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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

<b>Collection title:</b>	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
<b>Ref. no:</b>	131

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Schindler
<b>Forename:</b>	Hilda
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Female
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	12 May 1920
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Berlin, Germany

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	26 October 2006
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	3 hours 2 minutes

## **REFUGEE VOICES THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE**

**INTERVIEW: 131**

**NAME: HILDA SCHINDLER**

**DATE: 26 OCTOBER 2006**

**LOCATION: LONDON**

**INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ**

### **TAPE 1**

BL: We are conducting an interview with Mrs Hilda Schindler.

HS: Miss

BL: Miss Hilda Schindler. We are conducting an interview with Miss Hilda Schindler and it's the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2006. We are in London and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

BL: Can you please tell me your name?

HS: My name is Hilda Schindler

BL: And what was your name at birth?

HS: It was exactly the same.

BL: And when were you born please?

HS: On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1920.

BL: And where were you born?

HS: In Berlin

BL: Miss Schindler thank you for doing this interview with us for Refugee Voices. Could we perhaps start by you telling us a bit about your family background?

HS: My family background, well I was an only child. Very, very much on the level of friendship with my parents. It's the sort of thing one talks about now, you know. Especially with my father, we did just about everything together. And I grew up in a very comfortable home, flat. I always say that my life really started I suppose at the age of 13 when things rather went the wrong way. Up to then I'd been going to school. School wasn't very far from where I lived so I could walk there, and later on - that was the elementary school - and later on when I went to the grammar school, the

Lycee, that was also within walking distance. Virtually, more or less almost just across the road.

**Tape 1: 2 minutes 15 seconds**

BL: Where was that?

HS: Also in Berlin. In the Wetzelstrasse in Berlin. In the same road as my synagogue that I went to, not very frequently. But it became... All the things that happened regarding family and school and shopping and everything was all very much in walking distance in northwest Berlin.

BL: What was the address where you lived? Where did you live?

HS: The address now was Wetzelstrasse. I think it was something ..., 70 something, but I can't remember that very well. I do remember funnily enough a police station. Not a big police station. Must have just been a sub-office or something, only a few doors away which was very strange because there were all flats and no shops along there. But why I do remember it is because my little terrier had been run over. He just disappeared and the next thing, there I was going or running along the road with – not the bicycle...the... What's the other thing on wheels?

BL: Scooter?

**Tape 1: 3 minutes 47 seconds**

HS: Scooter. Thank you. I saw a sack lying outside the police station and four little white legs sticking out which did not please me. You can imagine a 6 or 7 year old screaming her head off, 'What's that dog?' And it was my little terrier. Curiously enough I've remembered that on and off over the years in connection with all sorts of totally different things.

BL: With what sort of things?

HS: Well, possibly, possibly connected with animals. Because I'm very fond of animals so it always clicks with something. Although I had various other dogs afterwards. But I always remember those four little legs sticking out underneath that sack. They hadn't removed it yet. My grandmother lived around the corner, so that was easy to crash in there.

BL: What was her name please?

HS: Her name was Cohen, Jeanette Cohen. She was absolutely fantastic. At the age of 75 she used to still sit on the floor playing with us or whatever nonsense we got up to. And she was a real...She had 13 children. But, as some time ago, they didn't all live. But eventually a very interesting connection came up, it only came up I think about 3 years ago in connection with my synagogue. Now, when her youngest daughter, my mother's youngest sister, got married we had a rather lovely photograph with all the uncles and aunts from both sides. This must have been in 1930-something. And as I said about 3 years ago a little lad in the religion school where I teach - Southgate

Progressive Synagogue- or then taught, and where I'm a member, brought in his project he had done about the Holocaust, about the Holocaust in... He did this for school and it was very, very good.

**Tape 1: 6 minutes 34 seconds**

HS: And amongst the photographs was a little boy called Günter Spiegel. So I said, 'Oh, I knew a Günter Spiegel, and he had bright red hair!' So this little lad said to me, 'My grandpa's got bright red hair.' So it turned out that this Günter Spiegel whose name is different now was actually one of those people that I did know all those years ago. Although he was not on that photograph, there was somebody on that photograph whose face I sort of recognised when one of the children in the religion school was enrolled some years ago. And this child was the brother of the boy who had brought in the project. Well, it turns out that that chap in the photograph was the little boy's great grandfather. So the members in our synagogue, we are literally second cousins, second cousins, third cousins. That is the lovely side to it. The really lovely side to it. But the tragic side to that was that the auntie's and uncle's little boy, Peter, was to come with me when I eventually emigrated to England. I had in fact already adopted him. There was a special adoption situation done although I was only 19 years old and I was to bring Peter with me. The people I was going to – where I had my domestic job – were quite happy to have him. He was 3 years old. At the last dying minute she wouldn't let him go. And it was not until we discovered that relationship here with the people, that they had meanwhile discovered that he died with his parents in Auschwitz. But the extraordinary thing is that I have never ever in anywhere else seen such likeness of people, facial likeness, in a family. Because only two years ago a younger brother was interviewed, a younger brother was enrolled and I happened to be in the office that morning and I sort of thought, 'Oh! There's that face again!' Exactly this little child, his grandfather, and the child's great grandfather, and his brother – they've all got exactly the same face.

BL: But if the little boy didn't survive, who came? Who...?

HS: The others of the same family. The little boy, that was one of them. There were goodness knows how many brothers. One of them married my mother's sister. He had a number of older brothers. And one of those is the great grandfather of this family now. And several on both sides of the family came through. No, not of my family but on that other side of the family in America, in... and here.

**Tape 1: 10 minutes 25 seconds**

BL: Tell me more about your mother's parents. Where did they come from?

HS: My mother's parents came from East Prussia. I never knew my grandfather because he died before I was born. But I was told that above their house in Nordenberg – their name was Cohen – that above their house was the sign of the priestly blessing. So whether he was a Cohen... I must assume that he must have been a Cohen. Otherwise I've never heard of this happening anywhere but I was told that that was so. I've never seen a photograph. So he had died a few years before I was born so I never knew him. Curiously enough both my grandfathers had the name Adolf. It must have been a very fashionable name at the time!

BL: What was the profession of your grandfather, do you know?

HS: I've no idea. No idea at all.

BL: Did they move to Berlin?

HS: Oh yes because my mother worked in an office during the First World War, or even before that, I think. In an office of a building company I think or Development Company or something. And my father worked there for a short while. I think it was whilst he was invalided out of the army. He went back into the army afterwards, but he was invalided out. And he worked there and worked there again after he came out of the army altogether. And I have been told a very amusing story. They worked at a double-sided desk. My mother on one side and my father on the other side. And they disliked each other to such an extent that they had a thing put in between them so they couldn't see each other. And nevertheless, in 1918 they got married!

BL: What sort of office? Where did they work?

**Tape 1: 12 minutes 58 seconds**

HS: I think it was developing... developers or builders or something like construction company or something like that. I think my father had worked in something like that before he worked there. Whether it had anything to do with that I'm not sure, but there was some sort of connection, there was something that he already knew something about.

BL: Where did they get married?

HS: They got married in Berlin

BL: In which synagogue?

HS: In the... I don't know, although somewhere or other and I honestly don't know where it is. I did have it. There is a marriage certificate but it's not a Ketuba... It's not like a Ketuba that we see now. It was a liberal one, but it was not in the Wetzelstrasse one where we lived. But it was somewhere near there. I haven't got the faintest idea where. I just don't know where that sheet's gone. I've got a copy of it, but I don't know where it is.

BL: And your mother's family. Were they quite religious, or were they observant?

HS: No, no. Very sort of High Holy Day synagogue attendance sort of thing, you know. Nothing very strict at all. We had a sort of a Seder there, but nothing overwhelming in any way whatsoever.

BL: Tell me a bit about your father's family please.

HS: My father's family... Let's start at the beginning. My father's grandfather was a rabbi and he was in fact the first, one of the first students at the first Liberal Seminary

in Breslau –what was the principal’s name? Oh, the principal’s name was Frankel, Zachariah Frankel. He was one of their first students. He rose to a very considerable position. He eventually was the first Jew in Germany to be appointed as a city councillor. He was also..., he wrote a lot of children’s – not prayer books, rather readers - for mainly learning Hebrew, I think. And he was also the editor of a newspaper which I believe was called the ‘Jüdische Rundschau’.

**Tape 1: 16 minutes 11 seconds**

HS: And... he travelled quite a bit because in his records I have of his life he was in Magdeburg eventually. That’s where he was for a long while but he was also in Torun which was then Posen in Germany, or whatever. And it was whilst he was a student that the students got out a protest against Samuel Raphael Hirsch who had - either he or his colleagues - had made a pronouncement that any of these students of progressive parents or Jewish parents sent to that college helping them to become rabbis came out as adulators and Sabbath desecraters. And it’s pretty obvious that the students didn’t like that and they wrote a protest which I’ve got a copy of, which is amazing to read. And my father, he was to make my father Bar Mitzvah. What I recall of my dad was that he was very fond of his grandpa. But for some reason or other, whether he was ill or something that happened, somebody else had to officiate. Which my dad didn’t like at all, whether it was a personal dislike or whether it was a 13-year old child’s, ‘Oh I don’t like that!’ sort of thing... And for many, many years that had an effect on him. Synagogue didn’t mean very much to him at all.

BL: To your father?

HS: To my father. Until the Reform Movement started. Now reform and liberal in Germany were exactly in reverse. Reform was ultra reform, if I can put it that way. So much so that some of the groups that started had Sunday services and things like that. But I think how he, why he was drawn to it may have been because the Hitler business had started. He was a socialist – he was active in the Social Democrat Party and I think it all somehow merged together in his thinking and his appreciation of things. But I was the one who used to go to... I quite enjoyed going to the synagogue which was only across the road anyway. And a cousin of mine went there as well and she had her confirmation there together with the rabbi’s daughter. But I wasn’t terribly..., none of us were very actively religiously Jewish.

**Tape 1: 19 minutes 38 seconds**

BL: What was your grandfather’s name please?

HS: My grandfather’s name was Adolf Schindler.

BL: And his father?

HS: His father. Ah! I don’t know what his father’s name was. Because my great grandfather was my grandmother’s father.

BL: I see, so the rabbi...

HS: The rabbi was Rama,. Moritz Rama and his daughter was Recha who was my grandmother.

BL: From your father's side?

HS: On my father's side, that's right. I remember her very well. Although I was only 2 years old, because she used to live with my father's sister and brother in law. And one day I came dashing into the room and the divan was empty. The bed divan where she used to lie down sometimes in the day – it was empty. She was dead. And I was only two years old, and I've got that picture – I could draw it! After that there is no memory of anything for ever so many years. For some reason or other that stuck. Although she was not as active as my other grandmother who was playing with us. Grandma Rama just couldn't do that. So that's my memory of her.

BL: And you were two, you said?

