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**AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive**

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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

<b>Collection title:</b>	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
<b>Ref. no:</b>	RV258

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Shinder
<b>Forename:</b>	Stella
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Female
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	3 July 1928
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Chemnitz, Germany

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	12 March 2021
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	Via Zoom in London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Clare Csonka
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	1 hour 30 minutes



## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV258  
**NAME:** Stella Shinder  
**DATE:** 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021  
**LOCATION:** London, UK via Zoom  
**INTERVIEWER:** Clare Csonka

[Present also is Alex Shinder, Stella's son, who speaks later in the interview]

### [Part One]

[0:00:00]

*So, first of all, I will just say that this is a recording of Stella Shinder, on Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, via Zoom.*

*Stella, first of all thank you very much for agreeing to do this, to be recorded for this Refugee Voices testimony Archive. Would you mind just starting off for identification by giving your name, place of birth and date of birth?*

Yes, my name Stella Shinder now, but was Orbach when I was born, and I was born on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1928 at -

*And- and where was this?*

I was born in Chemnitz-

*Chemnitz-*

Germany. Yeah, yeah - sorry.

*OK. No problem. Can we just start and get into this by telling us something about your family background?*

My father was an- a textile merchant. And he was born in the Ukraine but made his way from the Ukraine to- to Warsaw. From Warsaw he smuggled himself into Germany at the age of seventeen and he never- he never got a German- never got a German passport. My mother was born in Cracow in- which was Austria when she was born, became Poland after the First World War. And she- she also made her way to, to Germany at the age of seventeen and that's when she met my father. And there they married- she married- she was, I think- they were both twenty or twenty-one when they got married.

*Do you have, or did you have, any siblings? Brothers or-*

Yes, I had a brother who was three years older than myself. He was also born in- in Chemnitz.

*Right, so you had a brother who was a little bit older than you.*

That's right. Three years older.

**[0:02:31]**

*OK. Now, you were born in 1928, so we're talking about your early childhood now, in Germany. But do you have any memories of what that part of your childhood was like?*

Yes, I do have, I- my memory goes back to when I was about three years old. I had a- a wonderful- a German nanny who was almost part of the family. And she was more responsible for bringing me up because my mother was working with my father in his textile business. So, she was almost like my second mother. And she was a wonderful young woman. She was engaged to a, a, a- a very nice man but who never got a job because he was- he was a communist. So, he was *persona non grata* in Germany. So, that was rather sad. So they never married. The other thing I remember, is that right- I mean, Hitler came to power around that time, and so all- already there were- people were fighting in the streets. The

Communists and the Nazis were fighting in the street so we were somehow- when we went for a walk we were almost caught up in these, these strifes. So it is a very early memory of already things not going well.

*Now, Hitler came to power in 1933, so you would have- only have been five.*

Yes.

*Did the atmosphere change, for you, around that time?*

Not- not for- not really, not really, not very much. It- it was- it was when I started school at the age of six, that I had my first sort of, encounter. I had a little umbrella with red stripes, and a little schoolmate of mine said, "Is that the blood of the- of, of, of, of German babies that the Jews were killing?" So that- and I came home to my mother and said, "Could this be true?" So that was my- that was the first, my- my first experience of what- what, what was happening. Yeah.

**[0:05:21]**

*Do you-?*

And then-

*Sorry- do you- do you remember what your mother said, when you must have been distressed and asked her that question?*

"Absolutely not. This is not true. Never- you must never believe that." So, you know, that was the end of that. My father had an encounter with a, a, a janitor who called him a 'dirty Jew' and my father- this- this man happened to have a stick, so my father took the stick and beat him up. Beat up the janitor. So that was- [laughs] that was- that was the first sort of thing that happened in my memory about Nazism, yeah.

*So around this time, were your parents beginning to talk about the leave, to leave, to get out?*

No. No, not at that time. Not yet.

*What do you re-?*

I don't- sorry.

*Go- go ahead.*

No, no. That was-

*OK. What do you rem- what do you remember about the early discussions with your parents or between your parents about 'We must go'?*

That- that there was never any talk about going. Never. It wasn't until we actually left in, in July- July the 13<sup>th</sup>, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, that my mother- we, we went on our usual holiday to Czechoslovakia. Because we lived quite near the border, we used to take our holidays in Karlovy Vary. That was a beautiful spa in the- in the Sudeten part of the- of Czechoslovakia. We used to regularly have the holidays there. And it was not until this July, the 13<sup>th</sup> that we went on holiday. And when we crossed the border, my mother said to my brother and myself, "We are never going back." So that was it.

*Do you remember how you felt about that, when your-?*

**[0:07:43]**

We were elated. My brother and I were elated. Because we had already experienced anti-Semitism. We were thrown out of our schools. We were- and we were spat at in the street and so, you know, we had experienced the anti-Semitism quite strongly. We were not allowed to sit on park benches. We were not allowed to use swimming pools. We, you know, did- we already had experienced a lot of anti-Semitism. So, we were very, very happy to leave all that behind. My father was still in Germany and he didn't want to leave because we had a beautiful home and a- and the- and this business and he didn't want to leave. And my mother wrote to him and said, "If you don't follow us, you will never see us again." So, he- he packed his bag and he had some money in a in a briefcase. And on the- on the platform at

the- at the station he was so nervous he left behind this bag with money, which we never saw again. But he came and joined us. And subsequently, we went to live in Prague, where we stayed for six months prior to coming to England. So.

*And this was in 1938?*

1938, yeah.

*And so, what happened next?*

**[0:09:26]**

What happened next we- we had a small flat which we rented in Prague. And my brother and I attended a German-speaking school. And of course we were spat at by the Czech children because they thought we were Germans. There was a- a lot of anti-German feeling in Czechoslovakia at that time. We had a- a letter from my grand- my father's parents who lived in Warsaw at the time, to say there was an aunt, my grandfather's sister, was living in England, in London. "Write to her, get her to, get her to get you a visitor's visa. Get out of Czechoslovakia because Hitler's going to come into Czechoslovakia." So, we were so lucky, we managed to get this- a visitor's visa. And we- we then- my- my mother arranged for us to fly to England, because crossing Germany would have been dangerous for us, you know, if we had gone by train. So, we- we managed to actually to get a flight to take us to, to- the flight which landed at Brussels and then another flight from Brussels to London on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1938. So we, we landed in London on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1938. Croydon Airport.

*Can you remember your impressions? You were, you were ten by then.*

Yes.

*Can you remember your impressions on first arriving in London?*

Well, it was- we, we were greeted by this great aunt and her, and her son and a family who sort of, they were very welcoming. And we managed- we stayed with the aunt for a- for a few weeks until we found a small flat in, in, in like- in East London somewhere. So, we were able

to move out and be on our, you know, a family on our own. But the- the aunt's family, her son and daughter-in-law and so, they all- they showed us around and took great care of us at that time. You know, we were- they, they looked after us, really. It was very, very- we were very lucky at that time. Yeah.

