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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee POB:	Leipzig, Germany

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV165

NAME: Sir Ralph Kohn

DATE: 8th February, 2016

LOCATION: London, UK

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 8th of February 2016. We are conducting an interview with Sir Ralph Kohn, and we are in London, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

Sir Ralph thank you very, very much for having agreed to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. Can you please tell me your name?

Ralph Kohn. My real name is however, Raphael, and - but, normally people call me Ralph.

And when were you born?

I was born on the 9th of December, 1927 in Leipzig.

Can we start this interview please by telling, can you tell us about your family background…? ...And set the scene so to speak.

Yes, well my background is basically- if I can start with my parents. My mother was born in Berlin. She was a first generation born in Germany. Her parents came from Eastern Europe. From- to be more specific from Galicia. My father on the other hand, was born in Galicia in a little town near Lemberg, Lvov, Lviv; it's undergone a number of, of name changes. Today it's Lviv and it's in the Ukraine. When my father was born, Galicia belonged to the Austro-

Hungarian Empire. And he was orphaned when he was very young, about eight years old. Left his native city in order to be the breadearner and went to Germany to stay with an uncle in Hanover. So basically that's the background to my - my parents.

And tell me their names please.

Of my parents?

Yes.

Lena, and she was a born Aschheim. And my father was Markus Max [Mottl] Kohn. And they met in, in Berlin. And got married immediately after the First World War.

And what happened in between? You said there was a time in between, right? Between when they met and when they got married.

[0:02:27]

Well this is a - this is a very strange situation. They met before the war, they met apparently in 1913, in Berlin. And when the war broke out, my, just before my father left for Holland and lived in The Hague, and spent the war years in…in Holland. The idea was that he didn't relish the thought of being called up and in, in the war, he didn't feel that he really wanted to be involved in, in, in that particular war. And he therefore went…They got engaged in1913. My father left… just before the war, to go to Holland. And… met my mother again, after the war in 1919, when they got married. And actually it has a rather interesting story to it. Of course it's a very long engagement.

Yes, indeed.

I mean, we're talking from 1913 to 1919. It's six years. My father was very Orthodox. Hasidic Orthodox. And he was a follower of the Tschorkover Rebbe who was a very famous Rebbe. And my father had a very close relationship and was one of the big supporters of the Rebbe. And he used to send him large donations from Holland to Vienna, where the

Tschorkover Rebbe lived. And of course, when he was away from his fiancée for such a long time, my father contacted the Tschorkover Rebbe and said, "Well, what am I going to do? Here, I'm engaged. My bride is in Berlin. We can't get married, and this is now already – sort of, you know - ...several years." And the Tschorkover Rebbe then emphatically …suggested to him; really sort of more or less put down the law. He said, "Once you've given your word. Once you've had tenaim - tenaim you've got to keep your word, and you've got to wait until the end of the war, after which you must get married." And in this connection is rather interesting that amongst the very Orthodox, the idea of breaking your – the, the engagement, is almost looked upon worse than getting divorced.

Yes.

Because the meaning is, you have given your word. And giving your word to, after, from, after you're betrothed to getting married was – was a very important matter. And in fact I've even heard it said, that in some cases they were advised to get married and divorce afterwards rather than to break your – your *tenaim*. Your word.

And your mother? What about your mother? She was prepared to wait as well?

And my mother was also prepared to wait. That's right. And they got married in 1919 in Berlin. And then they moved immediately to Leipzig from Berlin.

And why? Why was that? Why did they move to…?

[0:06:03]

Well I think… part of our family were also in Leipzig. And I had an uncle who had established business relations there. He was in the textile business. My father joined him. And as my uncle, uncle Ja-Jacob was in Leipzig, my father went to - to join him there. And that's where we lived then from – Well, he, he lived then from 1920… in Leipzig until Hitler came to power, until 1933.

And you said he worked in a textile business. What was he doing before? Was he working in Holland?

Well, he in Holland, of course don't forget it was the war years. And he did business. I can't- I don't know. I suppose he was in the textile business in Holland too. But when he stayed with his uncle in Hannover, upon arrival in Germany, he - he worked I think as a- he was taking, taking a cart around as a, as a rag-and-bone merchant, you know, from a very early age. And he really sort of …educated himself. I mean, he went to evening classes and really managed to get …a very good education, which was of course not the sort of thing we get when we go to all day to school. My father I don't think ever went to school. I think it was so that he worked during the day, and in the evenings he would go to classes or and so forth. And yet he – he managed to attain a very high standard. And… of course he never had the opportunity of going to university, but his German was very good. He was an excellent Yiddish speaker. He was very Orthodox throughout, even though he didn't have a, a father. But he had an uncle who was also very Orthodox, so he was brought up in the very Orthodox Jewish tradition.

And what about your mother? What was her religious background?

[0:08:19]

Also very Orthodox. Not Hasidic. But my- my grandfather on my mother's side was a very Orthodox Jew. But I'm not aware that he was a follower of any of the Hasidic sects. And even my mother, although she was very Orthodox herself, she, she did not sort of go for the Hasidim. She thought that – you know – that was all a little bit hyped up, et cetera. So she used to sort of… poke fun a bit, you know, at some of their habits and behaviour and manners and all the rest. My mother went of course to school in Germany, and she was brought up more in a German tradition. So she already, you know, had all the… knew what was expected from somebody going to school. And…

Yeah. And what language did your parents speak together?

My mother… was very interesting. She spoke marvellous *Hochdeutsch*. Excellent. Absolutely superb. And she couldn't learn other languages. I mean it was- when we went to Holland she had the greatest difficulty in learning Dutch. And when we came to England in 1940, she just couldn't master the language. It was just awful. And we children, I'm afraid,

were very hard on her, and finally we used to say, "You speak such beautiful German. Carry on with German!" Rather than sort of you know, talk in English, or whatever it was - Dutch, you know, in a manner which was, you know, showed a total lack of understanding the language. My father was also not a great linguist. But my father spoke magnificent Yiddish. And it was very funny; at home my father would always speak Yiddish… to us, and to his wife. To my mother. And my mother would always answer in *Hochdeutsch*. So we were actually brought - as children - we had quite a number of languages going on simultaneously. Father would speak Yiddish to us as well. Mother would speak *Hochdeutsch*, high German, with us. We children who went to school in Holland, we would obviously speak Dutch amongst ourselves. And when we came to England we spoke Eng- we started learning English. And in the end there were four languages going on simultaneously. Yiddish, German, English and – and Dutch. So that's the sort of… So we speak all these languages and I'm not sure whether – whether one would consider that we speak them extremely well. Of course when we, when I went to school I spoke absolutely fluent Dutch, and… and my English I acquired when I was twelve years old. When I started.

Let's go back a little to the twenties in Leipzig. What happened to your parents? You said they moved to Leipzig? And maybe you can tell us a little bit, what- How many children did they have? What…?

[0:11:50]

There were, well, my father was in business. Mother sort of looked after the family, as was. And we were a well-to-do family. And we had a governess. We had a nurse. And there are some lovely pictures of – of myself as a little child having sort of sitting with a nurse, and there was, there's the governess. And then we had a *Putzfrau* as they call it in German, some, a cleaner lady. And so we had something like two to three supporting staff in, in the house. And as I say, we were very comfortable in the, in the twenties, and so forth until Hitler came to power. And…

Where did you live? What was your address?