HS: At that time I was only two years old. I only discovered that afterwards. I mean I've always had that memory and then discovered that she died in 1922, so I was only two.

BL: What other memories do you have of that time of growing up in Berlin?

**Tape 1: 21 minutes 33 seconds**

HS: What other memories? Going for long walks with my dad. And that must have been some very early memories because we lived fairly near the River Spree, near one of the bridges. And I have always remembered that when I went out for walks with him and when we came back, the last bit I was too tired to walk and he had to carry me on his shoulders. And I must have been quite little then because it's not exactly easy to carry somebody, especially after a long walk. What I do remember, which actually was brought to my mind a few days ago in connection with something; in the flat one morning I dashed from either my parents' bedroom to mine or the other way, and I slipped on the in the little passage way. And in the little passageway on one side there was the bathroom and something else and on the other side was a recess with the electric or gas meter or something. And I fell. And I still have the sign to show it because I cut my head open. And it was in the winter because dad carried me to the doctor and there were drips of blood all the way along. He stitched it up and I banged my feet into his tummy whilst he was stitching it up, evidently without any anaesthetic or anything. That's something that stuck in my mind, lots of fun at school and at home. Although I was an only child, I had lots of friends. Goodness knows how many cousins. All little boys. The older ones were... there were some boys, older ones.

**Tape 1: 24 minutes 0 second**

HS: I also remember Walter Woida. Because Walter Woida is my second cousin and I remember pushing him in a pram. So he's a bit younger than I but it was one of these enormous prams and I remember having to hold on sort of like that to push it. And what else is there in those early years? Oh yes. From the elementary school we, the Jewish boys and girls had to go to another school – not very far – to have our



religious education. RI it's called now. The other people there must have been going for some while and I remember somebody trying to teach me Hebrew. Well, I thought it was the funniest thing. Eventually I discovered it was the Shema – that is the first lesson. I remember the teacher standing opposite me, so she was looking at it back to front, and she was pointing, 'She.- mah .' And I thought to myself 'what is this?' And then she asked the class something and all hands went up. I hadn't the foggiest idea what was going on. Whether I learned anything in that at all I just cannot remember. It was later on in the grammar school where twice a week - I think it was Mondays and Thursdays - the Jewish girls had their lessons separately and I think the Catholic girls had their lessons separately – it was three lots. And then we did really learn something because that was aiming for the proper examinations. The examinations at the age of 15 and then the Abitur at the age of 18.

**Tape 1: 26 minutes 16 seconds**

BL: What was the name of the school?

HS: Kleist-Lyzeum. Which takes me forward years and years and years and years to Israel. Now I had to leave that school which I'll come to in a minute, but the first time I went to Israel was in 1959. We were in Tel Aviv the morning after we had arrived going along Ben Yehuda Street, looking in a shop window. And a lady behind me kept going sideways trying to look over my shoulder. I thought she wanted to look at something in the window. And suddenly she said, 'Kleist-Lyzeum?' So I said, 'Yes...' She was somebody who had been in the same school but she was two or three years younger, and of course one tends to remember the older ones. The little ones remember the older ones. And many years later suddenly they lived in London, they were also there as visitors. Lived in London! They became members of our synagogue but only for a very short time because they then moved to Brighton where I think they still live. It was a most extraordinary thing because it was something like over 20 years in between. But the school, that Kleist-Lyzeum was a brilliant school. It was absolutely amazing. It was a brand new building and it had just about everything you can dream of in the way of education. As well as this, in the underground in the cellar part of the buildings, we had a fixed rowing boat so that we could be taught to row before we... Because we went out once a year to a boat trip, the school's rowing boat used to escort the riverboat, which was great fun. And up on the top was a tennis court! The wire fences up on the top were so high that one could quite easily play tennis up there.

**Tape 1: 28 minutes 57 seconds**

HS: And the relationship between the pupils and the teachers was quite, quite amazing. Well, the best thing is to tell you how I got there. It wasn't like the 11-Plus but it was an examination. But you had already; there was already some sort of selection process before you went for the examination. And you went to whatever school you were going to for the exam. There must have been – I don't know – about 300 of us or something. Anyway, we started the exam, and our group were having quite good fun. I suppose there must have been in our group 20, 30, something like that – if that. And when we went for a break out in the grounds and we had thought, 'Oh this is great fun. What a funny exam, you know.' And we found other people in floods of tears, 'It was so horrible and it was so hard.' When we came back again after

break the headmaster came in and congratulated us on becoming pupils at the school. Apparently our recommendation had been so high that we didn't actually need the examination. And that's why this rather peculiar situation that 20 or so of us went to the school automatically. When eventually I had to leave the school in 1935 because of the Nuremberg Laws and all that business, the teachers... Oh, my aim for the future was medicine. I wanted to study medicine, either gynaecology or surgery – or any branch of medicine for that matter.

**Tape 1: 31 minutes 25 seconds**

HS: And my teacher said, or bade me farewell and said, 'See you back on the staff.' They must have been psychic because at that time it never occurred to me that I should go into the teaching profession. But what they saw, goodness only knows. And in between I had an interesting situation. Let's call it interesting - at the age of 13, just after Hitler had just come into power. We were wandering around the playground and some of the senior girls made some rather nasty remarks about one of the girls I was walking around with. Admittedly she looked very what is sometimes called as 'typically Jewish'. And they were making some very nasty remarks. And I got one of those girls by the throat and had to be separated because there might have been a rather tragic end to that. But the school as such was...well, wouldn't have wanted us to go if it was up to them. Let's put it that way. Neither the Head nor the rest of the staff and as I said, that was quite an amazing relationship between the staff and the girls.

BL: How many Jewish girls were in that school or in your class?

HS: I have no idea. Because of the area I was in there might have been quite a few. In my class –I have a photograph of it somewhere –there were about 30 in the class, and there were definitely 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. But my closest friends were the Hitler Youth girls, because we had been such great friends before. And there was no..., it was not..., we were mates together. That sort of thing didn't arise.

BL: And they stayed friends with you?

HS: They stayed friends for quite a while. Of course when you go to a different school and have different surroundings it's a different situation. But on the various photographs that are here as well as in the exhibition, you can see that when they were out on any trips, there they are in their black skirts and white blouses and anybody else is wearing just anything, because we didn't wear a school uniform. So it wasn't covered up by the school uniform in any way whatsoever.

**Tape 1: 34 minutes 33 seconds**

BL: So in general you didn't experience much anti-Semitism in the school.

HS: Not in the school at all. But for that incident I can't remember anything at all which again is different in different areas, even in Berlin in different areas and certainly in different towns.

BL: So what was the area called where the school was?

HS: Oh, the road where we moved to was called Alt Moabit and the whole area was actually Moabit. I don't think it had any name of its own because it wasn't the Tiergarten part any more. It wasn't the Moabit any more. Just the north west whatever. I can't recall that it was anything particular.

BL: And where was the Jewish school you had to go to?

HS: The Jewish school was in Grosse Hamburger Straße which is quite an interesting address. Both the synagogue I went to and the Grosse Hamburger Straße school share the questionable honour of being collection reception - whatever you want to call them - centres for the last deportations to Auschwitz. Now Grosse Hamburger Straße was near the Oranienstraße Synagogue which is quite totally in use again now and has been for years. It also had Moses Mendelssohn's grave in our bit of the playground which joined an old burial place and that was there. It had quite an interesting ... Well, Werner van der Zyl was one of the teachers there. I liked him very much. I wasn't keen on the school as such. It was so different from where I had been, that the last year wasn't at all funny. And unfortunately I had an accident there which was the cause of my arthritis now which shouldn't have happened.

BL: What happened?

**Tape 1: 37 minutes 18 seconds**

HS: I was swinging over the parallel bars and unfortunately somebody touched my leg and I crashed down. One of these things that happens. The problem was that it wasn't taken very seriously at the time, you know. But it wasn't till 30 years later that the radiologist decided in an x-ray that the cause for the problem probably lay in that. That didn't please me very much...you know to learn that after 30 years. I thought, 'Oh. Maybe that was the reason I didn't like the school.' But it was so, so terribly different in the way everything was done.

BL: Which way?

HS: Although there were one or two people teaching there who were very.... Unfortunately I can't really remember her name, she was a very prominent person also in the Social Democrat Party. I don't remember her name. There were some superb teachers there - no question about that. But it was so different. I think that was the major problem, you know. One...no that was later. I've got an interesting bit about another synagogue, but that happened later- Kristallnacht actually. I don't know if you want to know anything before that, or...?

BL: You say it was different. What was the biggest difference between the schools?

HS: Well, it wasn't stricter and yet it... I can't quite...I've never been able to put my finger on what the difference was. Partially possibly because of the relationship between the youngsters and the teachers. It wasn't terribly formal. Very good results were achieved. Maybe it was because I had been in a school which was absolutely the tops; I mean let me give you an example. We did a number of all-European youth competitions to do with Math, to do with Languages, to do with Art and practically

each time we came out if not the top, then amongst the top of things. Of several European countries joining in, but not in a way of being pressured into it but being...

**Tape 1: 40 minutes 38 seconds**

HS: I'll give you two examples. One was of the relationship. We had a wonderful, wonderful student for quite a while in – a science student. But she was ever so shy, ever so nervous, but she was super. When it came to one of her lecturers coming in, who was a most peculiar lady, she was ever so nervous. So we had worked out beforehand – we were all of 13 or 14 years old - we had worked out what we were going to ask her, so she went through this thing with absolutely flying colours. And after that she then became much more confident with whatever she was doing. The other thing was – oh I was involved in that - an art exhibition. And we put in pictures we had drawn in the zoo. We had got permission to go to the zoo, every fortnight or every week or something and do all sorts of pictures of the animals, which also enabled us to play with little tiny lions and goodness knows what. And our collection again won the competition of all over, which of course.., two totally different things. We didn't have – we had a very fine needlecraft department. There was no cookery because in a grammar school you didn't do cookery. That was a different type of school. In that sort of thing. Now the Grosse Hamburger Strasse, probably for political reasons – there were lots of things they probably might have been able to do that they just couldn't to any more because it was after all Nazi Germany. And before I could go across the road, then I had to travel on the underground/overground. So maybe all that together added up.

BL: How aware were you of the political situation at the time?