**[0:12:16]**

*What about language? Did you already speak some English?*

Well, my brother and I were then- we were- we were enrolled in this very religious Jewish school, which was- the school was in- in Stamford Hill. Somewhere in that area. And we- we attended school and then my brother already had some English knowledge which he had from his studies in Germany. And...But I- I learned very quickly to speak English, yes. And I still- you can still detect a slight accent. I never lost that accent. Yes. So, we were then- then when war broke out, we were evacuated with- with the Jewish school. We went to somewhere in Suffolk. I think it was a place called Sheffield where we were, you know, billeted with the local people. Yeah. So, what-

*What do you- sorry, what do you remember about that time when you were evacuated?*

Well, it was- it was, you know, we- the food came from London, the kosher food they sent from London. We used to- used to get tummy upsets. I don't know, because by the time the food got to us, it wasn't so good anymore. We used to- I remember going into the fields and eating raw- raw runner beans because we were so hungry. [laughs] And the first billet was a very nice lady who- but she had no- she had no sheets. She used those woollen blankets and I had eczema so, I didn't do very well. When my mother came to visit she managed to get me removed to another billet. The second billet was a- a nice lady who didn't understand that young children get hungry. So, [laughs] that's- that's when I- I used to go in the fields and eat beans and get tummy upset. And then eventually I managed- managed to get another billet with another lovely local lady who had two daughters of her own. And I remember that we used to - the two daughters and I - used to sleep in this big double bed. But they were very nice people who looked after us. But I- I still had to attend the- the lessons at the- from the Jewish school. And they were very religious and I was not religious, and I remember being-



somebody told on me because I- I switched on the lights on the Shabbat and I was not allowed to do that. So I got into trouble.

**[0:15:36]**

And I decided then, that I had enough. And I took myself on the Green Line bus and left- left without permission to go- to come back to London on my own. By the- I think my brother had already absconded before me. We- we were not in touch. We were never in the- in the same billet at the same time, so we lost touch with each other. But my brother had already done the same thing. He had got himself to London without permission. Anyway, I- when I- I was very- I was looked after. I remember I was a child with glasses, crying, and being sick in the bus. And land- landing in King's Cross. And some very nice conductor put me on the right bus to, to, to the- to go to Clapton where I knew there were relatives living. I knew their address. And when I- when I got there, my father walked in, by chance, and saw me. Surprise, surprise. And that was- that was the end of my evacuation. And then I got enrolled in a- a convent school which was one of- the loveliest school experience I ever had, because the nuns were so kind and so helpful to us, although we were Jewish. They were, you know, they- they took in Jewish children during the war as, as – so, there. And then the Blitz started. Then the, you know, the bombing started in London, and we had to sleep in the shelters.

**[0:17:41]**

And that was not good for my brother who had pneumonia twice. And the doctor said to my mother, "Look, you must get out of London, because if he has pneumonia another time, it could kill him." So, my- my mother- my brother and I left London and started on another journey as- in the country - various experiences. We were billeted with a wonderful, wonderful people. I forget the name of the village. They were the aristocratic ladies who looked after- who were so kind to us. Kept in touch with us even after the war. And- so, well, where- what happened after that? My father was still in- my father stayed in London, and then- then we had-

*Alex: [Inaudible] had to go because of the alien issue. He had to leave that place because you were aliens.*

No. No, that was not so. We, we, we... We- no, there was an opportunity for Jewish refugees to work on the land in- in Suffolk. And so, my, my- my parents- my father managed to get out of London and got a job on the farm- working on the farm. And so- both my parents worked on the farm with the Chivers people who, who had the- who owned the land in this, in the Sedge Fen which was near Lakenheath in Suffolk. And I attended the, the local village school there. And after that- Oh, yes. The- there were a lot of young Jewish men who, who had been interned because they had German passports. And they, they were- the Chivers people then were allowed to bring back these young men to work on their farms, while their men were in the- you know- the farm workers had to go in the Army, so they were short of workers. So, these people- these young men came to, to, to live in Sedge Fen in the- and then my mother got the job of looking- cooking and looking after these young men. And so she'd stopped working on the farm, but looked after these boys. And my father was still working on the land at that time. And I- I attended the village school. And this wonderful teacher encouraged me to take an examination which was the equivalent to the 11-Plus now. And I passed this examination which enabled me to leave the- the village school and attend a school in Ely, in Cambridgeshire, a school which had been evacuated from London. So, it was a secondary school. And I- I had then to commute every day by bicycle and train to attend the school in Ely. So, that was another experience. I had then- I had missed out on- on mathematics, on the higher mathematics. And the- the, the mistress who was in, you know, the- who was then the maths mistress at the school, thought that I was - what was it? What was did she call me? You know, mentally- mentally disabled. [laughs]

**[0:22:07]**

But I never caught up on the maths. But I was good at English and history and so on, so I knew that I wasn't- I was not mentally disabled. Left school. I then- I- I did not take the matric because I knew I wouldn't pass in, in the maths. So, I took myself out of school at the age of ...was it fifteen? And then I had the opportunity to, to go to- the Jewish Refugee organisation arranged for me to, to, to live in Cambridge in a hostel, what was called a 'refugee hostel'. And then I attended a- another- and they paid for lessons for me to have shorthand typing and bookkeeping lessons, which I- I attended that little school. And then I took my- got myself a job with a local photographer after school to, to, to help, you know, with making the tea and, you know, a sort of junior- junior helper, to earn a few pennies, you know, because I had no money at that time. My parents were still living in Sedge Fen near

Lakenheath, and I used to, every second weekend, used to go home to see my parents. And I had a very, very happy stay in this refugee hostel with the- where there were about fifteen of us, boys and girls from the age of fifteen to, to twenty-two. And, you know, it was a- I was very, very happy there. What more can I say?

*Clare: What about your brother? What was your brother doing? William Morton?*

My brother- my brother had- he, he left school, and he, he became- he, he worked for a solicitor as a Junior, to, to earn some money. He was- and then he came, he came back to London, and- Oh, yes, he- and then he joined the Army as soon- he was seventeen years old when he joined the Army. And he was sent to Germany to, you know, and he was- he had the job of be- of being an interpreter. So, he got a rank of Sergeant Major, and had to change his name from Orbach, because it was a German name. So, he then called himself William Morton, or Bill Morton. And he, he did his stint of, you know, in Germany until, until the war- until war was over. And then he, you know, he, after- after that he- he got a job in the- with the Korda film makers. And then he started on, on his career as a television and a, and a film maker at that time. Where, where was I, now? I- I'm losing track.

**[0:26:04]**

*Well we're coming I think towards the end of the war. You had many experiences during the war.*

Yes,

*And you were billeted. You showed lots of spirit by absconding, a child on the Green Line, all on your own. Yeah-?*

Oh, during the Blitz I remember one of the things that happened was, it was the, the Jewish festival of Rosh Hashanah. My mother and I were all dressed up to go to synagogue, and I remember wearing white gloves. And then a German aeroplane came to, to, to strafe people, you know, they'd started shooting people, from the plane, in the street. And I remember my mother and I were doing as we were told, we laid down flat in somebody's front garden, in our best clothes. And I was wearing white gloves. I remember getting them all muddy. Until,

you know, this- this was one of the experiences that we had during the Blitz. But anyway, so, you know, that was, you know, memorable. And then after- after the war, I- I came- I came back to London. I got a job with a, well, a very wonderful picture frame maker, Frederick Pollak who, who had a studio where he used to make picture frames for, for these wonderful paintings. And I was in charge of looking after the paintings. And I hadn't- I didn't realise that, you know, some of these paintings, which were priceless, and... so, I had this job until I got - working for this Pollak until I got - married. So what, what else can I tell you?

