But it was obviously very difficult. And then, we somehow fell into the property business. He went out and- It was '89, when the market really had collapsed. And it was really like blood in the street; all the young people had lost their homes. Do you remember that time? They'd lost their homes, the interest had gone up to fifteen, sixteen, seventeen percent. I mean, nobody could stay in anything. It was really, really bad. He then went out and found himself a derelict four-bedroom flat for about 60,000 pounds. Sounds like you know... And he said, "Look, you know, maybe it's about time I move out. Will you help me modernise it, you know, renovate it?" And so on and so on. Which I did. And then when it was spick and span, absolutely beautiful, two young men came in and said, "Is this flat to rent - for renting?" And Benjamin said, "Well, are you interested, have a look around." So they looked around. They said, "We take it." So he said, "Mum, why do you need a five-bedroom house just for yourself?" He said, "Let me rent the place; I can repay you the money quicker that way." So he... came back here. But it gave him a taste for – for property. So this is how I eventually, he eventually gave up the City, and I sold my business, and we went into property. This is how it happened. Like sometimes these things do, in a round-about way, things happen and sometimes they happen for the better.

**[2:14:28]**

*And where does he live now? Your son?*

He lives now in Budapest! [laughs] He's gone a long way away!

*How did he get there?*

Well after several years the market had gone up so much, so much, so much, that we agreed that it can't possibly go up any further... and now it's probably on the way down rather than up. Well, we were wrong, but that's what we believed then, which was about fourteen years ago. And... we've got a cousin who's a journalist and lives in Budapest. He said, "You've never been to Budapest. Why don't you come - it's a beautiful city - come and visit?" So I went with Benjamin and we visited, and we stayed with him and we looked around. And we both loved it. Benjamin loved it for one reason, I loved it for another reason. It looks very much like the 50s in Paris, where my parents... was that kind of... beautiful dereliction! [laughing] You know, grand houses that had seen better times, but were in a terrible state! And Benjamin liked it; he said, "Well, I don't have any attachment here. I've just broken up with my girlfriend." He said, "If you don't mind," he said, "you look after my business in

London. I'll stay here, get a couple of flats, you know, amuse myself with that. And then I'll come back after a year." Well, he's been gone now for fourteen years. He found a Hungarian girl, he got married... he's got a daughter who's now age five. Lovely daughter, lovely granddaughter. And that's how it is; he's a developer in Budapest.

*Yes. So within another generation, another migration...*

Absolutely.

*...in your family.*

Absolutely. Well, we are- we are real Jews. We move about.

*And where would you consider your home?*

Well I would say my home is now London. I've been living here over fifty years. Where would my home be? But I'm lucky enough, that I can say, that I feel comfortable in other countries too. I feel very comfortable in France, where I've got a house. I feel extremely comfortable in Israel, when I go to Israel. It's as if I've been there all my life, although I know it's not my home... because I can't speak Hebrew. The two years I've learnt, I've forgot. Which is ...making me miserable sometimes. I feel I should not have forgotten, but I did. Probably the same way I forgot the four years in the concentration camp, I've forgot the two years I've learnt Hebrew. I mean I reached the stage I could read; I could read papers. So where it went, I don't know. It's somewhere, it's somewhere there in a box; somewhere, locked away.

*And how would you describe yourself today in terms of your own identity?*

**[2:17:29]**

Well, I feel I'm very European. ...I've always felt that I enjoyed living in Europe. When Israel was kind of... smaller in the sense that people had less money, less means to travel, they couldn't go very far, that it was very claustrophobic. That I was used to wider horizons. So I always considered myself very much a - a European girl. I remember actually in some Jewish circles, in Zionist circles, I once dared saying this, and they were very upset with me, because I should only talk like I was a Zionist, rather than just loving Israel. So we came - we were - we had a disagreement on that, on that basis. I think you can love a country and not particularly want to be there. Yes, I feel- In Europe I feel comfortable. Since then I've travelled a lot so ...I feel- I feel worldly really. I know a lot about people

around the world. I know how people feel, how they behave, what they're like. A lot of it I don't, like but I know the world is a beautiful place. Including Israel. I think Israel is a beautiful place too. Quite exceptional.