**Tape 1: 43 minutes 22 seconds**

HS: Oh, it became very obvious. My Dad, as I say my father was an active Social Democrat and I was not actually in any youth group but I was in some demonstrations against the Nazis. It became pretty obvious. And afterwards my father lost his business, which was not totally due to the Nazi situation – only partially. But the... bank manager at the 1929 Wall Street Crash, his bank manager committed suicide and a lot of her clients were affected by whatever had been happening – whatever had caused that. And he lost his business partially also because of the Nazis but I can't remember the details of that. And shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933 - by that time we had moved to another flat in Alt Moabit with a huge park opposite - I was doing my homework in my bedroom. We were on the third floor and I heard what I thought was a car crash outside. There was a 'Bang, Bang, Bang' and things happening. And the next thing, we had a number of SS officers coming into the house, coming up to the flat, and questioning my father and my mother. Fortunately we had one of Dad's old Army colleagues staying with us for literally a couple of weeks. They were moving from one flat to another and couldn't get in so for some reason they were staying with us just for a couple of weeks. And he was a Nazi member and he came out of his room and started talking to these fellows. Both Dad and this chap had been invalided out of the Army so they were both wearing the relevant badge or whatever. So he spoke to them and they went away again and they took Dad away with them. So my mother had a sort of mild heart attack, one after the other which was one of her problems anyway. And he went with mother to the Gestapo

headquarters where Dad had been taken. And there again, the only thing that saved him was the disabled badge. He came home. He was already working in the Jewish Social Services. And that's in reply to what you said how it affected us.

**Tape 1: 46 minutes 54 seconds**

HS: He was working very hard also for people to try and get out of the country. But I don't think he realised that we also ought to be doing something about it. The following year, 1934, mother and I went to Luxembourg to our relations there. My mother's sister was there. And meanwhile Hindenburg had died and to our utter amazement the black, white and red flag, with the mourning veiling was hanging out of our window. And of course that would not have been the flag that Dad would have put out at any time; it would have been a gold one. So he said, 'Well, we will have good reason to mourn Hindenburg's death.' And of course he was quite right. And of course himself being saved at the Gestapo headquarters could not have happened unless the President was still alive. And... anyway, it wasn't until... well meanwhile of course I had left school and I was learning dressmaking to have something practical in the event of emigration. Then we came to Kristallnacht. It was a gorgeous day, weather rather like we have at the moment, beautiful day. And in the evening the telephone rang and a voice, a familiar voice said, 'Get out! Get to the girls!' A little while later, my Dad's brother phoned him. 'Meet you at aunties'; let's get there as quickly as possible. Need to talk you to.' He had no idea what had happened.

**Tape 1: 49 minutes 9 seconds**

HS: Well we went to the girls, because it was so urgent that voice. It was the voice of my aunt's son in law. He was not Jewish. She had a daughter of her first marriage. She wasn't Jewish herself either. And he was a very definite anti-Nazi, but he was a telegraph operator- very high ranking telegraph operator. And in order to hold a job in the telegraph offices – major telegraph offices - he had to join the SS. Very much against his beliefs. And that's what he was doing. He was warning everybody around the family because he knew what was happening which we didn't know. The girls were my mother's two unmarried aunts. Because he knew what was happening... he knew the order that so many Jewish men were to be arrested. Didn't know any more than that, but that. So he tried to empty the... wherever in the family he could do it. And we were there for a few nights. And he came along and wanted to help us some more. And Dad said, 'Go away! You'll be in trouble if you're seen with us. If you want to help us more, just get out of the way!' Anyhow a few days later, when everything had calmed down - and this is something they didn't even know at the Leo Baeck College – I gave them that information. I was going in the Fasanenstraße Synagogue - which again is in full use - which had then the offices of the Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland attached to it. My mother worked there, in Leo Baeck's office. And she had already by, a couple of days earlier, she had telephoned the fire brigade because someone told them it was burning and they said they didn't know anything about it. And I had gone back to work and I was delivering something, a dress or something, in a block of flats a little way away from the Fasanenstraße Synagogue and as I came down the lift I thought, 'It's still burning!' But it wasn't, it was the Ner Tamid, a Ner Tamid that has never gone out.

BL: Can you explain a bit, what is the Ner Tamid?

**Tape 1: 52 minutes 22 seconds**

HS: The Ner Tamid is the eternal light. It never went out. Now you can imagine that over the years this is imagination, I though. I may have dreamt this up. Until in – 50 years later – in 1988 in the Jewish Chronicle there's an article and I've got the copies from Professor Zondek, he was a consultant at Hammersmith hospital. He was a little boy of 6 or 8 years old and he describes exactly the whole situation; this eternal light that never went out and the fire brigade that didn't come out unless the houses next door started to burn. And since then I've seen a copy of the instructions what was to be done. So many men were to be arrested and fires in shops or houses and synagogues were not to be put out unless something else was in danger. Also along that time, during those days - I don't know whether it was the same day, maybe it was the same day - as I walked toward a bus or something I went past a shop – a toy and sports shop, near the - oh what was it called? - Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche in Berlin and there was a toy and sport shop which had been owned by Jews. And as I was going past I heard a little girl say - it was all smashed up, the glass hadn't been cleared away yet - and a little girl saying in English, 'Mummy, what's happened? So I sidled up because I heard the mummy answer, 'Some rather nasty and horrible people have done this.' I sidled up and whispered to her, 'Tell them when you get back home.' And I just poodled away.

**Tape 1: 55 minutes 0 second**

HS: And that's when it occurred to my Dad that it might be a good idea to at least get me out. Also during that time we discovered – we weren't ever quite sure of it but it was a shop a little way where we had lived in Alt Moabit - a shoe repairers. They had a daughter and they had the usual teenager trouble with her but it went rather deeper. The girl was a violent Nazi of about 14, 15 years old. And the lady, her mum was actually a Londoner. She had been a nurse during the First World War and they had married and this younger girl, younger daughter - they had some other children but they were perfectly ok - she had already denounced them for some totally dreamt up situation. And it came out through that that maybe she was the one who had made the accusation about my father a few years, all those years before when she was only 14 - she was older now, obviously - that he was meeting his socialist friends in the park in the morning. Well, all he was doing in the early hours of the morning was he was taking my little dog out for a walk. But we reckoned there was probably some connection there because they tried to get her, for years they tried to get her over here to her mother's relations and she wouldn't go. She knew exactly what they were trying to do and it was from then on that she started doing all these horrible things. What eventually happened to her, I've no idea but there seemed to be a connection there somewhere. Anyway my relations in Luxemburg then had a...Through their relations here they got me the domestic job.

BL: Miss Schindler before we hear that bit I think we have to change tapes, so we'll just have to take a little break.

HS: Yes.

**Tape 1: 57 minutes 37 seconds**

**End of Tape One.****TAPE 2****Tape 2: 0 minute 5 seconds**

BL: This is Tape Two. We are conducting an interview with Miss Hilda Schindler. You were just starting to tell us about your emigration.

HS: Oh yes, so where had we got to? Early 1938, no, in early 1939, after Kristallnacht my relations in Luxembourg tried to get out the whole family. Not just my family but all, my aunt, one of my mother's sisters. And they tried to get all the various families out to such as somewhere in South America. I believe it was Chile but I'm not quite sure. Eventually they got me out to... Via their own relations in London, my uncle's brother, they got me a domestic job which I accepted, - well of course I accepted it. And then quite recently, literally 4 or 5 weeks ago when I bought a rather lovely book from the Jewish Museum about Jewish art over the centuries I discovered inside it a copy of the application form of my employers to whatever, I suppose the Foreign Office to employ me. And there is an actual copy in there which I was so surprised to see. Anyway, I came to London on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1939. I'll tell you about what happened to the rest of the family in a minute. The family was in Muswell Hill. They went on holiday and as a result I found myself listening to the declaration of war on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September sitting in one of the little...(phone rings).

**Tape 2: 2 minutes 49 seconds**

BL: Shall we just interrupt? Yes.

HS: My employers had gone away on holiday so on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September I found myself alone with a little dog and was listening to the declaration of war. My employers then decided that they would evacuate. I can't remember whether they actually went to members of the family somewhere but they were definitely going to be away from London for the rest of the war. Together with my distant relations that had brought me here I found another job which became... We are in fact still friends because this family was very, very involved in the Red Cross, in all sorts of other organisations and one of the daughters, the younger daughter was driver to Churchill's son in law. I very soon of course had to do the Aliens Tribunal. It was a very interesting situation. It was at Highbury Court. Anyway I had the whole of the interview, all the various questions that they asked and eventually I was asked would I go back to Germany after the war. So I said, 'Definitely not.' So the Chairman asked me, 'Why can you be so sure?' So I said, 'Because the world had yet to see what Germany can do.' Unfortunately I was right. They awarded me a C Certificate which was free from all restrictions except where everybody was restricted like along the coastline and places like that. And the Chairman said, 'There's one more question I'd like to ask you Miss Schindler. Where did you learn your English?' So I said, 'At school.' So he said, 'Well I learned German at school but I can't speak it like that.'

**Tape 2: 5 minutes 26 seconds**

So I said, 'I hope you don't mind me saying so,' - because by that time I was quite cheeky - I said, 'If you don't mind me saying so sir, that's a longer time ago.' As a result I had everybody hooting with laughter. And so during the war I did fire watching. Warden's duties. Warden's messenger duties. Taking messages on bicycle and things like that. Helped in the Ladies' Red Cross shop. In fact one of the things that was brought into that Red Cross shop one day was the menorah that's standing in my sitting room now. The seven-armed candlestick which somebody had brought from a bombed out house somewhere. And the Red Cross shop in Muswell Hill was on the corner where St James's Church is and from that corner we very sadly watched London starting to burn, because Muswell Hill is very high so we could look down on the City and it really made us shudder when we saw that. On one occasion - I can't remember - were we in the shelter? Yes, we were in the shelter and I'd been on fire watching duty but I'd just got back to the shelter at the top of the road. Not in our own shelter but at the top of the road. The gentlemen eventually built our own shelter. But this was a shelter above the road - a brick-built shelter. And a doodlebug - that's with the flying bombs - I mean this was all towards the end of the war - the doodlebug came up and we literally saw it cut out, and we thought, 'Ah! What's it going to do next?'

**Tape 2: 7 minutes 42 seconds**

It was actually cutting in through some of the buildings in Queen's Avenue but didn't do a lot of damage. But in the morning we went round to see whether there were any casualties anywhere and there was somebody living right next to the police station. And he never would tell us where he was going to be. Because we used to go round the houses in the evening to find out who was going to be at home in case of an air raid. He would never let us know. On that morning we found him dead underneath the rubble. If we had known he was there, we could have got him out before. Very often these things used to cut out and then swoop on a bit more and eventually come down in the area of Southgate or Cockfosters. But at that time I little realised that Southgate and Cockfosters would mean a great deal to me because of my synagogue I belong to now and everything else, and where I live now. But talking about the war itself now, my relations eventually managed to get the permission for everybody, that's my parents and my mother's various sisters and their families, to leave Berlin - they all lived in Berlin - to leave Berlin on the very day that Germany invaded the Low Countries. So they were stuck.