**[0:28:15]**

*How did you meet your husband?*

I- I happened to meet him- I went to, to a dance in, in Knightsbridge. There was a Czech club, although I wasn't Czech but they- I attended that club because they had nice dance music. And I, I took a relative, a distant cousin and- with me to this dance and happened to, happened to meet my future husband. He asked me to dance, and at the end of the evening, he, he said, "Can I take you home?" And I said, "Yes, you can, provided that you also take my cousin home as well." And he gave- he had a little Ford car at that time, and he gave us a lift, and- a lift home. And that- after that first encounter, I, I said- I came home to my parents and I said, "I've met the man I'm going to marry." So, that, on the- that [laughs] - that was that. Another-

*You knew- you knew straight away?*

I knew- I knew straight away, yes.

*And was he an English man?*

He was born- he was an English Jew born in the East End of London. And he already had a little- he was in business with his brother. You know, he was, they- they were manufacturing medicated confectionery. They had a little factory in the East- in the East End of London. And, so, you know, he was well, well established by that time. And so that- that was the- and we, we, we met in in November and got married in, in June, 1949.

**[0:30:23]**

*And you went on to have children?*

It was a long time. It wasn't until- Oh, I had a- I had a, a daughter. I had a daughter which- which died at birth, in 1955. And I had a, a rather nasty experience with the, you know, the they- the, the- I was in hospital for several weeks. You know, the waters had broken, and nobody did anything and when they finally managed to get to, to, to get- get me to give birth, the child was so- already so- well, she, she died at- while I was giving birth. So, after that, I- I decided not, you know. I went to see a wonderful doctor called Suchet. He was [actor] David Suchet's father who was a gynaecologist. And he suggested that I should- I should try to get pregnant again, and I would have a caesarean birth, not to experience this horrible experience again. And I- I was lucky, as I then had subsequently two boys, both, both caesarean children. And- so, two wonderful sons. So, again, I was really very lucky. And lucky in my marriage, lucky with my children. And so here I am. Lucky. [laughs] I'm now an old woman, you know, it- it's with, you know, a few physical disabilities and arthritic pain, but being very, very well looked after by a young Colombian woman who shares my flat and looks after me as though I was her baby. So, but I see my children. They- they both live in this, you know, both live in the same area as myself, so, I see my children and grandchildren regularly. And I'm a very lucky woman. Here I am.

**[0:32:53]**

*Going back a bit, to your experience of being a refugee-*

Yes?

*How- after the war, and you could settle down a bit, there wasn't all that upheaval and you could take stock, how- how did it feel then, the whole refugee experience?*

Well, it- it was- we- we never felt- we never felt- how shall I say? We never felt like refugees. We were very, very welcome, you know, I don't know. It was- I, we were very happy here. You know, it was- it was our- now it was our home, you know. We- we never felt alienated in any way, is all I can tell you.

*So- so you found the- the English people welcoming and helpful?*

Yes, on the whole, yes. You know, this, I- on the- on the whole, yes. We- we- we had no problems. No problems. I mean, you know, we had a lot of our friends who were also refugees and, you know, a lot of- we had, you know, young people we- we used to- we had like- we used to do amateur opera or amateur theatricals. And you know, you usually with people who had- who- who had also been refugees. So, most- most of my friends were actually people like ourselves, including my parents' friends. They were all [inaudible] or, you know, refugees. So, we- we didn't really mix very much with the- with the British people.

*Do you ever wonder what your life might have been like if you hadn't been forced to go into exile, to- to leave Germany?*

**[0:35:33]**

No, I never wondered about that. No. It never, it never, it never occurred to me that I'd missed out on anything, you know? I didn't have that feeling. I just felt very, very lucky that we had- we were where we were.

*Do you think that your own experience of being a refugee has in any way impacted on your two sons, has changed their view of the world in any way?*

I really- I just- I wouldn't know about- I really don't know about that. You'd have to talk to- have to speak to them about it. But we never, you know, it wasn't anything that we, that- that we sort of talked about or thought about. We just managed- we lived more in the present, you know?

*You've been so good with your time and you've said so many really fascinating things. I just wonder, as we come to a close whether there is anything that I didn't ask you about or that we've missed out that you wanted to add? Anything at all? Any anecdote, any memory? Anything?*

*Alex: Yeah, I think so.*

What?

*Alex: I'm so sorry. I'm- I'm butting in here.*

Yes, Alex is-

*Clare: It's OK. It's OK.*

*Alex: So, the first thing is, you- you- Clare asked you whether your parents spoke about leaving. And you then went on to explain that you only heard about it when you'd already left.*

**[0:37:24]**

That's right.

*Alex: And then- and then you went on with your story. And then you hark back a bit on some of the experiences that you had in Chemnitz before you left.*

Yeah.

*Alex: But I think it would be interesting to know what life was like in Chemnitz. You know, there weren't many cars, presumably. How you got around?*

No, we did- we-

*Alex: And I think it would also be interesting to know about your parents, and your own circle of acquaintances, and you know, whether there were any relatives. And, you know, a little bit more perhaps about your father's business activities. Because it would possibly, I think for one- in terms of the circle of acquaintances one of the poignant things about that was that your mother tried to get them to leave, and they didn't listen.*

Yeah.

*Alex: And then after the war, they had vanished.*

Yeah.

*Alex: So, I think it would be quite helpful to just understand what it was like being a little girl in Chemnitz. You know, you had your tenth birthday party just before you left.*

Yeah.

*Alex: You know, what your hobbies were, what you did. You know, all that sort of thing. I think that would be a very helpful missing part of this. That, that- that's, I think, the part that- that needs filling in. And- and, and more perhaps about your father's activities and your parents' circle of acquaintances-*

Yes.

*Alex: And the fact that you were eastern European immigrants-*

Yeah-

*- rather than native German Jews.*

**[0:38:47]**

That's right. My, my parents, for instance, all their friends were, all their close friends were people like themselves who had been immigrants from, from Eastern Europe. And the, the, the actual German Jews who'd been there for generations, they- they looked down on these, on these so-called eastern European Jews, so they did not mix. There was no, no question of, of, of mixing with the- with this- these- these people. And we- my, my father had a successful business and the- the people, the German people that he- he and my mother did business with, the Germans were very, very kind. And they were not- they were not anti-Semitic. And they- they were- they were- they, they, you know, they accepted them- accepted



them as people like themselves. So, from- and I, apart from- from my, my, my- all my friends were Jewish- Jewish children. And so, you know, we we used to- our activities would be things like going skating on the ice in the winter. And we, we were not allowed to use swimming pools or anything like that, so, you know, we- we would go for walks in the- in the woods, in the forest, and the- you know, the- Chemnitz was surrounded by some beautiful lakes and forests so, you know, we, we, we would walk and pick- pick blueberries in the woods and mushrooms and things like that. You know, but we did- we did not mix with the German children. Only mixed with people like our- you know, children like ourselves.

*Alex: Mum, do you have a feel for how many acquaintances your- were your parents-*

My parents-

*Alex: Outgoing people?*

Yes, they, they used to play Rummy regularly with their- they saw their friends. They were very sociable.

*Alex: Would you have a feel for how many sort of friends and acquaintances they had? You know, just the number?*

They- well they-they had- I know that there were two other families with children that they were very friendly with, yeah, yeah. They used to play Rummy with. They had a, a nice social life, yeah.