The address was Lortzingstrasse… Lortzingstrasse number…13. And in fact, I must confess to you here that my remembrance of Leipzig is almost non-existent, because I was only five

years old. So I, I didn't really- I can't with certainty, now I have, I imagine sometimes what our house looked like, but really it's… It's more fantasy than fact. My memory starts in Holland, because I can't. But you asked me about our- my siblings…

Yes.

[0:13:28]

It's a – it's rather sad, very, very tragic how… One brother, Maurice, was born in 1920. Parents got married in '19, and the first child was appeared on…

Duly arrived.

Pardon?

Duly arrived.

Duly arrived in 1920. And then I had two sisters, Celia and Toni and then…and also another brother, Shimshon, who was born in, who was born in 1922. Now Shimshon… sadly… developed pneumonia in 1927. And as a child of five, he died. And so, that was in February 1927…Shimshon died. And my mother was heartbroken… and could not be consoled, as I'm, as I understand. And it came to the point, where my father travelled especially to Vienna, to confer with his… Rebbe, and the Tschorkover Rebbe and he told him of what had happened to the family. He's got a …His wife is in a terrible mental state and she's deeply depressed, et cetera. And the Tschorkover Rebbe said to him, "You must have another child as quickly as possible." So here is Shimshon who dies in February 1927, and I'm born in the same year, in December, 1927. So it's about ten months or something, after the death of my brother. And… so the other thing I must tell you, the Tschorkover Rebbe is really the one who gave me my name of Rafa'el , Raphael, because that's what the Tschorkover Rebbe said, "If it is a son… If your, if your wife gets pregnant again, and she has a son, call him Rafa'el ." Which really either, it's both also Archangel and of course also the meaning of the word refua which means, 'God will heal'.

Refua'.

'*Refua*' – Refua- el. Which means 'God will heal'. And that was the name, because there is no Rafa'el in our family. We've got a Moishe, we've got a Yitzhak, we've got a Yakov, we've got a Shmuel. All the- all the sort of Hebrew names you can imagine. You know. But there wasn't a single Rafa'el in the family. So I was the first one named Rafa'el. And… So this was the – these were circumstances of my- of my birth.

[0:16:41]

So was your family, or your mother particularly protective of you, as you were born in those circumstances?

Yes, yes. And I was, I believe, very, very spoiled and my mother, bless her, never let me out of sight. I was really sort of… I mean, and it, it got to the point even, I mean for example in the summer we'd go to a place called Kolberg [Kolobrzeg, Poland]… where we went every year. But I was never allowed to be out of sight. My mother was sort of literally standing at the edge of the sea, you know, just watching what I would do and where I, you know, where I'm going and so forth. And… I never really learnt to swim properly. But that's the, I think the circumstances. No, I was very, very protected and I ascribe it very much to the fact that- of this terrible tragedy which took her a long time to get over. So I'm told but I wouldn't know exactly, because I was of course too young.

Yes. Where was the place you went every summer to? Where was it?

At Kolberg.

Where was it?

Kolberg [present day Kolobrzeg, Poland], it's on the Baltic. It's not far from Danzig, up there.

Yes. So it was a summer holiday?

A summer holiday. And we used to go there every year. And a lot of Jews went there… and also a lot of Orthodox Jews. Yes. There were restaurants and so on. We've got some nice pictures of Kolberg.

Do you remember that? Do you remember it?

No, I don't remember it, but we have some pictures. And there's a picture of myself with my siblings and parents in Kolberg.

And what sort of social circle did your parents have in Leipzig? Who did they mix with?

[0:18:32]

Well they met with …mainly Orthodox people, I would say. I think they, they, the ambiance, the people they mixed with, were very much on the Orthodox side. My. They were… I wouldn't– they were not intellectuals. They were educated but my mother didn't go to university. I'd, I'm not sure that she even went to high school. But they loved- They were socially very active. My father was very musical. My father had a very good voice. And he was excellent sort of in, in synagogue at prayers. And he would lead the prayers very often, as sort of a…a chazzan, and so forth. He loved, he loved singing. And he was very, very keen on opera. That was his great, great love. Opera. But not Mozart opera, or Beethoven's Fidelio or Wagner, I mean, that, that, not that sort of opera. But he loved the operas of the Romantics for example Puccini, Verdi, Mascagni, all those. I mean, also my father was not into Bach, and he wasn't into Gabrielli and all these sort of composers. But it was the sort of …Romantic opera. And he knew those very well. And he always, he went to opera wher- whenever he travelled he always tried. And when he was in Milan on business, he would try to get to the Scala, and in - in Leipzig of course, Berlin. And he remembered very well and he talked about it, hearing Caruso, hearing Gigli for example in - in different operas. He was very, very musical. My mother wasn't all that music... She liked music but there was no great passion about it. They were not really theatre-goers except let's say, the Yiddish theatre. That they, they would go to. But …as I say, they were not, they were not intellectuals, but they had a terrific respect for scholarship and education. And we for example , if I can speak for myself. There was nothing that my father would not do to give me the best possible education that money could buy. For example, I'd have singing – I'd have, no, that comes later. I had

violin lessons, when we lived in Holland. I had special Hebrew lessons. I had Talmudic-Talmudical studies. Privately. But literally anything to do with education, my father was I think, I suppose having been orphaned at so early an age, he felt he must do for his children. And I would say for me especially, whatever – whatever was necessary. There were no financial restrictions whatsoever on anything to do with education. I think it's very interesting. Because you - you find that a lot with people themselves were unable to - to have the benefit of a, of a significant education, that they would in that case, make sure the children have what they were unable to, to take advantage of.
[0:22:30]

Yes. So what schools for example were your siblings sent to in Leipzig?

Yes, they went to school in Leipzig; Toni, Celia and Maurice they went to school. I'd just started Kindergarten, and I remember pictures where I stand with the big *Tüte* - you know those pictures?

Yes. Schultüte.

Yeah, that's right. …Where I'd just started. But it was 1933, about, when I was five years old. And… and then when another chapter in our lives had started.

So what happened in 1933?

Thirty-three… it's interesting. My father, having sort of lived through the sort of brutality of Eastern European sort of …people. Particularly the Cossacks, and all, and various other organisations and where the Eastern European Jewish communities were from time to time seriously attacked, even massacred and so forth. They always felt - had a great feel of insecurity. And that of course when my father came to Germany, I mean primarily in order to keep the family going back home. But… having already from a very early age, left his, his birth- his country of birth, there's always a sense of insecurity. And people have asked me many times, "Why is it that you left immediately in 1933?" The majority of people left much later.

Absolutely!

I mean after the Nürnberg Laws, for example, or certainly Kristallnacht when it was almost impossible to get out, it was practically too late! "But what made your fa- parents decide to leave Germany in '33, because as we know there were a lot of Jews, and others, who thought Hitler was a passing phenomenon?" The German people, the '*Kultur*' they had, the – the sophistication in the arts, in the sciences, in medicine, in architecture, you name it. They couldn't, they couldn't put up with a low-life like Hitler and his gang. That must be, that the German people will get rid of them as soon as they've cleared up the mess with the Communists which were also…

[0:25:14]

Yes.