**Tape 2: 9 minutes 37 seconds**

They had to go back home. Of course some of their flats had gone by then. From then onwards my parents shared my aunt and uncle's flat - my Dad's sister's flat. Her husband unfortunately had been in a concentration camp for some time although he was later released again. It was one of those wishy-washy accusations just like my father's at the beginning of the Nazi period. And eventually for several years - was it from 1941, no 1940 wasn't it? - from 1940 until towards the end of 1942 I had Red Cross messages, first of all letters and eventually Red Cross message correspondence with my parents. Of course it was all checked and checked and checked again. So if something was written on say 25<sup>th</sup> of February here or there it could take something until end of March or April to get there. And I've got quite a number of those Red Cross messages.

BL: What do they say?



**Tape 2: 11 minutes 20 seconds**

HS: Always hoping to see me again, always ending with a prayer for good luck. Usually asking for one or the other where they knew that somebody was either in America or – usually America - to try and get an affidavit and permission to go there. But none of them got anywhere because it...I tried, but it just didn't...nothing worked until eventually in 1942 they were deported – my parents were deported to Theresienstadt where my father died of malnutrition in - and I've got my mother's postcard to say - not saying that but just saying that her beloved husband died in Pesach – Passover, 1944. The postcards were sent to the non-Jewish relations in Berlin or the chap who had been my father's main traveller in his business. The non-Jewish relations in Berlin and their ..., that was in connection with the telephone call that we had on Kristallnacht, they hid my uncle, my mother's brother. They together with some other non-Jewish friends hid my uncle all through the war. How they managed it, God alone knows. But he lived all through the war and it was some while after the war that he died. And my aunt in fact converted directly after the war. But they still lived a few years very happily together after the war.

BL: Converted to Judaism?

**Tape 2: 13 minutes 48 seconds**

HS: ...To Judaism after the war. And they lived quite a number of years after the war. Now my parents were in Theresienstadt and my mother was on what appears almost, by what one reads, to be if not the last then one of the last deportations to Auschwitz on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1944. And I have the index cards which prove that nothing of this happened. The...during the...A very prominent person who was interned in Theresienstadt was of course Rabbi Leo Baeck. Now after the war, at one of the World Union of Progressive Judaism conferences, I met up with Leo Baeck again and my mother worked in his office before the war – yes before the war, that's right, however long she could. Already, not during the war – I doubt it, though I'm not sure on that. And somebody I think it was Rabbi Rayner who wanted to introduce me to him. And he straightaway immediately remembered my parents, from Theresienstadt and that my mother worked in his office. That was absolutely fantastic. I don't know whether you know the curious situation why Leo Baeck was not murdered.

BL: Tell us please.

**Tape 2: 15 minutes 57 seconds**

HS: He was in Theresienstadt and toward the end of the- it must have been around the time that my mother was deported to Auschwitz because it was right near the end of the war, Eichmann went to Theresienstadt and to his utter amazement saw Leo Baeck because he thought he had been done away with. It so happened that another 'Baeck', Leo Beck, not Baeck had either died or been killed in Czechoslovakia at that time. If ever there was a miracle, there was one. Because the work that Leo Baeck did after the war again right up until his death was absolutely fantastic. And I understand that there are still quite a lot of problems because...I believe the two families have got to know each other. Must have been grandchildren, great grandchildren, and nieces or

whatever. But I'm not sure about it. That may be something that somebody thinks is so.

BL: So you're saying by mistake they killed the wrong person?

HS: No they didn't kill him because report apparently went back to Eichmann or whoever, that he was dead! Well he wasn't and he did great work in Theresienstadt. I mean the writing that he did and the work that he did there was terrific, and the work that he did afterwards. So it's no wonder that so many institutions of learning and progress are named after him.

BL: But when did you find out about what happened to your parents?

**Tape 2: 18 minutes 17 seconds**

HS: That I found out after the war. Already during ..., amongst those letters, the information... I found that out after the war – that's right. I don't remember whether it was...I can't remember whether it was through one of the searching organisations or also directly through somebody who used to live in Luxemburg and got together again, because from Luxemburg they went to – where did they go? Oh, they went to Brazil and when they came back again... Because my uncle there had a prominent position - he was president of the Community, he was also Israeli Consul. So they did a lot of searching obviously, and I think it was also through one of the people who went back to Luxemburg -a friend of theirs, from...from Auschwitz, I think. She was an Auschwitz survivor, I think. She's long dead now, obviously, but she brought back quite a lot of information of people that she knew and of course through their position there they could sort of tie it all up fairly easily after a while. I also learnt then later on when I had all these postcards sent to me from Berlin, actually through the cousin who warned us. A huge, huge parcel arrived one day. A couple of carpets, - one of them is in the other room – rugs, a lot of papers, all these papers about my great grandfather and all this correspondence which was sent either to them or to the agent, that's the travel agent. And amongst the postcards there is one from my mother written in May 1944, I think. Yes, I think it's May. And it's saying, 'It was so nice to get your parcels...' that is to my relations in Berlin, 'It was lovely to get your parcels...' No, 'It was lovely to get your parcels for the Neumanns and for me.' And then she goes on to say... Well, that tells a huge story, that one sentence. The Neumanns, her elder sister and her brother in law had meanwhile been further deported to Auschwitz. The purpose of that was the Red Cross was allowed to make a film in Theresienstadt – in Terezin - how things were quite smooth and nice there and everybody had their own money and their own this and that, ha ha ha... But in order to do all that they had to get rid of 3,000 people!

**Tape 2: 21 minutes 44 seconds**

HS: And those two, my aunt and uncle were amongst those 3,000 and by saying, 'So nice to get the Neumann's and my parcel'; she was telling them the Neumanns weren't there any more. In the same way as her last postcard says, 'Going to move and in future I will only be able to correspond with you via the Reichsvertretung office in..' And then she says the place is not Fasanenstraße, it's near where they are living. And I wonder if she's trying to tell them something there. Of course that's

when she went to Auschwitz and there was nothing ever heard of her again. But this lady who went back to Luxembourg actually said something about my mother. It was years and years ago, I can't remember when, and I actually spoke to her about my mother when I was in Luxembourg. She was either on the same transport but survived, because almost immediately after that they emptied Auschwitz and started walking people back through southern Germany. Then afterwards somewhere later at the Northwood and Pinner Progressive Synagogue we had a get-together with people from Prague who had search offices in Prague and they gave me some more information. And they told me exactly what happened to my aunt and uncle with numbers and everything. Of all the things that didn't happen! That cousin, incidentally, who warned us, he wanted his wife to go and visit another aunt who at the time lived in Antwerp. Woida Bruno, Walter Woida's uncle. You know Walter Woida?

BL: No.

**Tape 2: 24 minutes 20 seconds**

HS: He is quite prominent...he always comes up in the AJR newspaper, time and again, running groups and things like that, a second cousin of mine. He wanted his wife to go on holiday there, take all our jewellery with her because we had to get rid of it all. And he said, 'I'll get on a ship as a telegraph operator and I'll jump ship.' But she wouldn't do it. She was too scared to do it. She was scared for herself, she was more scared for him and she wouldn't do it. So it never happened.

BL: So what happened to him during the war? What happened to this cousin?

HS: Oh, he was working in the telegraph offices in Berlin. And he, as I say, every time there was a chance... I mean he did what he possibly could. How he managed it, I do not know. How he got away with it, it's amazing how some people... Also he wasn't at all well. He was quite a young man but he wasn't at all well. He had a very serious kidney problem. Whether he tried some of this whilst he was on leave, I don't know, whether he made use of the disability, you know... made good use of it.

BL: Did you ever meet him again, after the war?

HS: No, because he died very soon after. We had correspondence and I think we spoke on the phone once, but his kidney problem eventually literally killed him. It was quite amazing how he had gone on so many years, you know.

BL: Let's just go back to the beginning actually of coming to England because we talked about it very quickly. Can you tell me about your first impressions when you arrived?

HS: My first impressions... Well my first impression was already on the boat. Coming across there was a huge blackboard to say that my employers were away and I would be spending the first couple of weeks with my newly found relations away in Hunstanton, which I did. So I didn't really... Oh yes, I stayed with them a few days in Muswell Hill as well. Do you know I can't remember very much of the very first

time? I think it got sort of washed out of the way with the war. Because there were so few weeks in between so that it was very difficult to...

**Tape 2: 27 minutes 30 seconds**

HS: The house that I ran there was quite a small house. The house that I ran afterwards was an enormous place. And everybody was always busy with voluntary duties or voluntary work. But very soon of course, High Holy Days came along so I thought I would go to what is now Belsize Square, it was called the New Liberal at the time. And to my utter amazement there was an awful lot of German in the service and they were doing the second day and that was all of German that I couldn't stand. Already on the boat I had already decided to myself, 'I am not speaking any German any more.' And that I couldn't stand so I went to the friends house overflow service from the Liberal Jewish Synagogue and probably my connections I began to make then started be off on being part of the movement, because I got to know Rabbi Danny Rich's mum and parents and a number of people, Lily Montagu. Very soon I started, I got involved in youth work, and because I was already a little bit too old to be a member, so I tended to be straight away one of the older ones. Or rather, when I really got involved I certainly was too old and I got involved with Lily Montagu, and Ezra Mattuck and working together which eventually is what the Leo Baeck College and the CJE and all that is now. Those were the seeds we laid when we were sitting around with a cup of coffee. And during the war it was with Rabbi Herbert Richer - a friend of mine who is still a member of our synagogue -, the teacher and a number of others all over the place that we became very active with the Youth Club or the Youth Group. And we met usually where the North London Progressive Synagogue used to be in Amherst Park and then as I said Rabbi Kokotek asked me to come to Southgate because we were great friends and they lived quite near where I was working.

BL: Did you know Rabbi Kokotek from Germany?

HS: No. No only from here. I knew them only from here. I got to know them in...through all this with the youth work. Partially through the New Liberal, and partially through Belsize Square and partially actually, well... refugees tended to get together in Belsize Square where of course he was. And of course he lived very near where I lived in Muswell Hill

BL: But this is much later, this is in the late 50s or...?

**Tape 2: 31 minutes 15 seconds**

HS: That, no that was in the '40's.

BL: Because Rabbi Kokotek was a rabbi in Belsize only in the...

HS: You know I can't remember the exact time. Oh, he was at North London and helped us in Southgate - that was a bit later - no that was in '46 because that's when he was...when he asked me to come with them. I... the... because some of the time he was...only then much later at the end of the war I went over to Dublin when he was in Dublin. But that certainly was at the end. But it was just a friendship that had built up amongst all the people. Also people from South London, quite a number

there, the Rich family of course because I got interested in the teaching. When I went to Southgate, I'd just become a member in Southgate and we had a meeting, I don't know, of one of the committees I got involved in in the Community Hall just here, because there wasn't a building or anything like that yet. And a Rabbi Doctor Brasch who died a couple of years ago, was rehearsing some Hanukkah stuff with the children in the hall in the same building. They were having awful trouble with somebody and I was walking through the hall, probably having a cup of coffee or something, having a peep in what was going on. And I said, 'If you do so and so I think it will work.' So he said, 'You come and do it better!' You know what? That's when I started my teaching because he said, 'Come and teach on Sunday mornings.' So I started to teach in Southgate and the services as well as religion school used to be in the Community Hall. On Saturday mornings the Ark, which was a large cupboard, used to be standing up on a table. And the Ner Tamid stuck on top – a little light stuck on top as the eternal light. I could never understand why they always used to trip over the cable. Why they didn't have a battery for just those few hours, goodness only knows. But in fact at the 50<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary we've been laughing about it because it's rather different now.