*Alex: And Chemnitz wasn't a big Jewish community, there were about 2,000 Jews in Chemnitz.*

Well-

*Clare: Stella, look- look- Stella, look towards- when you're answering the question from Alex-*

Yes?

*Clare: - look towards the camera.*

Oh, I'm sorry.

*Clare: That's all right. Because, otherwise, it's going to get a bit confusing.*

Oh, right. Yes, I'm sorry.

*Clare: So, I think he was asking you about whether there were lot of Jewish friends? Is that-?*

**[0:42:02]**

*Alex: Active in- active in the shul?*

Well, we, we belonged to a liberal synagogue and they- we would just attend on the High Holidays, that's all. We were not kosher. We were not very observant Jews. No.

*Alex: Did you- did your- was that lack of observance partly- partly conditioned by your mother's very strict upbringing?*

Oh, my- my mother came from a very, very religious background. But she, she already, she, she rejected the- the very religious observances. She, she was very- already very liberal in her outlook. Yeah.

*Alex: Was- was your mother brought up by a rabbi? Was her grandfather a rabbi?*

Her- her grandfather- she was brought up by her grandfather, because her-

*Alex: Was he a rabbi?*

He- yes, he was a rabbi and had his own, his own shtiebel, you know. I don't- Yeah - yeah.

*Alex: Ok. And so in terms of the, the circles of acquaintances you had, and your parents had, is it true to say that after the war they all just vanished?*

Well, we- my mother kept in touch and when we were living in Prague, she tried to, to persuade people to, to leave. And nobody, apart from our doctor, one doctor, nobody, nobody paid any attention, so, as far as I knew they all perished. We don't know how they perished but they perished because we never heard from them again.

*Clare: Do you still have any friends left in Germany?*

No.

*Alex: Didn't you bump into somebody?*

I bumped- I bumped into one friend that- she, she had actually been at my last birthday party. I happened to run in to her here in London. She, she had been adopted by a Jewish family because all her, all her family had perished. And I just happened to, to run into her by, by accident. And she was one of the children who was at my birthday party. That was a, a lovely surprise. So, we continued our friendship here in London. And she, she left to marry somebody in the United States and that was the, the end of that.

*Alex: Was she on the Kindertransport?*

No. No, no Kindertransport.

*Alex: No, she was your friend.*

What?

*Alex: The friend that left?*

No, she wasn't. She had- she- I don't know how she came to England, but she was there on her own.

*Alex: So, the other- if we could talk about your journey. Just before doing that, a little bit perhaps more about your parents. OK. So, your, your- your mother was, you know, a very- she was the one with the, if you like, the determination-*

Yeah.

*Alex: - and the foresight. What do you think- what do you think- can you think what there was about her? Maybe talk about her personality a little bit, to, to kind of get a feel for how it was that they, amongst a bunch of people who didn't leave, in your situation,*

Yeah.

*Alex: - why it was, that- that you think, they left?*

Well, my mother had this-

*Clare: Just hold on a second. Stella, I think it's probably better if I ask that question, you know, just for the continuity.*

Yes.

*Clare: It will all be cut into an earlier, but- so, if you look back to the, back to the camera, or back- ahead again. What do you- what do you think it was about your parents that made them realise that they had to leave, whereas perhaps other people at that time, didn't?*

It was my mother's instinct. My father didn't have that instinct but my mother, it was her. She, she was a- she was one of these people who, who lived by instinct, right, right from the- you know, right, all, all her life, it was- you know, she, she- she had this instinct of survival- of survival, I suppose. That's all I can, all, you know, she was, she had this common sense or, or, or she saw things as, you know, she had- I would call it instinct, really.

*Clare: Survival- survival instinct?*

Survival instinct. Yeah.

*Alex: When you say survival instinct, I mean, was it sort of very gloomy? Were people expecting to just sort of wither at that point in Germany? Or were they expecting that hopefully, you know, Germany was not unlike a lot of eastern Europe in terms of the anti-Semitism you were facing, and that this would eventually hopefully go away? Was it a realism that your mother had do you think?*

**[0:47:28]**

Yes, yes, realism, yes. Yes. And, I mean, she, you know already, you know, had a- I think she, she was like that right- born- born with that sort of instinct, you know.

*Alex: And your father, can you talk a little bit about- a little bit more detail about the business he was in? You said he was a textile merchant.*

Yes. He actually used to export- he had clients in, in, in the U- in England, who later on, when he- when- after the war, they actually helped him to, to set up a little business in, in England because they, you know, they, they were- they, they still remembered him. So, you know, he was, he was quite a- quite a successful merchant, I would say. Yes.

*Alex: What- what- was it clothes?*

No, textiles, mostly- mostly stockings, actually.

*Alex: Stockings?*

Yeah.

*Alex: He would- he would, what, broker? Was that-? He would broker deals between manufacturers and, and, and garment makers?*

That's right, yes. Yes.

*Alex: Right. Not a- not- I read somewhere that the 'native' - if I can call them that - German Jews were very often in retail, or medicine, or the, you know, various kind of company professions. But the immigrants were- eked a living in, this is the quote, "eked a living, in either peddlers, being peddlers, or being artisans, or being industrial workers." Does that sound familiar?*

No, they were- they were- they were not artisans or in- industrial workers, no.

*Alex: And the friends that they had?*

They were mostly in, in- in, in businesses or professions like law- law or medicine.

*Alex: Right, so they-*

But not-

*Alex: Right, so they, they- they were probably half-way house between the German-indigenous German Jews and the immigrant German Jews. I think, I get the feeling that your positioning- you know, you said you had a comfortable existence, you didn't have an 'eked out' existence. So, I suspect that your, if you like, your- you were integrating-*

Yes.

*Alex: With the German Jews when you were living in- in- you said they looked down on you, but it sounds to me like the- the process of assimilation into that group was taking place quite well for you.*

I wouldn't think so, no. No, because we- we didn't mix with them, at all.

**[0:50:11]**

*Alex: Yes. Were there many of them in Chemnitz or were they mainly in Berlin, like-?*

Loads of them! There was a whole group of them living in a- in one of these, sort of Knightsbridge areas- type. We, we, we- we, we lived in a sort of half-way, half-way place, you know where there- there- and there was no, no question of, of, of mixing with these- with the German Jews.

*Alex: You never talk about it but do you think it was- sorry, Clare-*

*Clare: Well, I- I'm just thinking maybe we ought to just bring this back to- unless there's a question you would like me to ask? Because probably for the format it's better just if it's between Stella and I. Otherwise it gets a bit complicated, Alex.*

*Alex: Fine. Would you like to ask-*

*Clare: Yes?*

*Alex: How, you know, that- was there any awareness of all the doors that were open for them when they left, all shutting, locked behind them? So, for example, they went to the Sudetenland and then from the Sudetenland they went to Czech- to, to Prague. But the Sudetenland then became part of Germany, and then by March, Prague- Prague had become part of Germany. And then, you know, that you'd have to have a 'J' on your passport if, if- but that was- that came in in October, and they'd already left in July. And then- and then the, the key element of this, was if you like the- the fact that they'd got advice to go to, to Britain, not somewhere that became occupied. And the, and the very- and the life-or-death ticket, frankly, here, was them getting a visa, a visitor's visa to England. And if they- if it had not been for that, that, that was a- that was a hard thing to get, even- even before the war. Once the war started it became almost impossible.*

*Clare: Right. So-*

*Alex: I'd like to understand whether they were aware, as children.*

*Clare: Of- of all the doors that were closing behind them. OK.*

**[0:52:22]**

*Alex: And- and also this: To enquire a little bit more about the visa and how that was, you know, if my mother has any recollection of how that was achieved. Because it was quite a remarkable thing to achieve.*

*Clare: OK. Let- Let me try that. This will be what we call a 'pick-up' because it will be inserted earlier into the interview. That's not a problem. So, Stella, going- backtracking quite a lot, and, you know, you were ten, a child when all this was happening in 1938. Did you have any awareness, or did you know if your parents had an awareness that each stage as you left, doors were closing behind you, and it was going to get harder and harder actually to be able to leave and- and to get a visa?*

No... no. I- I was not aware of that.