But my father didn't take that view. My father said, "No, no, no. I don't like it. I don't like what I see. I don't like what's going on in Germany. And it reminds me very much what Victor Klemperer, the diarist once said, He said, "You know the Germans are a seismic people. They can hear upheavals, and unrest before anyone else. The Jewish people have this seismic sort of capacity to, to realise something is happening." And I think this is actually what, what happened with my father. Particularly he said, "I don't like it. I just feel very insecure." And in fact I, I wouldn't remember it myself, but I'm told that the Nazis came to power. And of course they rounded up already immediately Communists and certain Jews and all the rest of it.

Yes.

My father didn't sleep at home for you know... He would sleep at my uncle's, at an aunt's, at friends and so forth, for a few months because the Nazis were already busy. And my father was, I wouldn't say a hugely wealthy man, but a very, very comfortable man indeed and he was also a very generous in, in …giving money to the congregations and so forth. So, he would certainly have been on the list of people to be rounded up. Anyhow, so the decision was made to leave. And my father having been in Holland during the First World War, then decided "Holland is the country which I know, and let's get out as soon as we can." So towards the end of '33 we left Leipzig for Amsterdam. And that's where a new sort of period

in our life started. We were still able to take a lot of things in those very early days. There wasn't too much trouble in taking your money out, and your belongings. That was fairly… That was fairly easy. Of course it got - got more and more difficult as time went on.

[0:27:40]

Yes. So he had enough time to organise everything?

Pardon?

He had enough time to organise everything?

He had enough time to organise, yes. It was, we started, almost as soon as Hitler came to power he said, "No, I don't like this. I don't want to take any chances and wait for him to be you know, to be deposed and another election, or so forth. I'm getting out."

And was it- did he have any particularly bad experience? Or was it a political feeling, or…?

Well… his bad experience really goes back more to Poland, to all the sort of upheavals you had there. And the excesses which were committed against Jewish communities. He lived in a relatively small city, and you know when they got drunk there, these sort of …peasants and others, and, you know, Cossacks and so forth. I mean how often were, you know, they- or on festivals. Easter, for example, they would sort of let loose and just go and kill Jews, and…you know.

Yes. So he had an experience of that?

So he had, of course, yes.

What was the city, if you could repeat it please, the city? Where did he come from?

From a place called Kalusz. K A L U S Z. Kalusz. Which is very close to Lemberg, or closer still to a place called Stanislawow [present day Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine], which produced some very famous Rabbis, by the way. So having had some experience, and living in fear

already in – in Galicia, he didn't now want to have where it's official policy the anti-Semitism and of course the hatred towards Jews. And he didn't want to be in any way sort of - near that.

And did your mother want to leave as well?

Yes. Yes.

Where were her parents at that point?

[0:29:35]

Her parents were still in Berlin. They were in Berlin in '33. And - but my mother was… She left it to my father, really. And, but she could see it. And she - she was also very unhappy with what was, what had… And my mother always used to say her happiest years were in her youth in Germany, you know, during the Weimar Republic. Even though we think of the Weimar Republic, as a period you know, of confusion and so forth. But yet, if you think of what those… years between 1918 and 1933, when the Weimar Republic was …active. I mean the standards in, in science and maths, and music, and - and painting and you name it, I mean I could give you a list as long as my arm of the most…

Yes! And the freedom!

Pardon?

The freedom, I mean – yeah.

And the freedom, that's right, and the Bauhaus and all these sort of great innovations which were, which were German sort of inventiveness. And these big German scientific conglomerates, *IG Farben* and so, and that place - companies like *Bayer*, and *Höchst Farbwerke*. All these gigantic companies you know, with all the discoveries they made in, in so many fields.

A very creative, creative time.

Absolutely!

And your mother regarded that as her…

My mother thought her youth in Berlin were the happiest days. Because don't forget I mean, you know, then she - she left Germany in '33. We went - as refugees we left Amsterdam. We came to England with nothing at all. Absolutely as – as we stood. That's the way we left Amsterdam. And of course it was very difficult then with the war years in England. And she wasn't well. So after that you know it was the family which, which, which became the predominant factor of her life and of her, of her happiness.

[0:32:12]

So let's if you could take us to Amsterdam and your earliest memories. What are your earliest memories?

Well the earliest memory is that I spent the first six months of our stay in Holland, in a sanatorium. Because I had been diagnosed with a …potentially with TB. the X-rays seemed to indicate that there was on one lung, there might, either it was - I was recovering from TB or I still had a sub-clinical sort of …infection. I was a very sickly child. I was a lot, at home. I was suffering a lot from… bronchitis, colds, and so forth. And, and don't forget, in those days we didn't have the great wonder-drugs which we subsequently had. And so I was a sickly child. I was at home a great deal. And when we came to Holland again, I was coughing quite a bit and then they diagnosed that on one lung they could see a suspicious area. So they said, "He should go to a sanatorium". So I spent six months in a place called Blaricum, which is near Hilversum. And I had six months of - it turned out that it was, it was a sub-clinical infection. And it was, I mean, there is still an area I've still got on one lung a small area which has been- which shows healing of a, of an infection. And they think it might have been very early signs of TB but which healed, you know. So those were the first six months of my life, and I came back sort of home - already speaking very good Dutch!

Because you had to speak Dutch.

Because I was in – in this, in the sanatorium. And then went to school. I went to the *Palace scholen* [inaudible] in Amsterdam, which was a Jewish school. And I stayed there until the age of twelve. But then something else happened. I became very interested- I loved music, very- I was passionate about music. And I wanted- of course we only had the radio in those days and also long-playing records, the 78s. And so forth. And I was longing to hear this. And I had a- we had a cousin, staying with us in Amsterdam. His parents and family had gone directly… they came from Leipzig, that was the uncle my father went to join, which I talked about earlier.

In Hannover?

[0:35:10]

That's right. And that uncle also came to Amsterdam, but - within about a year, he went on with his family to Haifa, to Israel, with a certificate with proper legal documents to come into what was then British Mandated Territory. And so …They had a son, called Gershon. Gershon. And Gershon was an exceptionally brilliant young man. Exceptionally brilliant. And he - he wanted to, he had started as soon as they came from Leipzig to Amsterdam. He was much older than- he was about fourteen years older than me. And he had started medicine and he wanted to finish it. His parents went in 1935 from Holland to Palestine. And they left one of their sons, Gershon, who then lived with us in Amsterdam. And that- and Gershon was a most extraordinary man. He …became a doctor. But in addition, he was a first-class pianist. He was a great athlete. He was a wonderful Talmudist. He was absolutely first class in - in learning. I mean he was the greatest sort of model you could sort of wish for. Now he lived with us several- he lived with us for the whole of that period from '35 to '40.

How much older was he than you?

He would have been… I think …I think about fourteen years older. About fourteen years older. But he was an absolutely- Absolutely unique in his achievements and so forth. And…

[0:37:18]

So did he take you to concerts?

And he was very musical too.

Yes. So did he take you to concerts?

Exactly. And I said, "Oh, I must go. I want to go." And also, there was this great Menuhin mania, because Yehudi was then sort of in his prime you could almost say; we're talking about in the 30s.

Yes.