**Tape 2: 34 minutes 26 seconds**

BL: Where did you live at that time?

HS: At that time I was working as a dressmaker and I got myself a room with some people in Winchmore Hill. And there I was within walking distance of all this. And that was until 1956. I know who got me into teaching eventually – oh what's his name- Professor Winston's mum. She was a friend of a friend of mine. And she came one morning when we already had the building, the Southgate Liberal Synagogue, in the house in Chase Road where the synagogue is now. And she came one day. I had moved to a flat right up at the top of the building. I was secretary of the synagogue by then. So she came and she said, 'You are interested in teaching?' And I said, 'Well, it's a bit late, isn't it?.' So she said, 'No, I'll make an appointment for you with the Principal at Trent Park.' Which she did! And to this day she still says, - I mean she's now about 90-something, you know she's an orthodox Jewess - she says, writing that application is the best breaking of Shabbat she's ever done. And I went to see the Principal and we clicked straight away. in fact when I came into the room, he'd got papers in front of him and he said, 'What did you say your age was on here?' I said, 'Well it's correct.' He said, 'No, you can't be.' He thought I was much younger than what was there. And he said, 'Well look, I would accept you straightaway but I can't do it. You'll have to go through the special examination thing at the London University Institute of Education.' Which I did.

**Tape 2: 37 minutes 30 seconds**

HS: I was very surprised I must say that of the about over 300 people that were there, a comparatively small number got through. Some while before I thought, 'Well, if I want to do that, I have no examination qualifications at all. I think I better at least have an English qualification.' So I started going to Enfield College, the evening classes. And after the second or third session the lecturer said, 'Have you got a minute Miss Schindler? I want to ask you something.' I thought he was going to ask me something about the war or something like that. 'Why are you coming to these

lessons? Why are you wasting your money?' I said, 'Well because I think having applied to Trent College, Trent Park, I think I ought to have at least an O-Level equivalent or whatever.' So he said, 'Yes, some of the others need it but you don't. Because you could stand here teaching them.' He asked me also where I'd learnt my English same as the Chairman of the Tribunal those years ago. So I didn't bother with that. I also found out whilst I was there that some people who had A level had to do extra English at the college. I was absolutely amazed. The years at the college were absolutely terrific. They really were. As I said before, I'd had history and needle craft but because the headmaster of the school where I did my first teaching practice had been half wanting to get me over two years whilst I was at college, I got that job eventually. And it was needlecraft. History has always been my passion aside from that and that I've done with Jewish studies. I did a lay minister's study with Rabbi Mattuck years ago and of course I've used it as teaching in the religion school over these years.

**Tape 2: 40 minutes 7 seconds**

BL: How did you finance your studies? Did you get any help with them?

HS: Yes. I had a grant but that was financed also out of the money, the reparations money that I got which amounted to 2 and 6, as it was, per day for my parents' lives from the day of deportation to the end of the war. That was what a life was worth! But nevertheless it financed my...and of course I had built up a bit of savings whilst I was doing my dress making. Then I have sometimes coached people, coached kids, exam coaching or something like that, you know.

BL: As a dressmaker did you work for yourself or did you work for a company?

HS: No I had a job in somebody's place in Marylebone High Street. Later on I got to know some people and we became great friends at Butlin's Camp on one occasion. And I then, we then built up a little... working from home but it didn't take off really to be something one could live on.

BL: Linked to this question did you have any contact during the war with the refugee organisations did they help you or assist you?

HS: No. At one point, and I can't remember when...Gordon asked me that ages ago – Gordon Greenfield. I think I was a member of the AJR years and years and years ago and then for some reason it dropped and I can't remember what the reason was or why. And then I picked it up again in more recent years. But I think what put me off was probably this business in Belsize Square, this business of doing things in German. I couldn't possibly think of doing a service in German it would have killed me altogether.

BL: Why?

HS: Emotionally. Emotionally - emotionally. I've had time and again invitations to go to Germany as you can imagine, either as interpreter or these invitations you get if you have lived, etc...And I could not trust myself what I might get up to. I remember being in Spain once. Was it Spain or was it Majorca? Anyway I was there with friends

and a bunch of - we'd been queuing for a bus, everyone had been queuing up very nicely - and a bunch of Germans started to push onto the bus. And I went like that (shows sweeping gesture) and they just went totally flying. Never again! And I'm quite sure that the slightest thing could spark me off and I don't want to take that risk. I think the problem with any of the refugee organisations - I went go in to all the meetings and all the things because it's the language. I don't want to know or have the whole thing over and over and over again. I'm a progressive Jew. Let's have progress, let's go forward! Let Kadima! [forward in Hebrew:]

**Tape 2: 43 minutes 54 seconds**

BL: You never went back to Berlin?

HS: No. my cousin from Israel has been back. He picked up the invitation from the burgomaster to... the invitation, but I won't do it. I can't do it. I wouldn't be able to. I certainly wouldn't be polite and I think I could become quite aggressive. The other day when I was giving a talk at the CCJ about all of this, Rabbi Hart said to me, 'It doesn't become any easier does it?' While I'm talking it's all right, it's afterwards that certain things can spark me off that don't even seem to have anything to do with it. Like the discussion sometimes about the immigrants nowadays. When you hear certain comments - whoops! It sparks off something, positive or negative - it could be either. I am most comfortable with children. Last Friday no - Friday before last, our Spy Club, the Youth Club of the synagogue, had a weekend in Mill Hill in a youth place.

**Tape 2: 45 minutes 45 seconds**

Usually I go to my Rabbi's family on Friday evening. And I they weren't asking me to come along because there are lots of stairs and things and I can't cope with them. And Abigail, the Rabbi's wife phoned me early on Friday afternoon. 'I'm here. You don't have to use any stairs. They've built a bridge from the car park into the building. No stairs.' So I went, he picked me up and I went. It was like being back at the Holiday school that I used to run with Rabbi Herbert Richer and somebody else. Like being in the upside down world of children, everything is totally different from what we do. When it's all children it's perfectly normal and perfectly ok. Anything people sort of criticise, when it's all kids it's totally different. And it was wonderful evening. But it's when question often are asked, you know to do with the Kristallnacht and things. 'How did people know which the Jewish shops were?' How could that cousin know to warn you?' Well the records are all there. And each time it brings back something else, something that one's even forgotten. And even now, although Abigail has been head of the religion school for some years now and she's a fantastic head of that but the first year she was going on sabbatical. There was a gap and she wanted me just to come to be there. And now I'm too old to be responsible for children. But I'm there every Sunday morning doing my particular thing, testing or doing some extra work that they do for which they get rewards and things, rather like the scouts, you know. And I'm responsible for that.

**Tape 2: 48 minutes 34 seconds**

And I do that and most of the work that has to be done, much recording and stuff which has to be done with that. So I'm involved in the synagogue as I told you. First

of all I was Secretary for 19 years. Whilst I was at College I was Secretary as well as teaching in the classes. And I asked one of the Senior Lecturers one day, 'Do you think I should give that up, that it's too much?' And she said, 'Unless you are too tired, don't give it up. It comes through in your teaching. The fact that you have no problems with a class of children that can be quite difficult to put it mildly comes from all the other work you are doing.' She'd come in as a lecturer when I had a class of 13, 14 years old in Wordsworth School [maybe Wandsworth?] And they were, well difficult is putting it mildly. Apart from which, the overhead projector hadn't been brought in so I had to talk about Elizabeth Fry and various other people of that ilk without having any of the pictorial stuff there - and I was only a student - to get along with it. Right bang in the middle of talking somebody suddenly brings in the projector. It had been forgotten. So I said, 'Well now in this room we haven't even got blackout.' Oh the kids thought what they could do they climbed up on the chairs, on the tables, and hung their coats up over the windows. Of course and she was in the room! So to calm that down again took all of 2 minutes. I said, 'Thank you very much that was a brilliant idea. Now let's all come and sit down because we otherwise wouldn't be able to see this.'

BL: So you think becoming a teacher and working with the young is part of not wanting to...?

HS: It's my life.

BL: It's to engage with the future?

### **Tape 2: 51 minutes 26 seconds**

HS: Yeah. Well that comes back to my teacher saying, 'See you back on the staff.' You know when I left school at 15. Perhaps they could see something of that relationship. I don't know.

BL: But did you talk about the past with friends, with other people?

HS: Oh yes, oh yes! On one occasion, one of those boys actually, he had a belt with a swastika on it. So I asked him, I said, 'I want to talk to you.' So I said, 'Where have you got that belt from?' So he said, 'My dad got it during the war from one of the soldiers.' So I said, 'Tell you what, I haven't got time now but later on, during break come and we'll sit down somewhere and we'll have a chat.' And I had a chat with him and said, 'I can understand that you want to wear it very proudly. But...' And I told him and 'Oh,' he said, 'I'm sorry.' And he was a real toughie. He said, 'I won't wear it again in school. Actually dad doesn't really like me wearing it. But I thought I must just show them what my dad has done.' And that I could understand too. He must have told the others. Shortly after that, a couple of years later we had Rabbi Samuels from Haifa came to visit. He had been at the JFS and he came to visit us. By then we were in the new buildings and he was interested to see the new building in Clissold Road which has been talked about an awful lot on the television, because the Clissold Park Centre which used to be the swimming pool has all sorts of things going wrong with it. Anyway he came because he wanted to see the new building they were building the new place in Haifa and he was interested to see it. And the class so fell in



love with him. The boys and the girls absolutely went mad over him. He was very good with youngsters.

**Tape 2: 54 minutes 16 seconds**

Later on that year at the annual Festival of Nations we used to have because we had so many national backgrounds in the school and parents are involved with the cooking and so on there was food, there was dancing, there was art, everything bringing in all the different backgrounds. And a bunch of West Indian boys and girls decided to be the Israeli group. And I had to teach the *Jerushalaim shel Zahav*, and they actually acted it out. They acted it out as if they were going up the mountain. One of the Indian girls carried that menorah right up. It was absolutely fascinating. It was a real togetherness of all the nations. And I had a feeling that it all started with that conversation we had because he then asked me whether I'd talk to the others as well and tell them some more of my experience. And as they got older... that class was right through. Eventually I had them, quite a large number of them, as sixth formers when I became head of sixth form as well. And one of them, going along Charing Cross Road one evening to the theatre with friends, one of the great big black fellows comes along the road and embraces me. I couldn't even recognise him. He was an actor by then in one of the big academies, I can't remember which one.