*Clare: Do you remember why they chose to come to Britain, other than going somewhere else?*

Well, because we had this- we had this great-aunt and her family who lived in Britain. We didn't have any other- there was no- nowhere else. I think my father made an application to go to Australia and he got a- he got a refusal. So Britain, it was the only place where we knew we had- we had relatives. That was the- our only option.

*Clare: And it turned out very well in the end.*

Yes. Yes. I don't know how he- how this aunt- how they managed to get us the visitor's visa. I, I, I never- I, I really don't know how they managed it, but they managed it-

*Clare: Luckily. Thank goodness.*

Getting visitor's visa for us to come to this country.

*Clare: So, just to end up with, is there anything that you would like to say to someone who may be watching this recording of you at some point in the future? Someone you don't know but who may be inspired by your story and- and watch it and any message for them?*



**[0:54:50]**

Well, I really don't have a message. The only thing is that- you know there was, like somebody said, there was a guardian angel looking after us. You know this- it was a luck, a luck question, really. I- I cannot put it down to, you know- the lucky that my mother had this instinct and lucky that we were able to, to, to act on all this, you know. What else, you know, it's- I can't give anybody any advice, because what, what happened was, how shall I say it? Everything was- was a matter of, of taking an opportunity when it- when an opportunity arose. And a sort of instinct, luck, what else? You know, this is something that you cannot advise people. It just happens or it doesn't happen. So, I, I cannot, cannot, I wish people luck, that's all I, that's all I can say.

*Clare: Thank you for that. And thank you for everything, Stella. All your time today, all your memories. We're very grateful. Thank you very much for doing this.*

Well, thank you for having me.

*Clare: It's a pleasure. And a great privilege.*

**[End of Part 1 of Zoom recording]**

**[0:56:23]**

**[Start of Part 2 of Zoom recording including photographs. Alex is helping Stella in the photo selection.]**

*Clare: OK. We are now recording.*

*OK. This is a follow-up recording of Stella Shinder, on Wednesday May the 5<sup>th</sup>, via Zoom, for her to talk through some family photos.*

*Stella, hello. Can you hear me OK?*

Yes, I can.

*Hi! Thank you so much for doing this. It's really over to you now, very much, to pick out some photos that you would like to talk about. So-*

Yeah. This-

*Go, go ahead-*

### **Photo 1**

This photo was of my nanny when I was about three and my brother was seven. That was still in Germany, in Chemnitz.

*Clare: Right. And you- I mean, you were very young, but do you remember her?*

Oh, yes, yes. She was- she was absolutely marvellous. She was instrumental in, in bringing me up because my mother was working with my father in business. So, she, she was really my second mother, I would say.

*Clare: And did she stay with your family quite a long time?*

She stayed- no, she had to leave because it- there was a decree that Hitler made that no- no German woman must stay in a- in a Jewish household. So she had to leave. That was about 1936.

*Clare: Right, OK. So she was a German woman. Not- not a Jewish woman.*

No.

*OK. So, she had to go, but she was good for- while she was there, she was a nice person.*

Marvellous.

**[0:58:02]**

*Good! That's a good memory. That's a great memory.*

Yeah.

*OK. Is there another picture you would like to show?*

**Photo 2**

Oh, that was- that was me. I think I was about four or five years old at that time.

*Right.*

Yeah. You know, I wore glasses and I was pigeon-toed.

*Oh dear.*

Yes. I don't know- there's nothing more I can say about that now.

*But that was- pigeon-toed was just a thing of childhood. It probably was to do with the shoes you were wearing or something like that.*

No- no, I was naturally pigeon-toed- pigeon-toed. And the, the reason why I wore glasses was because I- I had like a, what do you call? The- one of the lens- one of my eyes-

*Alex: Boss-eyed? Boss-eyed, or-?*

I was boss-eyed.

*Clare: Oh, OK, but not anymore.*

I was boss eyed and I also had eczema on my arms.

*Clare: Oh, dear. But you, you grew out of all these things.*

Yes.

*Clare: Luckily. Good. It hasn't held- it hasn't held you back anyway. You wouldn't know it now. OK another picture if you've got one?*

Alex?

*Alex: I'm just- sorry, I'm just-*

OK, no problem.

### **Photo 3**

*Alex: I'm looking for that brilliant one of-*

Which one?

*Alex: - you and your brother having just had an argument.*

Oh, yeah.

*Alex: That's a really sweet picture. ...So... Here we go. This one? Is that it?*

Yep – yeah. That's it. Yeah.

*Alex: OK.*

*Clare: Right. That's a good picture.*

That's a good picture. We just- we just- this was after an argument with my brother. [laughs]

*Clare: Can you remember what it was about?*

No. I mean, we- we used to play together but we always- but we were always fighting as well.

*Clare: Well, that, that doesn't happen doesn't it, with siblings?*

But he, you know, we, we- we had a lot- we used to play beautifully, but al- also fight a lot.

Yes.

**[1:00:30]**

*Clare: Yes, well that's - quite normal.*

Yes.

*Clare: That was lovely that. A good picture, that. Good quality.*

**Photo 4**

*Alex: Now, I'm trying to find the holidays in, in Poland.*

Yeah.

*Alex: So, Clare on your- your photo sheet, second row, last photo on the right.*

*Clare: I'll hold it up and you can tell me where you would like it. And tell me what you want.*

*Alex: A bit higher, a bit higher and if you move to your right a little bit. That's it, and then a bit higher still.*

*Clare: Yes?*

Yeah. That was in Poland, our holiday in Poland.

*Alex: Talk to that picture. Can you talk to that Mum?*

Sorry?

*Alex: Talk to that photo?*

Yes, that's my brother sitting on the horse-

*Alex: A bit higher, Clare?*

And- and it's one of the- one of the Polish- Polish cousins, and my mother and myself in- I, you know, on that holiday. 1936.

*Alex: What happened to the cousins?*

Well, we had- I think everybody- my- all this huge family that my mother had in Poland there were only two survivors.

*Alex: A bit higher- a bit higher please, Clare. No. Lower, slightly lower. It's very sensitive. That's it. A bit higher. If you take it a little further from the camera then- that's it.*

Yeah.

*Good. OK.*

### **Photo 5**

*Alex: Alright, and then the next photo is going to be the one, the, the next row down, last photo on the right. So, go higher, higher, higher, stop.*

Yeah. Yeah.

*OK, Mum?*

It was- the one on the right?

*Yeah.*

That was again a holiday in Poland, and I was sitting on the lap of my uncle who actually owned that hotel. A great-uncle, I would say. And in the photo there was my mother, my brother, and some of the Polish relatives. And none of those survived. That's it. Yeah.