And of course all youngsters wanted to be, you know to - who were musical - wanted to study and so forth, the violin. I took up the violin, and with the- this, the leader of the second violins of the Concertgebouw orchestra, which was conducted in those days by the world-famous Willem Mengelberg. Mengelberg of course was one of the - like Furtwängler, like Bruno Walter, Kleiber and so forth. You know, the absolute top category of conductors. And I used to go to the Sunday morning children's concerts at the Concertgebouw. And of course I loved those. The violin, to be perfectly frank, I didn't really take to. I did it because I wanted to have something to do with - with music. And I started. But also there's the other thing, I didn't, wasn't doing it long enough because that's when we, in 1940, we had to run again, to- when we came to England. So, in Amsterdam I… was awakened to, you know, to music. Encouraged by my parents. Again, I mean, the, the man who was my teacher was a man called Tromp, Sam Tromp, and he was a brilliant violinist himself. In fact, if I can digress for a moment…

Yes.

I got to know Bernhard Haitink, the Concertgebouw, who took over the Concertgebouw at some point. And Haitink is also a violinist; that's his instrument. And we went out for dinner, two or three years ago, and we talked. I told him about Mr Tromp, who was my teacher, and he said, "Sam Tromp?" I said, "Yes." He says, "We were both doing - studying the violin at the same time and of course – *och!* - he was such a great player." He was Jewish, Tromp, and he had to disappear; he of course he went underground. So that was that. But Haitink

remembered him very well, and he was so, he said, he was so amazed that during a dinner, he should be reminded of somebody who was in the orchestra when he conducted it.

[0:40:13]

And did you sing as well? Did you sing?

No, no, no, that came later. That came later. But, so that was then …Our stay in Holland was - what shall I say? I went to school, fairly - fairly normal. We had, you know, getting used to a different culture. Different language, different people, and so forth. But it - it was for me, it- It opened, I think, the - my yearning to express myself in music. Not only to listen to music, but to also find a means of expressing myself. And that's through the violin.

But were you influenced by your father's love of music…?

And my father. And I think I've inherited that from my father, because my father was exceptionally, although uneducated, but he loved music. He loved singing.

And your siblings? Did they?

They were all- they all loved music, but I think I'm fair, it's fair to say, not as passionately. I mean for me it was the number one. Not that I ever thought of being professional in music but that I get a way of expressing myself, and, and - and doing more in music. That was my great passion in life. I was also very active as a, as a young chess player. And …and I used to play already then…with…fairly good players. Yeah.

Yeah?

Yeah. But that chess playing I did more then, when we came to England. I was on our first team at Manchester, at Salford Grammar School. And then we won the North of England Championship for Schools. And then I also went, I also played chess for the first division at Manchester University the Second Board. So I was- But that got a bit too much because I was also so passionate about chess, you know that I knew a lot of the literature. Chess literature moves. You know. So that was another great passion of mine.

[0:42:35]

You said your father was almost a chazzan in the synagogue in Leipzig.

Yeah.

What synagogues did you go to in Amsterdam?

The synagogue was a Shtiebel, if you know what a Shtiebel is.

Yes.

Yes? Where you sort of… And that was not far from where we lived, actually. The *Achterhaat Shtiebel*, and that was a sort of, of, of, very Orthodox fort of Hasidic. It was a Hasidic Shtiebel. Yeah. And that's where we went.

Did you go to the Sephardi Synagogue at all?

No, no, not Sephardi, it was Ashkenazi.

No, the Shtiebel. But I mean in Amsterdam, obviously there's the big synagogue.

Oh yes, the Spanish and Portuguese.

Yes.

Oh, yeah. That's the most beautiful building, but that was a, as you say, that was a Sephardi synagogue.

Yes.

We would go there occasionally. But you know the, the, the prayers… first of all they pronounce it differently, and so forth. But it, it, it wasn't a sort of *heimisch*, it wasn't sort of as intimate as you find it in a – in a sort of Hasidic Shtiebel.

And in Leipzig, because I didn't ask you, what synagogue did you go to there?

Oh we also, we also, oh, yes. We lived in the, what was it called again? The… we lived near the *Rosental*. I don't know whether you've ever been there; it's a wonderful park.

Yes?

I mean, I've visited of course Leipzig many, many times in recent years, and it's a wonderful park. And it's the … the *Gartenviertel* of…of Leipzig.

Yes?

And in that- that was almost entirely inhabited, a Jewish quarter. And you had eighteen synagogues in that sort of square mile.

[0:44:38]

And which one did you go to?

And we went- We went to a couple of them, but I was too young, don't forget, to remember.

Yes…yes.

But, we went to the, to the Tschorkover or the Boyaner Shtiebel because the Boyaner that was one, one - one branch of the Tschorkover of, you know the Ruzhiner was the origin. The old Ruzhiner Rebbe, he then sort of had various sons. One went to Tschorkov, to another Butschatsch then you had another who went to Sadagora and so forth, you know.

So it was a Shtiebel also?

They were Shtiebels, Yeah. And that's where we went- That's where we went to in Leipzig, which I don't remember, but in Amsterdam we went to a Shtiebel… and there were quite a number of those also. Mainly for Hasidic Jews, which came- I mean the Dutch Jews wouldn't go there. They had- They would have a- sort of like St John's, like the United here. You know like St John's Wood or Dunstan Road, and...

So that leads me to my next question, what- how was the reception by the Dutch Jews to you? What sort of reception did you get?

In Holland?

Yeah.

When we arrived we weren't looked upon really as refugees. We weren't sort of being supported to any large extent, as I... Yes, I mean, we came, we were refugees from Germany but at that point we weren't kicked out. When we left Germany in '33, it was by our own free will.

Yes.

It wasn't yet at the point where you were fearing for your life. Because people, they knew what the regime, you know, what Hitler had sort of put down, that he doesn't want the Jews and that he - he would like to get rid of them. But there was no thought in anybody's mind that this would lead to liquidation. I mean that was just… Nobody, ever, dreamt that it might end up in what it, in what it did.

So what papers did you travel to Holland? What papers did you have?

We had Polish passports. We had Polish passports, because when my father- that part of Poland… Galicia became part of Poland after the First World War. Don't forget the Germans lost. The Austro-Hungarian Empire of course collapsed and you had all sorts of- you had Czechoslovakia and you had Moldavia and you had Poland. And so you had all sorts of- and Poland - Poland took that part …of Galicia became Polish. So therefore, I mean, you know, all sorts of… We had a Polish passport - when we travelled.

[0:47:58]

Yeah. So in Amsterdam. So… Then towards the end of the 30s, do you remember a change of, I mean, of your parents getting worried, or…?

When we…?

Before– before you actually left in 1940, do you remember at some point that people got worried and thought that this Hitler might…?

Well don't forget, war had already been declared. I mean the war, the Second World War started in September, 1939. The invasion of Holland was in May, 1940. So the, World War Two was already raging!

Yeah.

And we, and of course thinking back to the First World War when the Germans invaded Belgium… and you know there was some thought: could this be repeated? But in the First World War Holland was not attacked. Holland was- it's neutrality was respected. And the Germans did not invade - Holland was entirely- entirely neutral and, seen to be and accepted to be. But when, in the Second World War, people in Belgium were more worried about this happening again, that the Germans might invade Belgium and then go on and fight the French. But most people thought Holland would get away with it again; that nothing would happen. Like in the First World War, Holland was spared, very likely it's going to be the same but it wasn't. This time they took Holland as well because they wanted to have a complete Atlantic wall, where they could, you know, with the U-boats that they would have free access to Naval facilities and so forth. So of course we- On the 10th of May 1940, the Germans invaded Holland, Belgium, Luxemburg and then leading to the catastrophe of – of France capitulating six weeks later.