**Tape 2: 56 minutes 15 seconds**

But that was very funny. But that was one of that class and it all started off by talking things through properly, you know. And they wanted to know more and they came from all over the world, that lot.

BL: You're in a rare position in that you also had an exhibition about your life at the Jewish Museum.

HS: Yes, that was shown in Hackney, long after I had retired. Of course I retired in 1980. That thing was done in 1988. A class was taken to Hackney Town Hall to see the exhibition because Hackney Town Hall had hired it. And one of the kids - I was told that afterwards by somebody - one of the kids yelled out, 'Oh I know that! My mum was in her class!' It was really funny that.

BL: What did it feel like to have suddenly your sort of private life being displayed?

HS: Very strange because I had no intention of doing that. It was a friend who... a friend of mine who was working with Lady Elizabeth Maxwell on her book, something For the Future...Listening, learning...

BL: Remembering the Future

HS: Remembering the Future. And she wanted some, either some interviews or some pictures and things like that and she said, 'Oh I think I know somebody who would be useful.' And that's how it all started, and since then I've been in various places where people have asked me to come to the Holocaust talks. They've got it in Nottingham with Bet Shalom and oh, all over the place. Somebody once pinched one of the Red Cross letters because it had gone to one of the universities or colleges. Fortunately I already had the photocopies. They were not scanned then but there were at least photocopies. I think it's the last one. Yes, it's the last one, saying about...The one

where, 'We're going to the Protectorate' hoping to be able to correspond which of course they couldn't

BL: Miss Schindler we need to change tapes again.

**Tape 2: 58 minutes 52 seconds**

**End of Tape Two.**

### **TAPE 3**

BL: This is Tape Three. We are conducting an interview with Miss Hilda Schindler.

Perhaps we could just come back to the time when you had just arrived in England, when you were a domestic.

HS: Yes.

BL: What did it feel like to suddenly be a domestic?

HS: I was not very happy about it as you can well imagine, because after all, having all my life dreamt of a medical career I wasn't exactly enamoured with washing up, washing floors and all that sort of thing. But I have to say that in the job, because the people were such nice people, and although especially the second job which I found myself, fusspot wasn't in it, you know. The whole family, everything had to be just so. It was a huge house. But I suppose one just gets on with it. And...and maybe that was one of the reasons why I became so interested in doing other things such as youth club work and all that sort of thing because I wanted to do other things as well rather than cleaning up and the spring cleaning. I mean Pesach spring cleaning is nothing against spring cleaning that I did in that house. There wasn't one inch in that place - as was my own house in years gone by - that wasn't either washed, scrubbed, polished, cleaned or whatever.

BL: They were both non-Jewish families?

HS: Both non-Jewish families, yes. I never really got to know the first family very well, the second family I got to know very well. And as I said I think already earlier after my exhibition had finished, I was in Israel at the time. And when I came back from Israel I had a phone call from the museum – The Jewish Museum and Sternberg Centre - that somebody had enquired about it and they would like to meet me, meet up with me but of course they couldn't give them the telephone number. So I asked who, and they gave me the name. And it was the... well, if I can put it that way, the person who was born, the granddaughter who was born whilst I was there and who was very fond of me and I was very fond of her, and who was by this time married and had children herself. And they had seen it, she and her aunt had seen it in the Hampstead local paper. And the photograph where I'm in the garden and she's the little girl standing on top of the shelter was used as one of the bits for the advertisement.

**Tape 3: 3 minutes 33 seconds**

And of course she recognised herself straight away. And we sort of exchange greetings every now and then during the year. I write to them at Christmas, they write to me for the High Holy Days and that sort of thing, and we have met up once or twice. What is very interesting, that her husband - I don't know what he does actually, now he's retired and she's a grandmother - but he has been, from a research point of view to practically every concentration camp on the continent for research purposes. Now whether he is a historian or what I can't remember. He wasn't in the army, no he wouldn't have been old enough. So he's been doing an enormous amount of researches. And we, as I say we sort of correspond now and again. They live too far away now to be able to get together.

BL: Do you remember how much you got paid?

HS: Oh no, I can't. Somebody else asked me that recently and I really can't remember!

BL: Did you have enough money to get by? Was it a hard time?

HS: Oh yes. Oh, yes, I managed pretty well because my clothes I made myself, most of them. And...the cost of everything was so different. Even if you tried to convert it exactly - it doesn't make any sense. My main going out mainly was either to the cinema, just in Muswell Hill the Odeon Cinema or going up to town to St Johns Wood to meet up with the Liberal Jewish Synagogue opposite Lords, to meet up with the Youth friends or in Stamford Hill.

### **Tape 3: 6 minutes 6 seconds**

BL: Did you have other refugee friends or did you have some English friends?

HS: Not deliberately refugees. No actually in the Youth Club where they were I can't recall anybody who was there. I've got a photograph in the other room of the first weekend away between the Liberal and the Reform Youth. And on it are a number of rabbis, and Hugo Gryn's widow, Jackie, is on there and a number of other people who unfortunately are dead now. Yes there are one or two. In fact somebody who is very much involved, Stern, Ralph Stern, he's involved in all this work. I can't remember his wife's name. Ruth. Ruth, I think. There were very few there who had a refugee background, I don't know. And yet they should have been there because that was the only Liberal youth group there was. So they must have been around.

BL: But you were not looking for other refugees?

HS: I wasn't looking for them, I never did. I never did. We have in fact a member in our synagogue who has time and again asked me, 'Why this? Why that? Why not this? Why not that? Why don't I go to this? Why don't I go to that?' I don't want to. And when I look through the AJR paper, the letters where they...Quite frankly, again and again I think, 'Let's go forward.' Let's learn by what's happened but let's go forward. There's no sense in harping back.

BL: What do you think some people do or what does it mean not to go forward?

**Tape 3: 8 minutes 24 seconds**

HS: They keep on digging up... Somebody's written an article say, Mr Grenville's written an article, 'So and so should have been so and so', little bits of criticism. So what! It doesn't matter. My thing is the other way around. You know, lately they've got Hitler's Holocaust on the television, haven't they? And I think to myself, 'I'm here. You're not.' You know, that's my attitude. And unless I think I would have that attitude – which is very fortunate I think - I wouldn't be able to cope. I'm on my own. As I have said, time and again, my family now ... Time and again people have come in here and said, 'Oh, your family!' Yes, but it's my rabbi's family. It's not because it's the rabbi. It's because we are such close friends. The three youngsters and themselves and the whole of the wider family even, they have totally adopted me. When I had my second hip operation a few years ago, that was the family. They were looking after me. They were doing everything. In fact Louise, the eldest daughter stayed here with me. They wanted me to stay with them after the week in a nursing home after the hospital. I said, 'No, it's simpler here, I've got everything convenient on my level.' So she came to stay here, and she almost considers this as her other home, and that's it. It works both ways. Because as far as family is concerned, real family, blood relations are concerned, I have one cousin of my own generation now in Israel. He's got 19 grandchildren; he's got a huge family. Another cousin has children as well. But other than that they've all gone and they've all gone in the Holocaust. They haven't just died with one or two exceptions. And I think when one is on one's own that's the only way – to look forward. I can't go over it again and again. And when I do, when I am asked to with this thing or recently with the CCJ, I say 'What do you want me to talk about?' And they say, 'Oh, what you did a few years ago.' Oh well, as I said earlier on, while you're talking it's ok. Afterwards it's when all sorts of other things click and come back. But working with children and looking forward in my opinion is the only way.

**Tape 3: 11 minutes 54 seconds**

BL: To cope? To cope with the...

HS: Yes. The only way to cope, yes. And the other day I managed to fall in here. Then I had to call on my neighbours to cope with the situation because I cannot get up because of the hips. But fortunately I have very good neighbours here. But other than that, it's always the... Even many years ago, one of the members of the synagogue, long deceased, said, 'You've made the synagogue your family.' So I said, 'Yes, I have. I haven't another family.' But at that time I actually had some family in Luxembourg and other places, but they've died.

BL: How different actually is the synagogue service? Does it remind you of anything in Germany or is it completely different?

HS: It's, well if anything the Liberal service in Germany was more like Belsize Square. Much more, I wouldn't say formal, but the ladies were sitting in the gallery which of course doesn't happen here. But over the years the sermons have become a little more traditional. We do certain things at Southgate the Liberal Jewish Synagogue doesn't do. We've always had Bar and Bat Mitzvah. In fact I had my Bat

Mitzvah a few years ago because Rabbi Howard kept on nagging me about it. So eventually I agreed and it actually turned out to be very lovely.

BL: You didn't have a Bat Mitzvah in Germany?

HS: No. No, it was unusual. Confirmation yes, but Bat Mitzvah was still very, very in the background, even in the Liberal movement. It was Confirmation, as is Kabbalat Torah now.

BL: Did you have a confirmation?

**Tape 3: 14 minutes 12 seconds**

HS: No. No, I didn't. Even that was rare. My cousin did together with the rabbi's daughter in fact. They all wore long white dresses. I remember that. At Southgate I was the first one to be Kabbalat Torah, reading the Simchat Torah and a friend of mine was Kabbalat Bereishit who...I am now...actually that has nothing to do with it it's just because we have been there so long. I'm now the Life President and Doris is the Life Vice President because Dick our Vice President died a little while ago at the age of over 100. Other things we do at Southgate – we do a Simchat Torah carrying the scrolls around. Also we have a Chavurah supper at Chanukah which has become very, very popular. And we have a Chavurah, a joint everybody-sitting-around-the-table supper at Purim. Although that has become a little bit different because the Youth Club has taken over most of the entertainment then, so it's become a little different. And a number of things that we do are different from St Johns Wood because it's always been a wee bit more... You know of the recent change of the Liberal Progressive Synagogues to LJ – the Liberal Judaism? The name has been changed. Well we have, Southgate has decided to remain Southgate Progressive Synagogue because to us that means more.

**Tape 3: 16 minutes 37 seconds**

BL: But so you're saying that for you it wasn't continuity from Germany. But it was a really new thing...

HS: It was a continuity because when the New Liberal was founded with Lily Montagu and refugees from Germany it was to build up, to revive and keep alive rather, the Liberal Jewish tradition in Germany and the vast majority of the members at first were German Jewish refugees. There's no question about that. But it has stayed very much on that wavelength if I can put it that way. They've also changed things but not as much. Ours was right from the beginning it was more liberal. In fact the name got changed a few times. At one time it was the Southgate and Enfield Progressive or the Southgate and Enfield Liberal or the Southgate and District Progressive and eventually we came down to Southgate Progressive Synagogue. Nice and short.

BL: Do you see yourself carrying on the traditions of your great-grandfather for example?