*Alex: OK, and then last, and then the last, that was in- when you were eight, yeah? Roughly? 1936?*

Yes, that's right. Roughly. Yeah.

*Alex: OK. And then the last one is going to be the-*

The birthday party?

### **Photo 6**

*Alex: No, no, no, no, no. Of this section. Another, another holiday in Poland photo. The last- the bottom one on that, on that photo sheet. Right. Move it to your left a little bit. Your left. That's it. that's it. A bit- yes.*

**[1:03:19]**

Yes. Again, that was in a- in a place called Rabka which was a spa in Poland where we spent time with relatives.

*Alex: Do you remember any of the names?*

No.

*Alex: OK. Right, OK, that's- that's that.*

### **Photo 7**

*Alex: And now we're going to move to the first day at school photo.*

*Clare: Is that on this sheet?*

*Alex: That was – yes, the second row, first on the left.*

Yes.

*Alex: I've got it here, actually.*

*Clare: Oh, OK – OK.*

*Alex: I'll do it from here.*

*Clare: Good.*

*Alex: This is quite an important photo. Remember the talk about the- the, the sweets, Mum?  
There we are.*

That's it. Yeah.

*Alex: So- and say how old you were.*

Six.

*Alex: Alright, do you want to just say-*

Yeah. I was six years old and it was my first day at school. And in, in- it was customary in Germany for a child to get a huge bag of- filled with sweets and chocolates to help them on their way on their first day at school. That- it was-

**[1:04:35]**

*Alex: You seem to be on some sort of town square.*

Yes, it was Chemnitz. In, you know where- the place where I was born. I- we stayed there until this, until we left in the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1938.



**Photo 8**

*Alex: OK. And then we're going to do your tenth birthday. Which is- this is the most critical photo of all of them. And I've got it here. My mother will talk about it. OK. Right.*

Yeah. That was – yeah.

*Alex: OK, so say- you know, explain that it-*

That was my last birthday party on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1938. And there was one of- one of the girls at that party, I met later in London just by chance. She- she had survived but not her family. But all the other people there I had- none of- none of them would have survived.

*Alex: And where was this party?*

It was in my home, in- in my flat, in our flat in, in Chemnitz.

*Clare: So, Stella, where are you? In that picture, which one are you?*

I can't see it.

*Clare: Do you remember where- where you were sitting? Perhaps at the head of the table. It was your party.*

Can you see me with glasses somewhere?

*Alex: Third on the right.*

*Clare: Yes, yes. That's- that's right. So, were they- were they all girls at this party, your friends?*

Yes.

*Clare: They were all girls and there were some adults- adults in the background. Are they your parents, standing in the background?*

I'm just- do you know, I can't see.

*Alex: I'm going to take the photo down.*

*Clare: Yes, of course. Sure.*

So... they were not- do you know, they were friends' parents. But I, I can't see my-

*Alex: So, your father is, your father is – he's in that photo. Let me have a look.*

I- I don't know.

*Alex: Yeah. Your father is, is here. He's the second adult on the left, at the back.*

**[1:07:10]**

With glasses?

*Alex: Yeah.*

*Clare: Oh, right. Show that photo again, it's such a good photo.*

*Alex: It is, isn't it?*

*Clare: It is. It's a great photo. I mean, it really captures that moment, doesn't it?*

*Alex: And it captures the, the quality of their home that they lost.*

*Clare: Yes, yes. It was a really nice flat, a nice home.*

*Alex: So, the father is-*

No, the-

*Alex: Second on the right. Sorry.*

It doesn't- doesn't look like my father.

*Alex: He's the second on the right. Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.*

*Clare: OK.*

*Alex: The only man in the picture.*

*Clare: And it's a big table, isn't it? You can get a lot of people around that table.*

Yes. Oh, yes.

*Clare: So, you would have had family meals there as well?*

Yes.

*Alex: And they had a piano.*

*Clare: Yes.*

Yes, we had a piano. I did have piano lessons as well at that- at that point.

*Clare: Yes, and your friends, tragically, you said, most of them didn't survive. Because they stayed in Germany I suppose, and you left.*

Well, yes! Absolutely. You know. When we- when we left, my mother, she used to, to, to write to the- in those days they didn't- we didn't all have telephones. She would write to our friends, "Leave, leave."

*Clare: Yes.*

And nobody paid any attention. Nobody paid any attention.

*Clare: But luckily your family did. Your mother.*

My father- my father didn't want to leave, but she said to him, "If you don't leave, you will never see us again." So he- he left.

*Clare: Yes. Thank goodness for that. Do you remember Stella, at that party, you were ten, do you remember what you had to eat? What kind of thing did children's parties have, for food?*

I cannot remember.

*Clare: No, so I know, it's only a detail. It's only a detail.*

Yes, no. No, I couldn't- I can't remember. I- I do know that my mother she used to bake a lot of cakes and things like that, so, she was a very good cook, my mother.

*Clare: Yes.*

And she- she would- would have baked a lot of things. In, in those days you didn't- for instance there were no- you didn't have biscuits in Germany.

*Clare: Right!*

So you would have cakes, yes, cakes and things that you baked. But the, the actual- the British biscuit wasn't, wasn't- that was not part of the German culture at the time.

*Clare: Yes. But, but home baking would have been better.*

Home baking, yes. Yeah.

*Clare: That would have been the best.*

Yeah – yeah.

*Clare: So that- so that was in 1938.*

'38, yeah.

*Clare: Yes.*

We actually - Yeah. And this, that was- you know, just my, my tenth birthday was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July and we left on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

*Clare: Goodness. So-*

*Alex: That party, was it on your birthday or maybe on the weekend after?*

No- I don't know whether it would have been actually on the day. Prob- I don't know.

*Alex: I seem to remember that you thought that you left only three days after that party. So that party may have been on the 10<sup>th</sup> or something. Yeah.*

Could be. Yeah.

*Alex: Yeah. So- and you had no idea, did you?*

**[1:10:20]**

No idea. Because my mother just packed, you know- in fact when she packed, she was packing some winter stockings, and I said, "Mummy why are you packing winter stockings on our- on our summer holiday?" And she gave me a smack and said, "Be quiet." Because there was a- we had a cleaning lady working the, in the, in the flat and she didn't want her to know that- she didn't want us to know that we would never come back again.

*Clare: Yes, of course.*

Yeah. So, but she did pack some winter things which [laughs] which made me wonder ‘why winter things in summer?’. You know?

*Clare: Yes. A bit of a clue. It would have been a clue to the cleaning lady anyway.*

Yeah. Exactly, yeah.

*Clare: So, your mother was very- very wise.*

My mother, yes. To- to shut me up I got a smack around the face.

*Clare: So, you didn't- you didn't ask again. That was it!*

No, I was a very obedient child. I really was.

*Clare: Good! In that case, thank goodness. Thank goodness.*

## **Photo 9**

*Alex: OK, so-*

*Clare: Yes, go on.*

*Alex: So we've got the last photo. Would you mind holding up the- I'm trying to find the original of- this is the ...spa, spa. Oh, yeah. It's the spa. The one on its own. The one on its own.*

*Clare: On its own?*

*Alex: Yeah, there was one photo you had on its own.*

*Clare: This is the only one on its own.*

*Alex: That's it. that's it.*

*Clare: OK.*

*Alex: Now, I'm trying to find whether we have that one in here.*

That- that was the spa.