Yes, so where were you on the 10th of May?

On the 10th of May, we were in Amsterdam. And when it happened, there was a big discussion going on. Do we stay or do we leave? And we didn't really do much for the first couple of days or so. Friday, and it was a Friday. Friday, 10th May, and we didn't do anything. But then of course you know, friends would come and you talk: Oy-oy, what's going on? What's going to happen? Are the Germans going to…? And of course the Dutch Army was no match for the Germans I mean, you know, so it was only a matter of time before the Germans would …occupy Holland. And I remember discussions with people coming to the house: Where do we go? What do we do? Do we stay? Do we go? Do we go and try to get to England? Or: Even if the Germans occupied, is it going to be so bad? Or: Will they leave us alone? You know, the - the opinions differed.

Yes.

[0:51:12]

But we still, at our home, my father still said, "I would want to escape. I don't think it's a great idea that we should be …occupied and that who knows what's going to happen. Let's see if we can…" And we talked about it. And then something extraordinary happened. …Which really, you'd – you'd think this is…divinely arranged. On the Tuesday morning - that's four or five days after the invasion of Holland - which was on the Friday morning. On the Tuesday morning my cousin, Gershon, who was living with us, comes back from having been somewhere, right? We didn't know where. And he comes in, at noon, to the house and there were several fellow …Jews who had accumulated. What do we do, etc, etc.? And Gershon comes in and says, "I have one way of getting out of Holland. And it's as follows: There is one ship, leaving Ijmuiden which is the harbour of Amsterdam; it's on the North Sea. It's leaving this evening. It's now twelve o'clock. And you've got to get- if you want to do this, you have to leave everything you've got. There will be no suitcases, because we are going by bus. There will be half a dozen buses organised from the Jewish Community Centre, which are going to Ijmuiden, to a boat which will take us… we don't know where. Destination unknown. Now, are you interested in going there?" And this was a new situation. There was a scheme! There was a plan, which we didn't have before. And I do remember the discussions which went on. And first they said, there were several men there and they said, "Well maybe the men ought to go and leave the women behind." Because they were… And then others said, "Well maybe we shouldn't go at all. And then others again said, our family

said, said, “We would be quite willing to go.” And I am, I believe that I was, because my father also thought, should only he and my brother Maurice go, and that I would stay behind with the family, with the rest of the family. And I understand that I made a big fuss, but I don’t remember it. And I said, “Oh, no, no. We’re all going, or we’re not going. There’s no splitting up of the family.” And that was agreed. So the family went. Now, the question is, how is it that Gershon knew? He was a doctor by then.

Yes.

He had got his medical degree. How is it that Gershon knew that there are buses to go to IJmuiden? How did he know that there was a boat to go from there? And it transpired later, which I only heard much later, that Gershon…There was an orphanage in Amsterdam, to which ninety… transport - Kindertransport children - were delivered some weeks or so before with the object of going on to England. So you had in Amsterdam the Amsterdam orphanage with ninety Kindertransport children.

Yes.

And that, those children, the government said, should be… transported to England. And Gershon was the doctor who looked after the children in the orphanage. So he had just come from there. And we only heard that much later. He had come from the orphanage, where they were getting these children ready to go to IJmuiden. And they said, “There is enough room for about another 200 people.” So all these Kindertransport… and that’s when he came to the home and he said, "There are buses, and a boat.” He didn’t tell us that, where he’d come from, and where he got this, because he was the medical…

Yeah.

…And looking after these children. You know. And he’d only just qualified that year. And he became an MD. And that is how it happened.

And who was the lady who was involved in that, because that’s interesting?

[0:56:33]

Mrs. Truus Wijsmuller-Meijer. She was a very aristocratic lady. I think her husband was the owner of a bank; of a very, very aristocratic Dutch family. And Mrs. Truus Wijsmuller-Meijer she took it upon herself- she was non-Jewish. She went to Germany, and like this Mr. Winton and various other people who were involved in Kindertransport, and she arranged everything. And when the- To get the children to come to Holland. And when it came to what to do with the children, she, at the highest level, because of her position in Dutch society, she arranged with the government that these children should be given transport. Because she said, "We've given our word to the parents of the children; we have the moral responsibility that we must try and get the children across to England. And we have got to keep our word." And the government agreed, and the order was given. And the boat – "The Bodegraven" in IJmuiden - was destined to be blown up in the harbour of IJmuiden, in order to deny the Germans the facilities of using the harbour. But owing to this, these ninety- The boat was spared because of the ninety Kindertransport children. The government said, "It's a debt of honour we have given to the families of the children, that we will ensure their safety, and we will ensure that they are delivered to their final destination. And therefore if "The Bodegraven" is there to be blown up, no, don't blow it up. "Bodegraven" is going to take these children." And that's how it happened. And that's because it was- I think it was about five thousand tonnes. It was busy with the Dutch-Argentine route to South America. It was going backwards and forwards I think. And that boat was an old cargo boat, and that was there. Orders were given not to be blown up: the children. And the 200 people it can carry in addition. So Gershon said when he came home, "We have this boat in IJmuiden; the buses are lined up. Are you prepared to go as you stand, because no luggage is… whatsoever?" You could take your briefcase. And my father of course would put his tallis and tefillin and so forth naturally being a very orthodox man, and so forth. And my mother had her jewellery, money, whatever. But we actually went just the way we were. We didn't have a single suitcase to take on board. And then we walked from where we lived to the Jewish Centre, which is not far; it's about a quarter of an hour's walk on foot. And I do remember that, because we also on the way to the boat, to the buses we picked up a very distinguished Rabbi, who was the Rabbi of Vienna. A man called Yosef Babad – B A B A T - world famous Talmudical scholar. And he was the chief Rabbi in Kalusz. He then became the Chief Rabbi in…in Vienna. And my father said, "We must go to see to see whether Babad wants to come on this journey." And he was a sickly man, and I do remember now here, I do remember it so well and I was twelve years old.

Yes.

And I remember so well, that this tiny little man Babad, he was, he was suffering badly from respiratory problems and so forth. And he said yes, he wants to leave. So I remember us taking him under our arm to the buses and on the boat and so forth. And that's how we managed. By six o'clock in the evening, the boat left. And by ten o'clock in the evening, the Germans were in Amsterdam. And that was the escape. And I was witness; I was on board.

[interruption for camera check]

[1:01:24]

Yes, so coming back to… your journey. You said you couldn't take anything. Do you remember, did you just grab something, or, what were you wearing? Did you have a bag or…?

My normal clothes. …I recall my father had a couple of, you know, sort of bags and, but no suitcases at all. And I know that he put in things like a tallis and tefillin, and money, maybe valuables of some sort but there was no, there was no clothing. Nothing. '*Wie man steht und geht*', as the saying has it. 'Just as we stood'. That is the way we went and boarded the ship.

And the flat, and your – everything?