*Did you, or do you have a desire to go back to Krakow and see where you came from, or...?*

**[2:19:15]**

Well, I was there. I was there... fourteen years ago, when John was Mayor, so I was in Krakow. I did want to go then. I wanted very much. ...I've got a thing against the Poles. I- even now I get upset if people say to me, "But the Poles are nice people." It upsets me. I feel they ought to qualify it by saying "Some Poles have been nice". Most of them have not been nice, and not been good to us. And, and that...cannot be removed from my, from my mind. So when I was there, and... because I was Mayoress and because I came from Krakow, and because everybody knew about it, they sat me next to the Mayor of Krakow. And eventually we got around to a conversation about Poland. And I told him my mother was born in Krakow and so on. And he said he knew. OK. And then I said, "Well, I'm quite disappointed," – something like that- I said, "I'm quite disappointed that in your schools, you are still, and we are now 2000, and in your school you are still not able to... teach your children what was." And I said, "And until they know what it was, what happened, during the war, before the war, after the war, they can't get on with their lives. They can't progress... in the true sense of the term. And it's your responsibility." So he said, "Oh, well, you know, we do this..." and, "You know what it's like...when you come here to Poland and when the Israelis come to Poland, they walk around everywhere, they come on this 'Walk of Life' [he refers to March of the Living] and they turn all of Poland into a cemetery." I said, "Yes, because to us, it is one big cemetery. That's exactly what it is. But," I said, "Nevertheless," I said, "you are the Mayor." I said, "How old are you?" He said, "Well, I'm fifty." I said, "OK. So you are fifty. You are the Mayor of Krakow. You are not responsible for anything your father or grandfather may have done, or thought, or what...that is the past." I said, "But you have got the power to change things. You are the important man here, and now, you need to change things." Well, it didn't take him long to get up and walk out. So that was not, if you like, a good experience about...uh... politics in, in, in Poland. Benjamin came and joined us. When he heard that we were going to Poland he wanted to see Krakow, where his grandparents, grandmother was. So he came and joined us. And, he had a little bit of extra time, so he went to- he stayed in Warsaw. We then went to Warsaw; you know we did all the things that one needs to do in Warsaw. We lit the candles, did the prayers; we did all that. And, oh, and when we went to Auschwitz- That was the other thing that really, really upset me. And maybe I shouldn't be upset but I felt very deeply about it. I know that in Auschwitz there is one memorial only, and that has been built by Israelis. It is in one of the barracks. And... a Polish young woman took us, to show us everything. And she said, "I'll take

you to the museum.” And we walked into the museum and what did we see? Piles of shoes, piles of glasses, piles of crutches, you know, shawl, all that, and that’s to them is a museum. I can hardly pronounce the word. Maybe it’s a ‘memorial’, maybe it’s something else that you should call it, but they call it a museum. And I – I was very upset. Anyway. Then, on the way out, I said, “Look, I’d like to stop at this memorial.” There was- On this group, there was only one other Jewish person. So I said, “The two of us, we would like to go in. The other people don’t have to go in. You just take me there. We won’t be long. It’s only a question of going in... showing respect, and coming out.” She wouldn’t. All she said, “It’s not on our schedule, I haven’t got the time.” So I sat down on, on, on one of the stones there, and I said, “Well I’m not moving from here, until you take me there. I’m not leaving here, until I’ve been there.” So...the group stopped, and then somebody kind of said to her, “Oh, well, you’d better take her.” Anyway, they all came. I mean they were really a marvellous group. They all came. She then took us there, we did our bit, we lit our candle, did our prayer. And they all came; they all looked around and...and we did. So that was also not a very good experience for Benjamin and myself. Then when he stayed on in Warsaw, the Mayor was much nicer. The Mayor said to Benjamin, “You are staying on? What do you want to do here?” So Benjamin said, “I’d like to go to the big library.” So he actually sent a car for him, and took him to the library and left him there. Well he didn’t himself. He sent a driver. He left him at this, at this library and Benjamin of course spoke, looked around at the documents and so on, and spoke to the young man who was there. And he said to him, “Look,” he said, “What do you think about the Jews here, the Jewish heritage?” He said, “Look,” he said, “Benjamin. There are no Jews here, but he said - we are full of Jewish phantoms. They are everywhere.” I don’t know how to take this. Benjamin didn’t know how to take it, but he said, “I don’t want to go back. I didn’t feel good.” The same thing happened to me. The Town Hall in Krakow gave me a young man to take me around to all the addresses, and when I said to him, “Are you told at school about ...the Holocaust and what happened?” “Oh,” he said, “It’s not our fault. We were occupied.” That was the big- that was the big theme: “We were occupied.”