*Alex: Right, OK. So, so- so what we're going to say to this photo, is that when they left Germany on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, they went to this spa-*

But this photo.

*Alex: ... which is the one they would normally go to.*

Yes, yeah.

*Alex: This is an earlier picture-*

An earlier picture-

*Alex: - of that same spa.*

Yeah. Yeah.

*Alex: OK? And the important thing is, that they really didn't know where they were going to go. They just thought, "We've got to get out of Germ,..." Is this the picture? Is it the same one?*

No, this is my mother skiing in-

*Alex: OK. Wow. I don't think I've got. I don't know where that one is. I can't- I couldn't find it in, in this lot.*

Which one are you looking for?

*Alex: The spa photo. No, I can't find it. So we're going to have to use that photo.*

**[1:12:50]**

*Alex: So, you can say that, you know, you left on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July -*

Yeah.

*Alex: - just a few days after that birthday party. You went to the spa where you normally go, which was just on the other side of the border in the Sudetenland.*

Yeah. That's right, yeah.

*Alex: And to give an idea of how random your escape was, you had no plans beyond that. All you had was your holiday luggage, and you went to the spa.*

Yes.

*Alex: And you had to work it out from there.*

Yes.

*Alex: But there was no game plan to get to, you know, where you eventually got to England. In fact at that point they had no idea where they were going to end up. So if you could just talk to that Mum, and then I think we're done.*

So, well, you know, we- we-

*Alex: Hold it up a little higher, please, Clare, so we can see the whole thing. Perfect.*

Yeah. Well, that was taken on a- on a holiday in a spa, but that was taken in 1936 or thereabouts, you know? Yeah. But anyway, from, from- We were- while we were still in in Karlovy Vary in the spa, my mother, you know, wrote to my father to, to come and join us. And he, he didn't want to leave everything behind. That was our beautiful home and his, and



his business premises which were in the same building as our home. And she said, “If you don’t join us, you will never see us again.” So, that’s when he, he packed his bag and he put some money in a briefcase and he took a train, or rather on the station in Germany, he was so nervous that he left the bag with the money on the platform and we never saw that money again. We never saw that money again. That’s my poor, poor father. And, you know, he, he regretted it but there was nothing we could do about it. Fortunately, my mother had, had given some cash to, to some friends who, who some of them- some of the money we got back. But some people never- never gave us the money that we lent them.

*Alex: I think that the significance of this spa was that you would go on holiday there regularly-*

Yeah.

*Alex: - every summer.*

Yeah.

*Alex: And you didn’t think there was anything particularly unusual about it.*

No. No, but-

*Alex: Until- until you got across the border and your mother said, “You’re not going back,”*

Yes, when we- when we.

*Alex: And also, the other point that you might want to make, is that you had no plans beyond- that your parents had no plans beyond just getting out of Germany.*

That’s right.

*Alex: There was no- there was nowhere where you were going to. It was just getting out.*

[1:15:30]

That's right.

*Alex: I think you might want to make- Clare, maybe by questioning, I don't know, you could get-*

*Clare: Yes? Yes, sorry, can I move this away? Have you seen enough of it now?*

Yes. Yes, yes.

*Clare: I'll just have a look at it myself, actually. Yes, so- so, you were, as you said, you were in this spa, with all your family. Your father who'd joined you,*

Yes.

*Clare: - having not wanted to. He'd had this mishap, he'd left money behind at the station, because understandably he was really nervous. Because he didn't know what was going to happen at the border, did he, when he was leaving?*

No.

*Clare: But he must have been very, very anxious.*

Yes.

*Clare: And- but do you remember anything about this time when you were in Czechoslovakia and you didn't know where you were going, but at least you were all together?*

Well actually- well, you know, from- from the spa we then travelled to Prague, the- you know, and, and took a small apartment, a small flat in a block of flats in, in, in Prague. And my brother and I were sent to a German-speaking school in Prague. And the, the, the Czech children would, would spit at us and say, "Německý" you know, calling us 'Germans'.

[laughs]

*Clare: Yes.*

Having escaped from, from Germany where we were spat at because we were Jews, we were now spat at because they thought we were Germans. But, so, we- we- my mother would get in touch with our friends and relatives who were still in Germany and say, "Get out, get out!" Nobody paid any attention except our doctor. He, he, he got out and survived, eventually going to the United States. He was the only one who took notice. So, all our friends in Germany perished.

*Clare: I mean, that is a terrible thing.*

Yeah.

*Clare: Obviously.*

Yeah. Except for this one - sorry - except for this one girl, Sylvia, who was at my birthday party whom I met here by chance many years later.

**[1:17:50]**

*Clare: That must have been the most amazing meeting-*

Yes, she had-

*Clare: - if it was by chance.*

Yes. Yes. actually we met in the street. It was- she was such a distinguished looking girl that she, she hadn't really changed so I would recognise her immediately. And we continued our friendship until she- she left to, to get married in the United States some time later. Yeah.

*Clare: And was the meeting literally by chance, in the street?*

Yes.

*Clare: In London?*

In London, yeah.

*Clare: I mean, that is such a coincidence.*

Yes, such a coincidence, yeah. Yeah – yeah.

*Clare: Goodness I mean that must have been a joyful moment that she survived.*

Yes. Exactly, yes, yes.

*Clare: And those- and those poor people, those friends of yours and your parents' who didn't leave Germany in time.*

Yeah. Yeah.

*Clare: I wonder- I wonder whether it was partly because they didn't believe that there was going to be a-*

Well, nobody knew!

*Clare: - problem.*

Nobody knew what was going- I mean, there was great anti-Semitism, but nobody- nobody thought what- what finally happened.

*Clare: Of course. You wouldn't- you wouldn't imagine something so horrendous.*

No. Yes.

*Clare: But your mother had a- an instinct -*

Yes, yes.

*Clare: That she- you had to go.*

That's right, yes, yes. It was pure instinct. Yeah.

*Clare: Yes. Well, thank- all one can say is thank goodness for your family. Thank goodness.*

Yes.

*Clare: Your mother's great instinct. Those photos are- are marvellous. They're very evocative. And I've just got copies here, but they're black and white of course, but that gives a lot of atmosphere of the period, of the time. And - you know? They're very good photos. Very good photos.*

She was a very- she was very- always very elegant, my mother.

*Clare: Yes, I was going to say, extremely elegant. And I mean, you- you children are nicely dressed. You're nicely turned out.*

Oh, yes, yeah.

*Clare: You- you have-*

Well in those days, you know, we were- nowadays we're all scruffy. But we were not then. Then, you know, it wasn't the fashion to be scruffy.

**[1:20:20]**

*Clare: Not at all, no; standards were completely different.*

Yes.

*Clare: And people didn't- of your generation you- as children, you weren't wearing lots of jeans and trousers and things.*

There was- no! There was- we were, you know, as I say, there was a completely different fashion. You know, people were more formally dressed. My father always-

*Clare: Yes*

And my father with a jacket and always with a tie, you know, so. [laughs]

*Clare: Yes, I, I remember. I know from my own parents. And long socks. I do remember long- I think they're in the photo where there's just you and your brother, after you've had an argument.*

Yeah.

*Clare: And I think you'd got- you've got nice coats on and- and then you've got long socks. Probably cause it was quite cold!*

Always falling down, yes. [laughs]

*Clare: Yes. Well you would have been cold, I mean... But the- the birthday party photo is, is a wonderful photo.*

Yes, yes.