We just closed it and that was that. I don't think we even asked anybody to look after it; nothing. I mean don't forget this was sort of… high drama. You know, you're going to leave. I mean, are you going to worry about anything except getting now… You've made up your mind. You're going to go. The Germans are at the gates. You've made up your mind. It's – it's a very dangerous situation. Also for the future, you know. So once we've decided we cannot stay any longer. I think you know, matters of, 'what shall we leave behind?'- we were told simply, "No suitcases will be allowed to be taken on the buses. And otherwise if you do, you stay behind, you're not allowed to board the buses, or you'll be forced to leave your suitcases at the- on arrival." So we didn't- we obeyed orders and we just sort of went, as we stood.

The buses you said left from the Jewish Community. So how long was the trip on the bus?

The trip took a very long time. We must have left, say, about two o'clock. And the distance I think from Amsterdam to IJmuiden is approximately… perhaps thirty miles, at the most. Under normal circumstances you can do that by car within an hour, let's say. Because roads weren't so great in those days. Because you didn't have the, the – you know- sort of *Autobahnen* which you had already in Germany, and so forth. But it, let us say, normally it would have taken an hour; it took us four hours. Because there were road blocks at every… conceivable… place, with armed Dutch soldiers. Stopping… papers. "Who are you?" "Where are you going?" Et cetera. Because, you know. There's a war going on. What are these refugees, six buses of refugees in, in, in a militarised zone, going to what's a harbour, a naval base? Because IJmuiden and Den Helder, up in the north, were the two well-known Naval bases. Den Helder particularly. But IJmuiden was a Naval base as well as being a harbour.

Yeah.

War ships would anchor there and so forth. So you know, the idea of buses with, with, with sort of ordinary citizens going through, was something, you know, which they were ordered "Don't let it through". And there was another complication. The Germans used… para, paratroopers …which who landed at different places to do sabotage, et cetera. And also Fifth-columnists. So consequently it was, for these soldiers who were guarding sort of strategic points it was very difficult to know sometimes, who was who. German soldiers in some instances, as you know from the history, were dressed in Dutch Army uniforms. So there was massive confusion going on. So actually, so Mrs Truus Wijsmuller-Meijer had a job to convince all these people at the road blocks that she has legitimate right to get, to go through. So she had some government paper - identification obviously. But I do remember how she was rushing, you know, from, she was on different buses on the way. There were about half a dozen buses. And as we were approaching roadblocks, obviously we had to stop and she would rush out from the bus. Show the papers, official permission from the government 'Allow these buses through to IJmuiden; they have government approval'. But it all took time to argue with these people! To convince them that you were genuine, that you weren't bringing a bunch of fifth-columnists, you know to- sort of to, to take over installations and blow up things. And I remember at some points it took quite a while to get permission to go

on. So it was a fairly slow, slow process. And I think it took us something like about four hours to get to IJmuiden.

[1:07:14]

And in the bus, in your bus, were there the children or were the Kinder in another bus?

The children were on other buses. There no children in our bus. There were ninety Kindertransport children, and they were taken I think maybe in two buses. But they still had a lot of… Once the Dutch government said, "We want, we have a moral responsibility for these children. We promised their parents we will deliver them to Britain." And Britain, as you will remember by… vote in parliament, gave permission for 10,000 children to be allowed to come into Britain without any formalities, without papers. They were Kindertransports, and 10,000 would be allowed. And that was part of the 10,000.

But of course by then, the Kindertransport had stopped! Because the war had broken out. So this boat must have been the last…Kindertransport into Britain!

I would think, I think this would probably have been the last Kindertransport. I think so. Yes. I can't, I can't believe that there was anything else. Because there were no Kindertransport going from France. Holland was occupied. Belgium was occupied, Dunkirk and all that… So there was no– no way that any other Kinder…we were the last- that's a very good point you're making. This was the last group of Kindertransport children to be able to come to England. Absolutely.

And what's also amazing, if there had been a smaller boat, there wouldn't have been places for other people. But this particular boat, was a big…

Precisely. Precisely. It was a cargo boat.

A cargo ship!

A cargo ship, and they had enough room. And as I mentioned earlier, they – they had enough room for an additional 200 people.

And was it a struggle for those 200 places or how were they allocated?

Oh, absolutely! Because then, when we arrived, there were already queues. And we somehow managed to get on board one of the buses. One of the buses, where we were able to get on. But there were – oh, absolutely - there were a lot of people left standing there. Once the buses left, that was it.

And then the buses arrived.

Buses arrived at – at IJmuiden. But there was a massive walk… I remember, with my father and brother. And there was this Rabbi Babad, who… who we schlepped along.

By himself?

We took him under the arms…

He didn't have family?

Yeah. He was a very sickly man. Very sick. He was suffering from… And then when we came to England he couldn't take the climate in Manchester. I mean, that's where we ended- so he went to Buxton. But he died during the war. And he was a very, very saintly man. I believe he was one of the great Talmudists of our time.

So you walked with him, from the bus?

We walked from his home, all the way, very slowly. That of course took us time to get to - with him and his wife - to get to, to get to the buses. And then we helped him when we arrived, we took him under our arm into the, yeah, into the boat and so forth. So it's been… And then we had six days on board ship.

So there was a long walk from the bus to the ship?

A long walk from the bus to the ship, on arrival, huge, a very, very long. I don't know how. Because they didn't – they didn't allow the buses on the quayside near the, near the boat. So they said, "This is as far as you can get. Get out and walk the rest." That's how it was.

And did you meet the Captain? Was there a Captain of the ship?

Oh, yes, yes. And then the crew was… But there was nothing to eat.

[1:11:34]

So when you came on board, where were you put? It was a cargo ship…

Downstairs, there was, where cargo is, you, they had a few blankets and you just lay down there. You didn't know where- We asked where we were going. The Captain said, "Destination unknown to me as well. I have no idea. I'm awaiting instructions from London." The Dutch Government had transferred to London in the meantime. Right? And they had arrived in England two days before, I think on the third day of the invasion. And the Captain, as I recall just said, "I cannot tell you where we are going because they haven't told me yet. All I can, they told me, just carry on." And we set sail at about six. It was still light. This is May, the…May the… Tuesday - 10th of May was Friday. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday: 14th.
14th of May it was already, light still at six o'clock, of course. And… we left when it was light. But then we had another terrible moment when, you know some of us went downstairs…

Yes?

… and some stayed up on, on deck. And then we had, the bells rang et cetera. And we were told, "Everybody get down as quickly as possible!" There were two German bombers, who then appeared within a couple of minutes from this alarm. And we all rushed downstairs to the hold – the boat-hold. And then two German dive-bombers came over, and raked the ship with shells… but no bombs were dropped. These were dive bombers, Stukas. And if they had – they had been on a mission…I don't know where. Whether it was boats or whether England. Whatever. And they jettisoned their bombs, and on their way back to their base,

they saw this boat. And they hadn't got any more bombs left, but they raked it with machinegun fire. And then, so thank God nothing, nobody was killed. If they had bombs still and this defenceless boat had – you know, was sailing up, it would have, it would have sunk! I mean they would have hit it, there was nothing- it was a defenceless cargo boat. Unable to, to keep them away or offer any resistance. And - but I do recall that the following Morgen, morning, there were a whole… series of big shells, machine-gun …bullets were sprayed all over the deck. And in fact you know they were collected by people, when they came up. So that was that. And then we had a death on board ship, which I also remember. I didn't remember of course who the man was, but I made some research afterwards.