**[2:26:11]**

*We were talking about your return to Poland, and your experiences. And I wondered about your parents, did they ever go back to Poland?*

My mother, for a while talked about the possibility of going back to Poland. Of course she couldn’t because she had this ‘Stateless’ passport, or document, which stopped her going to Poland. So I said to her, “You know, you need to become British.” And she wouldn’t... because it meant facing the authorities. And what happened if they... didn’t like her papers, or there was something that they found against, or whatever, whatever. They wouldn’t do it.



*So she never became British?*

No. Neither of them, no.

*They stayed stateless? ...French stateless, or British stateless? What passport did they have?*

I, I think French stateless, yes, they remained French stateless. Ja. So, no. ...She had a chance to go and then she never talked about it again. Once she knew that she had to become British to be able go there, she wouldn't. She wouldn't do it. [pause] Ja. And my father never wanted to go back. He never spoke about going back. Never.

*And when did they pass away, your parents?*

My mother in '88 – 1988. And my father in 1994. He survived for another six years. And the last three years he lived with us here, in the house. Ja. And of course when my mother died, and we had to put a stone down, we had a bit of a problem. Because she, in the camp, had made herself younger. So when she then got papers, she was a younger woman. And I wanted to put down her real age.

*Yeah. And you couldn't?*

Ja. We did, we did. Because in fact we explained to the rabbi exactly what happened, and he understood. He said, "If you want to put you put down this date, put down this date."

*When did she make herself younger? In the camp.*

In the camp. Obviously it must have meant a survival thing, to be younger. Maybe it meant she was younger, stronger. I don't know what it meant, because again, we never spoke about that. All I knew is that she was younger.

*Are they buried in the Jewish cemetery, your parents?*

Yes.

*Yes?*

Yes. They are here. ...Well, so this is in résumé: seventy-five years of life.

*Yes, we have discussed many things. Is there anything I haven't asked you, or you particularly think we missed out, or you'd like to add?*

**[2:29:46]**

Well, let me think what... what is there, what is there to say? Well, I think I want to say that all in all, I have been happy living here, with... you know, with all the things that I've said about it, I think that it has been a happy life. It's been a successful life. It hasn't always been a contented life. But partly I think is... my emotional pattern as well. Because maybe I am more needy than other people. And I think a psychiatrist friend of mine said that to me, that she always felt that there was like a bit of sadness in me. Although I don't look as a sad, she said that she felt there was always something there. And maybe there is some neediness in me that, that remains. But it would be surprising if in fact there hasn't been any scars left. Even if I cannot put my fingers on it, I'm sure that there are some scars left. The fact that my son is successful fills me with a lot of pleasure. I, I do nice things because travelling- I enjoy travelling and I enjoy going to the countries I enjoy going to. So, it's a happy life from having a – a happy retirement. And I hope that it will continue a little longer, and I also hope that my granddaughter... will, will listen to all this and take it on board and think about it. And realise ... what inheritance she has, by having us as Jewish grandparents. What she has inherited that is good, that is permanent, that is helpful to the world. And she should be proud of it. Proud of that side, and never neglect it. So this is really my wish.

*Cause that was my last question, partly. I know that you wanted to- that you're planning to write a book for your granddaughter. What message do you have to her or to anyone else who might watch this interview?*

Well this is really the message that I have. I want them to think about the contribution that the Jews have always made. The last 2000 years, the Jews have made a huge contribution to every country they've been in, to every country they've been thrown out of. They've started somewhere else, and they've contributed somewhere else. And they still are contributing. And Israel is contributing now, and Israel is proving to have done research and discoveries and- in all fields. Not just medical. Not just IT. In all sorts of fields that have helped the world. And I want people really to realise that in some ways the world owes us something. They have tortured us for 2000 years. They have nearly destructed us - annihilated us. I think if the Russians hadn't moved from the East to the West, maybe the Americans would not have moved over to save Europe, and maybe two years later there would have been no Jews left. Or a handful scattered around the world. Maybe the few Americans. But there would be nothing left of us. And we can be proud that we've rebuilt. That we are so strong. [pause] And I would like to be able to live long enough for the world to say they recognise this. Not just in

words. Not just political men who stand up and say, “French Jews are French, first thing.” You know, I’d like them to say, “We are all French. And that’s it.” And...and there would be no more distinction. No more anti-Semitism. But that is high hope. I ...I don’t dare hoping that that will disappear. But I hope that at least – at least in words they can recognise it, our contribution. And that my granddaughter will certainly you know, follow something, to be able to pass on to her generation. I don’t want to be the last one of – of my line of Jews to die. That’s it.