HS: Well, I had at one point had a discussion about that, years and years ago after I had done a lay-minister's course with Rabbi Mattuck which I found very interesting and it was very enjoyable. I discussed it with Rabbi Richer at the time. One day at the holiday school we were talking about it and he didn't think that was my thing. He saw me more working with children and that side of things rather than sit studying for ages. I mean I've done a whole lot of study courses. On one occasion actually when we had the evening institute at the Montague Centre, I think it was the first year and on one occasion either he or somebody else who was supposed to be doing a history lecture couldn't come.. So Herman said, 'Do you think you could do it?' I said, 'Well, I'll try. Tell me what are you supposed to be talking about?' So I did, I've done that. That happened a few times actually over the years to sort of do a stand-in because I've certainly studied it. But he was probably right.

BL: How important was religion to you? Did it help you being a refugee?

**Tape 3: 19 minutes 48 seconds**

HS: I think it was the companionship of the people more so than the religion as such. I mean getting together and doing the same things and doing the fun things as well as the study side and learning side of things. I think it was a mixture of both. Funnily enough, we were talking about that the other day. We have a course at Southgate on Judaism and Islam and some people are doing an A-Level in it. But some are just doing it, including myself, have just joined it for interest sake. And we were saying it then, 'What happens if people move to another country?' It was talking about starting of synagogues; you know going back centuries to ancient Babylon. Synagogues started in Babylon. Yes, but why synagogues? Synagogues are a meeting place. The Bet Knesset is a meeting place. When you get somewhere you want to get together with other people that are like you. Especially where there are children, you want the children to get together, that's how the school starts. And then the synagogue, then the place of prayer comes. It's the getting together, the learning and then the place of prayer comes. It tends to work in that way. And I think that's how it's worked for me. Except that the German, the question of the language and what Germany did was too close for me, too interwoven for me, to be able to cope with anything where, well I might almost say, where religion was adulterated by using the German language; For me at that time.

**Tape 3: 21 minutes 46 seconds**

BL: Did you ever go back to the Belsize Square Synagogue, or did you ever...?

HS: On specific occasions. Oh yes! One occasion we decided from the Youth Club we decided we'd do some performance for them, so we did an afternoon's entertaining for them. And one of the ladies, we were chatting with them in the intervals in between and one of the ladies said to me, 'You do speak German very well!' [Laughs] Big laugh about that! This is a long time ago. It may have been...could have still been during the war, or just after, either in the late 40s or early 50s. It was really funny.

BL: How did it affect you being a refugee? How has it affected your life?

HS: Can't think of anything specific. Maybe, it may well be that my command of English which is good luck really, and even the pronunciation has made it impossible for people to sort of pick me out straight away. I remember during the war going along Oxford Street with a friend who insisted on speaking German. I told her not to be a fool because any minute now there was going to be an air-raid again and you don't want to be talking German do you? And she hadn't cottoned on to that at all, a highly intelligent person! And I thought to myself, 'Isn't it obvious that you don't wander along in the middle..., when there can be an air-raid any minute going along Oxford Street talking German at the top of your voice?' And I think it may well have a lot to do with that because people didn't really sort of think, 'Oh, who's that?' Don't know!

**Tape 3: 24 minutes 24 seconds**

BL: How different do you think you're life would have been if you hadn't been forced to leave Germany?

HS: I would have studied medicine. No question about it. I mean even now you try and interrupt me when there's anything on the television that's...or for that matter...I'm not a first aider, but I've always been able to cope with situations straight away and in the correct way you know, to avoid anything worse happening. And at the Holiday school or where I lived in Winchmore Hill you know, to know what to do sort of instinctively is one of these things. I always dreamt about it right from when I was a little girl. Always a dream but it remained a dream! I didn't want to ... Funnily enough, Louise asked me that only yesterday because she is now probably embarking on a nursing career although she's a very, very fine artist. I said, 'Well, I've always been interested in medicine but nursing has never had the same sort of attraction for me.' With her it's exactly the other way around. She wants the nursing, the caring side of it. She's coming into nursing because of the caring side, which she's already done as a volunteer. Whereas with me it's medicine as a science and that side of it, the medicine side of it.

BL: But it wasn't possible to study...?

**Tape 3: 26 minutes 19 seconds**

HS: It wasn't possible and that wouldn't have been possible any more, I mean after the war. It would have been too late to start then and I don't think I could have coped with the cost and everything else. And by that time I was involved in other things, working with children, working with youngsters. As my teacher said, 'See you on the staff.'

BL: How would you define yourself in terms of your identity today?

HS: How do you mean? I'm not quite sure what you mean.

BL: Do you feel British, English, Continental, Jewish...?

HS: Oh yes. British, British. British and Jewish, both. English I don't think one can say unless one is actually born here. And even those who are English, you don't know

how far back it goes you know because England is such a mixture anyway. Quite apart, not even talking about immigrations of this century, going further back, it's a great mixture.

BL: Do you feel at home here in London?

HS: Oh, yes. Oh yes. Oh yes. On one occasion I was stuck in Dublin visiting the Kokoteks and there was a general strike whilst I was there and I couldn't get back and so I was stuck over there and I managed to keep myself going by crocheting some little things looking like a little hat but with several sort of compartments for needles and safety pins and goodness knows what, and I sold them. And I don't think I would have wanted to live in Dublin although I built up quite a friendship circle there. I didn't feel at home. Whereas, and I'm going back now to just after the war, oh, 50, 60 more than 50 years ago. Because I came back to their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary some years ago, so that was in... '98? Something like that. It didn't feel right somehow. Whereas in London I felt very comfortable. Interestingly enough, when I said about English language just now, when I was a child and had to write essays in German, dad always had to have a bit of a go on them as well. I could write English right from the beginning, I've written goodness knows what. In fact, so much so that one of my lecturers at college wanted me to join the English Speaking Union and something else – Writers' something or other, and that was at college already in the 50s. So for some reason or other I think this feeling ok must have something to do with the language.

### **Tape 3: 30 minutes 0 second**

BL: That you feel comfortable in English and you had quite a good command when you came to England?

HS: Yes, yes. We had a ..., we were very fortunate. Our English teacher had been teaching in London for a number of years and she was not English, she was German. And she insisted, that was...by then we were already in our 4<sup>th</sup> year in grammar school. We went to grammar school at the age of 10, so we were about 14, 15. And she insisted that once a week – we had English every day – that once a week we would speak English regardless of mistakes. And I think that did the trick. She would say, 'Alright, you are on holiday in England. Nobody around you speaks anything but English. Get on with it.' And that probably did the trick.

BL: What is the most important thing for you of your continental heritage?

HS: I don't know. I think just the family. I think quite literally just the family, because I can't think of anything that I came away with which I would say, 'Oh, couldn't do without that.' I think the reasons probably were too cruel and too hard to want to even go back to them. Last Saturday a member who comes with her little boy on Saturdays and just by chance a German word was used. And I didn't even know that she spoke any German but I realise now why, and somebody else was there whose wife also comes from Berlin and he started up straight away. And my automatic...he said, 'Oh! There's another one.' And I was just putting my coat on. You know he was just saying it as a joke and I said to him, 'Don't you start with me.' You know it was all in a joke, but it was just immediate. And when I...where were we? Oh, the only time I



used to have to use the German language was in Israel because my Hebrew wasn't good enough to converse in Hebrew.

**Tape 3: 32 minutes 53 seconds**

Some people couldn't speak English, but I use it as Lingua Franca, you know. But until I, when I had enough Hebrew around me I could at least answer in short hand sort of thing. But other than that when we went to... Oh yes, this is funny. A friend of mine- a friend from whom I've inherited those - and I went to...It was in Switzerland on one occasion. She started speaking French. And because I thought the girl we were talking to found it very difficult to understand her I thought 'Well maybe I better say that in German, maybe she can only speak Schweitzer- Deutsch.' And she immediately answered me in English. Now that was the funniest thing. Obviously the pronunciation of the German must have been with an English accent which was very funny. NO, I honestly can't think of anything... The only things that I have are things connected with my parents or with the family otherwise, but nothing other than the rug inside and one or two little bits and pieces that belonged to my mother. The thing at the back of your chair, the cushion - various things like that. Oh once somebody brought me back from Germany - they had been to see Auschwitz and other concentration camps - and brought me back, done up in some box or something a piece of coal from between the railway. Now how anybody could even think of that! But it so happened that it was here when I think Abigail was here - Abigail Howard I think was here - and I hadn't got rid of it yet because he'd only just brought it in or something...no Florence brought it. So Abigail said, 'Let's go and get rid of it!' And we chucked it in the bin. Now how anybody could do that I don't understand! And yet some people do. Yet some people do take sand away and all sorts of things. I don't understand that.

**Tape 3: 36 minutes 2 seconds**

BL: Do you still have some of the things you could bring with you from Germany?

HS: Oh yes. My trunk is still in there. Oh yes! I've got...the lady who comes to do my cleaning said the other day, 'This towel, I've never seen anybody attach a tea towel.' I said, 'No. That tea towel is still from home.' It's hanging up in the kitchen. And there are one or two things amongst my laundry because they have simply lasted and some of them are older than I. There is something in my cupboard there where all my sheets and things are. Oh yes in the other room there is a rather beautiful cloth made of 4 tea towels crocheted together which is rather lovely hanging as a tablecloth over my put you up bed in there. And that was made by one of our maids as a present for my mother. And on my dressing table I've got some things, black embroidery on squares, black and white embroidery on white. I've got a number of things like that that either I've made or somebody else has, my mother or one maid we had she did some beautiful things. Some things like that, because I did bring some laundry and stuff with me. Other than that I can't think, even looking along there whether there's anything there. No, there isn't...But that, yes. They're useful and they are still used and they're still going strong. I wonder what happens to things that are made now.

BL: But nevertheless they're important for you?

HS: Yes. They are important. I gave one as a present to somebody once Oh yes, I took one of the squares over ... I thought that one of my cousin's daughters in law, one of them in Israel; she admired it once, that black and white embroidery. So I took some over to her and she's had them framed. She's got them as pictures. One of my embroideries of the Knesset Menorah is hanging up in the Leo Baeck School with some pictures up there. It was also on one of our scroll mantels. We've got different mantels now so it's hanging up in the cupboard. That sort of thing yes some things like that but not... I can't think of anything else that's important, you know.

**Tape 3: 39 minutes 36 seconds**

BL: Now we've discussed many things. Is there anything I haven't asked you or you'd like to add? Something we didn't discuss?

HS: I don't know. You realise how involved I am with the synagogue. It's my family. In fact somebody said that once to me and I said, 'Well I'm unashamedly saying that it's my...pleading my...' What did she say? It's in one of my talks there. Oh, I can't remember how she put it. I said that quite publicly when I was giving a talk on the anniversary of Kristallnacht which happened to fall on exactly the same Friday evening. But I said there that I plead as the orphan to the adopted family; I plead - not mercy but something or other - as the orphan to, not the accepted family but the - it's in one of my talks in there. I can't remember the exact words. The adoptive family, that's right. Whoever would adopt.