Yes…

A man called Goudstikker, who was the most famous… most famous sort of …seller of - of, of paintings, art objects and so forth. A bit like the - the equivalent of Christie, Sotheby, Bonhams. Not quite the size of course but Jacques Goudstikker.

Yes?

And he was the most, most famous for Old Masters. He specialised in Old Masters. And he broke his neck actually on board ship, on trying to go down the hold. He missed his step, because it was all... And it wasn't the first night, the second night, when he walked, came down and he… And then when he- there was a lot of commotion I seem to remember and we were allowed to dock very briefly at Falmouth. You know where Falmouth is, not far from Exeter…

Yes?

…towards Cornwall. And… we stopped there, and the body was taken off. And it's buried in Falmouth cemetery. And I've given – I've had a picture in my book, you know, where it shows how Jacques Goudstikker lived and died, et cetera. He died on board ship, by a mishap. He missed the step, and he came sort of fall– he then fell down and broke his neck. And he was dead.

[1:16:46]

That's very tragic. I mean as a- you were twelve years, at that point. Were you scared the whole of this journey? Or was it more of an adventure? What…?

Not really, it was, it was all a bit of a dream, and an adventure. You know: We're going off to. Where are we going? We don't know. Are we going to America? Are we going to England? Are we going to South America; where – where are we heading? And there was a lot of speculation, you know, until we didn't know… until the last day. At the moment- we were heading, we went into the North Sea of course and then south, past Southampton, Isle of Wight. I still remember seeing that area. And then we went to Falmouth, where we unloaded the - the body. And then we were told, "We are heading for Liverpool. That is our destination, and that's where the passengers are going to leave the ship."

And you said there was very little food?

Very little.

So what did you eat?

Nothing. We had some bread and we had some… tea or whatever it is. Whatever they had on board. But we had no meals. No meals at all. Not that I can remember. I remember we just had some bread and …I think, don't know whether some cheese or so, but it was precious little there.

And I – I read somewhere that it could have taken actually more people, that it wasn't full. Do you remember that?

It was- yeah, they could have. Probably… probably. I can't tell you exactly what the, what the numbers is it could take. We were only told that Kindertransport and an additional 200. There was room for 200. Now how many actually in addition turned up, I can't tell you.

Yeah.

But we- we knew quite a few people actually who came on board.

I mean I wonder whether they thought maybe of waiting another day, but then it realised the boat had to leave then, immediately.

Yeah.

Whether the command was trying to wait or leave, or…

[1:19:10]

Yes.

But realised that they had to leave that evening.

Oh, definitely. We had to leave that evening, because the Germans were in Amsterdam by ten o'clock. And… literally. And we left at six o'clock in the evening. So it was two hours between our leaving, and the Germans coming into Amsterdam.

And in a way, also because of the Kindertransportees, you almost had a guarantee to come into Britain.

We thought we would.

At least…

Yeah, yeah. That was the idea. But– but don't forget, you know, the situation was so confused. And you didn't. I mean, they were dealing with crises on the continent. I mean there was- the biggest disaster was unfolding for the Allies, I mean, which led ultimately as you know, to the capitulation of France. And Britain was in a dire situation. So I'm not sure… you know, whether - whether the boat, et cetera, whether that received a high priority, you know.

Sure. And, but the Kinder, were they allowed to go off the boat first? Or…?

I couldn't tell you the order of which we did. They came off, and I think they were kept together. And we lost touch with the Kinder. I didn't see them afterwards. I saw them on board ship, of course. There were lots of them.

Do you remember anyone in particular? Anyone you spoke to, or…?

[1:20:56]

I don't actually… There was one, there was one. Ronnie Aschheim, who was a relative of ours. Now he was a Kindertransport. But unbeknown to us, we didn't see him on board. But he was on board. But he, we never saw him, because… I think it's a situation where you've got a lot of people sort of being very preoccupied with what's going on… and, and I don't know, it was all very confusing. And I, I certainly don't remember …any; I know that there were certain people we knew, my parents knew, who were on board ship. But… but I can't honestly claim to remember much of that.

Yes, and the children. Did the lady come with them, or…?

No, no. No, she didn't come, because she felt – she felt that she had more work still to do back in Holland. And… But it's also a very moving story. She left actually her handbag on board ship in order to reassure the children that she was going to come with them. Because- She was a very fine person. I've read quite a bit about her, this Truus Wijsmuller-Meijer. She was an extraordinarily refined woman. Aristocratic woman. And the children loved her dearly. And they wanted very much, you know as long as she was with them, you know, the children were - felt that it was their mother, you know, who was really travelling with them. And she also felt that she must reassure the children. So as a consequence, she left in her memoirs she says this. She left her handbag when she boarded the ship, she took her handbag and she left it on the board that the children should see. "I'm leaving the handbag. I'm with you here of course. I've still got a few things to do." But in fact she went off. And she decided she still had… She was of course questioned by the Gestapo afterwards, what she has been up to. But… I believe in the light of her having these impeccable credentials, and being of really very aristocratic background, that they didn't want to start with her. She was left alone.

And she continued her work?

What could she do?

I think she…

What could she really do? She stayed in Holland, the Nazis took over. I mean, there was – there was nothing you could do.

[1:23:59]

I read that she was quite active. She helped people in Westerbork.

Oh, yeah, yeah! Maybe. But I mean, not- I don't think she was able to repeat any of this to still take children out. I mean, that. Yeah. That I can quite under-believe, that she probably went to Westerbork, make sure as much as she could. But you know with the Nazis you…you couldn't make deals, you know.

No. And she was acknowledged by Yad Vashem… She was acknowledged by Yad Vashem?

Yes…yes.

When did she receive the…?

I don't remember the exact date. Oh definitely! She was one of the Righteous. I mean she has been… But it's a very moving story about her.

Yes…Yes. And you were close to it. Ok, back to you. So, what are your first memories of arriving in Britain?

[1:24:55]

Of Britain? Well, we got off… the boat. And we spent two days in Liverpool, in the Seaman's Union's …accommodation there. And then we were looked at, passports, et cetera.

And we had Polish passports, which had expired. Now, the Germans, the British, then looked upon… people with Polish passports, even though they had expired, as friendly aliens. After all, Poland is why Britain went to war. Britain had guaranteed the frontiers of Poland. The Germans invaded Poland. And hence Britain and France went, declared war on Germany. So we came with passports, but which had expired, because the Poles in the 30s did not, were not prepared to extend your passport if you didn't come back to Poland. They want, they said, "Yes, but we have the Consulates outside Poland are not authorised to extend. Only we can do it," if we come back; and that's what they wanted, you see. And of course no Jew in his right mind would go back to Poland…

Yeah.

… during those… So my father said, Right, so let it expire and then we will have to get permission from the Dutch authorities. And as he had already been from the First World War in Holland, it wasn't difficult to get yearly extensions. And that's what it was. So we were- So we handed over the passports. And they said, right, you're a friendly alien, we have no arguments. So then after Wigan- after Liverpool, they took us to Wigan for de-briefing. Then we were interviewed to see who is who here. Are there any sort of individuals who are really Nazis and so on? So they did that. And we stayed in the – in three churches, interestingly enough. Three churches were requisitioned, and they housed the- a very fair proportion of the 200 people. And it was, I have a very definite memory of our having services in the morning that people, because there were quite a lot of Orthodox Jews. They had tallis and tefillin…

[1:27:44]

In the church?