*Clare: And you're all posed – somebody- do you remember who actually took the photo? Was it-*

No.

*Clare: Maybe a professional photographer was brought in?*

I don't think so. No, it would have been, would have been maybe my father. I don't know.

*Clare: Yes.*

I- I cannot remember.

*Clare: But it's a- it's a great photo.*

Yes.

*Clare: If I could see in more detail, I might be able to work out what you were eating. But of course, I can't see that amount without a magnifying glass. But it's very nicely posed, and arranged, and there's the long table. And, and obviously a nice apartment, nice things in the background. I can't really see what you've got in the background exactly, whether it was a window perhaps or a nice light.*

We had- we had a very nice apartment, which, you know, in, in, in a nice part. Not the best part of Chemnitz. Not- we were not in the poshest part, so-called. Yeah.

*Clare: Right. But it was but nice, all the same.*

Yeah – oh, yeah.

*Clare: A nice, middle class, professional area.*

That's right. Yeah. Yeah.

*Clare: And yes, the picture here, which I think- Yes, at the spa. You know, your parents are very nicely turned out. You said, your father, tie, suit and a hat. I think he's got a hat on. And your mother, with a hat.*

Yes, in those days the women would always wear a hat of course.

*Clare: Yes, and- and then you too, you've got a nice summer dress on. So, it must have- well, it was in the summer, I suppose. And you've got a pretty dress.*

Yes.

*Clare: And then your- your brother is in a kind of a suit but with knee-length trousers.*

That's right, yes. Yeah.

*Clare: Not long ones, and long socks.*

[1:23:06]

No, in those days they didn't wear long trousers in those.

*Clare: No.*

Children, until they grew up, they never wore long trousers. Always in...

*Clare: Yes. But that was the same here, I do believe.*

Yeah.

*Clare: Well, thank you so much, Stella, for sharing these photos. You know that really- it brings to life so much.*

Yes.

*Clare: Which you've done anyway, by all the things that you mentioned last time we did a recording. But this kind of just adds something extra. Something visual. So, you know, we're very grateful for all your time, twice now. So, thank you so much.*

Well, it's a pleasure, it's my pleasure.

*Clare: Well, it is our pleasure. It's my pleasure. It has been absolutely great talking to you. I'm going to stop the recording shortly, but I'm going to ask you to stay there for just a few more minutes, because there's a few things in the biography list that I need to ask you, that Beate would like- just a few more details when you filled in your biographical details, which I*



*will ask you. So, I don't need to record it, cause I'm just going to fill it in myself. So, I'm going to end the recording now, unless there's something- unless there's something else you wanted to add at all before we stop the recording? It's up to you.*

*Alex: I- I've got an idea. You know when you were in Prague, you, you- your father applied for- to emigrate- emigrate to Australia.*

Yes.

*Alex: And his- his application was refused.*

Yes, that's right. Yeah.

*Alex: So, he- his- her father was, you know, they were all living in this one-bedroom-flat, together with the doctor, sharing, you know, one bed. And the floor- and-*

Well, the doctor and my brother slept on the floor in the kitchen.

*Alex: Yeah.*

And my, my- my parents and I slept on the floor, on mattresses. We didn't have beds, we just had mattresses.

*Alex: And they didn't- they didn't have a phone.*

**[1:25:11]**

No.

*Alex: And they were scurrying about trying to get asylum - without success - all over the place. I mean, that- that may be a kind of, you know, eventually this magic letter came from Poland that suggested that they had relatives and they could get a visitor's visa to the UK.*

My- my grandparents-

*Alex: But that wasn't- but that wasn't at the beginning of their stay-*

No.

*Alex: That was at some time during it. So, you know, they were exploring where they might end up. You know, because they- although they'd moved from this spa to Prague, from Prague, you know, they had to then- they didn't have their next move planned! So, they had to, you know, work out- and Hitler was only, you know, Hitler was going to go into Prague in March, not that necessarily- but was already in the Sudetenland. So, I think- I think it may- I don't know if you want to talk to that a bit.*

Well, I think- I- I don't know whether you've got it on record, but my, my- my grandfather in Warsaw wrote to us to say, look, get- his sister was living in, in England and get her- and get her to- get her to get, get you visiting visas to get to England. So that's- that was how it started. And she managed. She and her, her son managed to get us these visiting visa in... so, which was- we just had to get- the, the way we had to get to England was by aeroplane because we were- if we hadn't used a plane, we would have to go across Germany again, which was too- too dangerous. So, we had enough money for airfare. So, that was lucky. So, on the- was it on the 13<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup>?

*Alex: Of December?*

No, on the- September the 6<sup>th</sup> 1938, we managed to get a flight to Belgium, and from Belgium to- to London, Croydon airport, so that- that- which saved our lives.

**[1:27:33]**

*Clare: Yes, and what an adventure that must have been. And there was some [inaudible] that actually I- I forgot to ask you in the original recording, Stella. Your grandparents, who were in Warsaw-*

Yes.

*Clare: And they really helped save you because they then remembered their sister in London.*

Yes.

*Clare: What happened to those grandparents in Warsaw?*

Well, all we- in, in fact Alex is trying to get some, some information of how they perished, whether they were in, they were- where they were killed. Whether they were killed in Warsaw, or whether they were in concentration camps. We had no idea. But nobody- no- none of them survived.

*Clare: Yeah, I was thinking because it was Warsaw, it would have been a very, very dangerous place. So, you didn't hear from them again, once you'd got to London-*

Yes.

*Clare: You- you lost contact with them.*

That's right, yes. Yes.

*Clare: And another tragic story-*

Another, yes- tragic-

*Clare: Another- another amongst so many.*

Yes, yes. Yes.

*Clare: Terrible.*

And the same- same with my mother. She had a, a large family of relations in the- in, in Cracow, in Poland. And only two people managed to get out and survived. But a young man who who later joined the British Army, and one other woman who managed to get to, to Israel or Palestine at the time. They were the only survivors. Yeah. Oh, and the- Oh, no, my

mother's- she had two step-brothers, and one managed to get to Peru with his wife. So he was another survivor, yeah.

*Clare: That was a long, long way to go to Peru.*

Yes, yeah, exactly. I don't know how they managed it but that's where they went. Yeah.

*Clare: But luckily, and very much thanks to your grandparents, you came to London.*

That's right. Yes.

*Clare: Your family came to London, so-*

That's-

*Clare: So, they did a great thing, then.*

Marvellous, of course - yes.

*Clare: Yes. And then here you are now, in- in London. Alive. Well.*

Yes.

*Clare: With- with, with a family.*

Exactly.

*Clare: So, it is- as you say,*

A, a- a series of luck, right through my whole life. Yeah.

*Clare: Yes, as you said before when we were talking, you consider yourself to be a lucky woman.*

Yes, yes. Still I- I mean, you know, obviously so, you know, some guardian angel looking after me. [Laughs]

*Clare: Yes, well Stella, thank you so much. I'm going to end on that very positive note. I'm going to stop the recording, but I just want to ask you a few things, so don't go away.*

Right.

*Clare: All right. Thank you so much. Stop.*

*Leave that stop now. I'll just make sure that it has.*

**[01:30:56 recorded interview ends. Blank to-]**

**[01:53:01 - final end timing]**