BL: Miss Schindler is there any message you might have for anyone who might see this?

HS: Well as I said all along to look forward and not dwell on things, be they in the past or even the more recent future [sic!] [Not] keep on dwelling on things like 9/11 and the thing...in July, what was it, two years ago? You have to go forward, because by going forward you can make some sort of success and talk to each other. We've got a prime example of that in the synagogue. We've got a young man who was involved in that; one of the people who was injured in that July business and he goes forward and he's a young fellow. Yes he'll talk about it, but he says, 'That's not the most important part of my life.' Or as I said to you earlier on, when the Hitler broadcast comes on the television at the moment, my answer to that is 'I'm here and he's not.' So that's the only way I can put it. I haven't any high-faluting messages.

BL: Miss Schindler, thank you very much for this interview.

HS: Thank you very much.

**Tape 3: 42 minutes 50 seconds**

**PHOTOGRAPHS****Tape 3: 43 minutes 12 seconds****Picture 1**

HS: Well this photograph is a photograph of my great grandfather Rabbi Moritz Rama in Marienbad together with his second wife and his daughter and son-in-law.

BL: When was it taken?

HS: Oh, that's very difficult to work out. It must have been, I should think in the middle 1800's – no possibly a bit later. His second wife... Very difficult to say, it was probably the late 1800s – the best I can do.

**Picture 2**

HS: That is a photograph of my great grandfather. I believe it was taken at the 25th Anniversary of his office as Rabbi, probably in Magdeburg by that time. But as far as I am concerned the interesting bit is the silver collar of the Tallit is now..., I have made it into a bookmark and it is now our memorial bookmark in the synagogue at Southgate.

**Picture 3**

BL: Can you describe this picture?

HS: That is my father's father, whom I cannot remember. He must have died before I was born. Oh no, he didn't. He died...I was quite little. I remember he died when I was quite little, but I can't remember him.

BL: What was his name?

HS: Adolf.

**Picture 4**

BL: Yes?

HS: That's my dad with the little marker over the, over the head. That's my dad in the army in the First World War.

BL: What was his position?

HS: I have no idea. I think he was a non-commissioned officer but I'm not sure. I gather that from one photograph that I've seen somewhere, but I'm not sure.

**Picture 5**

HS: That's a photograph of my mother. I don't... I can't really remember her looking like that with such a funny hat. But I should imagine that...it's so small that it's almost like a passport photograph but not really big enough for that. No, the face is not really big enough for that but...don't know. Anyway, it's my mum.

**Tape 3: 46 minutes 15 seconds****Picture 6**

HS: That's me about 7 years old, I suppose, 7 or 8 years old with one of my smaller teddies.

**Picture 7**

HS: That's my great aunt Julia with her little dog. It's her empty house that provided shelter to my father and uncle on Kristallnacht, but that photograph was taken many years earlier than that.

HS: This is 1926.

HS: Yes

BL: What was her name?

HS: Julia.

BL: And her surname?

HS: Julia...Julia, Julia...Don't know. Julia Adam.

**Picture 8**

HS: That's a river trip outing in Berlin with Dad, on my right.

BL: And where are you in the picture?

HS: Well, I'm on the right of the picture.

BL: Which river is this?

HS: The River Spree

**Picture 9**

HS: That is on a school outing to Potsdam. And I'm the second one from the right, at the back.

BL: Do you remember the names of the other girls?

HS: No idea. I think one of them was Ursula, the one in the front, more or less in front of me.

BL: And when was it taken?

HS: Oh! No idea. I should imagine it was the top end of the juniors, no, must have been older than that, not sure.

**Picture 10**

HS: This photograph was taken at school in 1934 - our whole class. And you see quite a number of the girls in white shirts and black skirts. They were girls in the Hitler Youth., maybe they were going on to a meeting or something. They wouldn't

necessarily wear it all the time. And as there was no school uniform they're pretty obvious.

BL: Where are you in the picture?

HS: The name is there. I can't see it from here but the names are all the way around so...In the top row.

BL: Thank you.

### **Tape 3: 49 minutes 25 seconds**

#### **Picture 11**

HS: These were the photographs taken for the passport to come to England so that must have been in 1939.

#### **Picture 12**

HS: That's a photograph taken during the last few days of Berlin with my little cousin Peter who I was supposed to bring with me but unfortunately his mother, literally in the last dying minute wouldn't let him go. So unfortunately he died with his parents in Auschwitz which I learned a long, long time after, in fact, only about 5 years ago.

#### **Picture 13**

HS: That's the first day in England at the beach in Hunstanton with my newly found relations.

BL: When was the photograph taken?

HS: 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1939.

#### **Picture 14**

HS: This is in Hunstanton where I stayed with my newly found family. And the one in the jacket by the side of me is my second cousin Stella whose parents enabled me to get the domestic permit over here.

#### **Picture 15**

HS: That's the huge house in Muswell Hill where I had my domestic job.

BL: How long were you there?

HS: Well I'm just trying to think when I left. I think it was in 1945. Latish 1945. I don't think it was 1946, I think it was 1945, 1939-45.

BL: What was the address, do you know that?

HS: Midhurst, Lauradale Road, Muswell Hill.

#### **Picture 16**

HS: That was my first holiday at Butlins Holiday Camp, where we had great fun! I cannot remember the names of the other people or who they were, but we had very great fun together, I remember that.

BL: And where are you in the picture?

HS: In the white dress. Whitish dress. White floral dress.

**Picture 17**

HS: This was taken in 1947. Some people have debated maybe it's 1948. But anyway, it was taken in Hunstanton when one of the other people on there and myself arranged the first joint weekend of the two Youth Groups, the Youth Group of the Liberal Movement and the Youth Group of the Reform Movement. The RSY and what we used to call Flipchick.

BL: Where are you in the picture?

HS: Right in the middle. The fellows behind me have very kindly shushed my hair up so I look like a teddy bear or something or a Shockheaded Peter.

**Picture 18**

HS: This is my second cousin Stella and myself. Stella, the daughter of the people who helped me...to come over here...to obtain my relevant permit for me to come as domestic servant.

BL: When was it taken?

HS: Oh I don't know when that was taken, because they evacuated to Cheltenham. So I wonder whether that was even taken around there. No idea.

**Tape 3: 54 minutes 3 seconds**

**Picture 19**

HS: This was taken just before we finished at Trent Park Training College. And I'm there on the second from the left front row from the top. Trent Park Teacher Training College which is now Middlesex University. Still training teachers.

**Picture 20**

HS: My family, Rabbi Howard and his family who have completely and utterly adopted me. My family, Rabbi Howard and his family who have completely and utterly adopted me, and I am ever so grateful for that. Now you want me to say who's who on it?

BL: Yes please.

HS: Rabbi Howard at the back. His wife Abigail in the front in the lilac coloured sort of jumper. Next to her in the middle is her mother, Peggy Cohen. In the other corner, myself. Above me, Sam, their youngest son, who has just been Kabbalat Torah. Next, Rachel in the red sweater, who is in Israel now on a study session with the Leo Baeck Education Centre in Haifa University. Next to her is Louise, the other daughter, the

eldest daughter, who is a very fine artist but still a student and is doing a great deal of voluntary work to do with cancer research and nursing as well. And next to that is another friend's daughter, Della Freedman who is a very close friend of the family and the daughter of a very close friend of mine.

**Tape 3: 56 minutes 40 seconds**

**Picture 21 and 22**

HS: This is my Dad's passport with which he hoped to be crossing the border...

BL: This is your mother's actually..

HS: Oh sorry, my mother's passport with which they hoped to cross the border just to Luxembourg, and via Luxembourg to South America a few days after the Germans had invaded the Low Countries. Or rather the way I should put it, their journey was planned but the Germans invaded the Low Countries just before. So they were stuck.

BL: Yes please.

**Picture 23**

HS: These are Red Cross messages which were sent. I shall have to read them. I can't sort of tell you all about it in detail. They were sent whilst...at first they could be sent from here to Germany but they took ages to get there because they had to be controlled here and there... going through several controls. By the time they arrived – whichever way - they were almost out of date, because all sorts of things had happened in between. But I'll give you more detail when I actually can read what's written there.

**Picture 24**

HS: This is the index card of what never happened. This one is of my mother. The name of the transport, or the number of the transport rather, that was taking her from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. My cousin who lives in Israel on a Moshav ...found this one and the other one relating to my father when he went to the Terezin Museum in Israel – I don't actually know where that is - and he came across them and had them photographed and sent to me.

**Tape 3: 59 minutes 29 seconds**

**Picture 25**

HS: This refers to my father's cremation. And cremation...he died of what was referred to as malnutrition at Passover, 1944 in Theresienstadt and this is the actual index card which records that.

HS: This is one of the Red Cross messages that my father sent to me. I'll translate it but I'll say something about the dates as well. It was sent on the 25th...there's a stamp...his dating is the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1941. On the top of the letter there is already a printed stamp of the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, 1941 and even the coding has been changed from 1089 to 1090 /1033. And this is what it says, 'Dearest Daughter, For the New Year we ask the Almighty for all possible best for you and that He will cause it that we should be meeting again in the near future. A thousand kisses, Parents' And

then it is signed by my father. And at the bottom there is another stamp, which says 8<sup>th</sup> of October, 1941.

BL: We need to stop.

**Tape 3: 61 minutes 1 second**  
**End of Tape Three.**

#### **TAPE 4**

**Tape 4: 0 minute 4 seconds**

BL: This is Tape Four. We are conducting an interview with Miss Hilda Schindler.

HS: This is my father's Red Cross message sent on the, or dated the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1941.

‘Liebste Tochter, Zum Neuen Jahr erbitten wir von dem Allmächtigsten alles erdenkbar Gute für Dich, und dass er uns noch einmal zusammenführen würde. Tausend Küsse, Eltern.’

HS: I received this in December 1941 and this is what I answered,  
‘Liebste Eltern! ...erwidere ich Eure Wünsche ganz her... [vom ganzen Herzen?] und von dem Ewigen Gottes Segen, insbesondere für zu weiteres Wiedergehen [für unser weiteres Wiedersehen?]. Schreibt so bald wie möglich.  
Alles Gute, Hilde’

HS: And that was in December 1941. Now let me just translate that and explain why it's a rather peculiar way how it is written. ‘Dearest parents, I respond to your good wishes with heartfelt feelings and hope that God will certainly try and bring us together again in the future as soon as possible. All the best, Hilda.’ There were only 25 words you could write and to make that into a logical message was almost impossible so both the German and the English sounds somewhat stilted.

BL: Miss Schindler, thank you again very much for this interview.

HS: Thank you!

**Tape 4: 2 minutes 30 seconds**  
**End of Tape Four**