*Thank you Mrs Lebor for your interview, and we’re going to look at some of your photographs now.*

**[2:35:06]**

**[End of interview]**

**[Start of photographs]**

**[2:35:32]**

It’s my mother, Regina Beckmann, marrying Gedaliah Deitel. In 1937. In Krakow.

My stepfather Abraham Kaliser, with his first wife, pre-war wife and child, little boy.

*And where did they die?*

In Lodz.

*And when?*

The date exactly I do not know, but they- I don’t know.

My mother and myself in Bad Gastein, in 1945, on the terrace, in the hotel where we were staying. And the little doll is my very first doll. 1945.

*Did the doll have a name?*

No.

Me, next to the Israeli teacher. I’m on her left, with a bow, with a wide bow on the head.

*And who else is on the picture? What do we see on the picture?*

We see other of the children that were in the same class. Also about 1945.

*Do you remember any of the names of the other children?*

No, I don't.

[2:37:21]

I am dressed for the Purim Spiel. In Bad Gastein, also 1945, maybe '46; I look a little bit bigger on this one.

*And what was your role in the Purim Spiel?*

*Ver veyst?* [Yiddish: Who knows?] [Laughs]

Me and the teacher.

*And somebody else. Who else is there?*

I don't know who else it is.

My mother, my stepfather, myself in the middle, in front of the famous waterfall in Bad Gastein, in 1945 or thereabout.

*Have you been back to Bad Gastein since?*

Indeed, I've been back to Bad Gastein. In 2006 I went with a friend for the first time, and that was very emotional because I met an Austrian who showed me around all the places where the school was, where the playground was, where we lived, the hotel and everything. And then, this year, I took my son there. He wanted to see it with me, and we did. We did like a... pilgrimage to the place. And I then learned that somebody who was with me at the DP camp, that was an older boy, he was sixteen while I was only five or six. He came also to visit. And I'm trying to be in touch with him because he must have really very sharp memories on, of those days.

My mother. A photo taken of one of her documents from Bad Gastein, also around 1945.

My mother and father - stepfather, in Paris, in 1950s.

[2:39:33]

My mother's brother, Abraham, who went as a Zionist before the war, to Israel. He lived in Haifa. My mother connected up with him after the war. Unfortunately, he died before they could see each other again. He died in the 50s.

Rose and John's wedding. 1962. Rose's parents are on the right, and John's parents are on the left. My parents, Regina and Abraham, later on known as Albert, and John's parents, Charlie, and Sarah, known as Sissi. At the wedding, June, 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1962. In London, in the Brondesbury Synagogue, in Chevening Road.

Benjamin's Bar Mitzvah, with my parents and two cousins from Paris. The Bar Mitzvah was in 1980, at the Liberal Synagogue in Preston Road.

In the 80s, I started my business, which was called Miss Pharr's Holidays. It was a connection with France, as I was renting out houses in France from French owners, to English clients and American clients. The houses were all in the south of France in the southern belt. It was the Dordogne, the Languedoc, Provence and Cote D'Azur. And the business lasted nearly twenty years.

John was the Mayor in the Millennium. And this is a family photograph taken with his wife, the Mayoress and son, Benjamin.

Benjamin and Geda, 2003.

[2:42:10]

Lily, aged five, 2015.

This is the death certificate of my natural father, Gedaliah. He died in the hospital, in the camp of Budzyn in 1944, just before the end of the war.

This of course is a replacement paper, issued by the French Government in 1952, I think.

*Thank you very much for this interview and for sharing your photographs and your story and your documents with us. Thank you again, Mrs Lebor.*

Well thank you for interviewing me and I hope it will be useful for the future.

*Thank you.*

**[End of photographs]**

**[2:43:12.9]**