In the church. In the church. Absolutely. And there were three of those churches. And we were having Shaharit, Minha, Maariv, Shabbat, you name it. And we did that for about four weeks. And one sunny day… somebody comes in and says, "Right, you lot you can go where you want. Where do you want to go?" "In England we have checked you out. You are friendly aliens. You are allies of ours; right, where do you want to go?" So we settled in Salford - part of Manchester. Since my father was in the textile business, Manchester he knew quite a lot of people. And that's where we ended. So they said, "You want to go to

Salford? Off you go." And that's what happened; we went to Salford, and there was a big house requisitioned, where about twenty of us went. You know, so we spent there… and that's where we stayed.

So you were together with your parents? Your sisters…

With our parents. We were never separated. This, I think- people have said, many times to ask me about, "You know, you are refugees…" But my answer's always been, you know, if you were on your own, and if you came as a child, then all sorts of things happen. You've lost your parents or… your siblings. You're alone in a strange environment. Your language… isn't what the one you're used to. And many problems arise. But I think, the status and the sanity of those who came with parents and children, it's a different story.

Yeah.

[1:29:30]

So I, even though I've been uprooted,

Yes.

…but I wasn't uprooted from my parents and my siblings. And that counted hugely. So it was just… You know I was uprooted from Holland and from, from Germany, but always with my parents. Always with the background and, and you know.

It was much harder for them, for your parents, because they left their parents behind.

Yes. Of course. Of course. But from my point of view, my status as a refugee is very different. If you're with your parents and family, your whole attitude, your whole way of thinking is a different one.

Yes, because you were protected in a way.

Absolutely. Absolutely, yeah.

So you moved- so in the meantime, you didn't have any money, so… Who paid? Was there a Refugee Committee who…

I don't know.

… who paid?

Well, this was paid by either the Committee or we came to an arrangement. But we had no money to pay!

Yes…

I mean, we were completely at the mercy of… Of the local authorities. We went into this house, and we then we went to the synagogue nearby, and you know, gradually we, we got money. I think there must have been a Committee that supported those people who came as refugees, and who really didn't have- we didn't have the money to, to, to look after ourselves.

Yes! So how could your father- how did he start?

[1:31:12]

Well he, after - after a while. Well, let me talk about the family. My brother …worked for a while, but then he joined the Army. He joined the British Army, and spent the next five years in the British Army. He was first asked by the Polish Government because they were told that people with Polish passports- But my brother didn't want to go to the Polish Army. There was no great sympathy for the Poles. So he said, "No, I'm not going to join the Polish Army, but I'm very happy to join the British Army." So he did. So he stayed for five years in the Army. My cousin, Gershon, who was a doctor and so forth. He wanted to immediately go to the British Army, but they wouldn't have him. They said, "No, we are short of doctors at the Manchester Royal Infirmary. And you will be much more use to us, because all the young men have gone to the Army, so would you mind going to the Royal Infirmary?" And he worked in a very interesting department of Haematology. And that was the famous time when Vitamin B12 was discovered. Cyanocobalomin. And Gershon was with a man called

Professor Wilkinson who was the head of Haematology and a doctor Israels. And those two were very distinguished haematologists. Did very important work. And Gershon was part of that team that worked on cyano- but then, after two years in the Infirmary, in 1942, they allowed him to go to the Army as well. Because he said, "I want very much to be part of the Army." So then he became a Captain in the Army as a medical- and as a doctor, in the Army.

Did he change his name?

And then he changed his name to 'Kent'. From Gershon Kohn, he became Geoffrey Kent. Yeah. So that was…That was him. And…

And your sisters? What did they do? Your sisters?

[1:33:49]

My sisters. They – they started work, actually, you know, to… And one of them in particular, Celia, she was the breadwinner; she made bags and so forth, you know, in order to - to make money. My father wanted to work. His application was turned down first time, but then later on he managed also to start business and start earning- started earning money.

What business? What did he do?

Pardon?

What business? What did he do?

Textiles. He was in the textile business. And he knew a lot of people. But those, you know the days of Leipzig, when he was a very substantial man, they, you know, that was- that was gone.

So you were the only one who went to school in England?

In England I went to school. Yeah. I went to elementary school, and then I went to- I tried to get into Manchester Grammar which of course was the… great school. But when I tried, in

June 1940, the High Master, as it's called in Manchester- I went with Geoffrey, and he did the talking because I didn't speak any English at all! None! Nothing! Not a word. And then they talked and so forth. Anyhow, the upshot was, the High Master said, "Look, he doesn't speak a word of English. How can I take him in to a school which has high flyers? Very- first it's the best school in northern England. You know, of course- it's, its, also for him it would be difficult. Come back in a year or two when he can speak, and I'll be very happy to consider him then." But instead of which you know, I got to know the boys. We lived in Salford actually, not in Manchester. And I got to know the local boys, the Jewish boys in the area and many of them went to Salford Grammar! So I thought, well, Salford Grammar can't be all that bad if these boys are there. And- So I went to Salford Grammar… and for the next, what is it? I went first to elementary school for about a year. And then I went to Salford Grammar, and left '47.

And how did you manage language-wise?

[1:36:27]

Well… I gradually picked it up. But you know, in the elementary school they were so decent. I mean, when I think back of it. I , the humanity, and the care, and the attention! I mean, I remember, I went to two schools. Grecian Street and Hope School. And the Headmaster of one of them, had the top boy, a chap called McAlpine, to look after me, and to explain things to me to make it an easy language you know, so that I could follow, and so forth. So they really, I must say, the– the wonderful, wonderful… humanity they displayed was absolutely unique. I have nothing but praise.

You didn't experience any hostility?

I did not feel any- no, the contrary. The contrary. This wish to help. The wish to support. Can I do this for you? Can I do that? I must, I must say I don't know what the experience has been of others. Speaking strictly for myself, I have been treated in the most generous, … most humane manner one could poss-ever hope for. I hope I can live up to those- The way they came up. Fantastic.

Because people understood that you came and didn't have the language, and...

[1:38:02]

Yes… yes. Yes. And not only the language, also other subjects. You know? I was really given so much opportunity. When I went to Salford Grammar… in 1942, it shows you. My first year at Salford Grammar and there were thirty-odd boys in class. I came number four in class. That was my first year in Grammar School. So they gave me a special prize for coming number four in a class of thirty-three in my very first year at Grammar School. So that was at Salford. And… That's where I stayed, and took my… my school certificate - higher school certificate. And then I wanted to do medicine, because there is medicine in our family, by Gershon. But then we also had a very famous …a very famous doctor in the families. A man called Aschheim, and that was a relative, an uncle- second uncle of my mother. My mother was born Aschheim. And this man, Selmar Aschheim was one of the great German research gynaecologists. And he worked at the Charité in Berlin.

Yes?

And he, together with another Jewish gynaecologist called Zondek, developed what became known internationally as the first pregnancy test in women. There had never been a- you could see a woman getting, not menstruating, but actually to have a qualitative test to show pregnancy, that was known as the Aschheim-Zondek Test. So that became very famous. So that was a man called Aschheim, whom I never knew, by the way, but – but he was a very well-known man. And I wanted to do medicine, but I couldn't. Because when I got my higher school certificate, I got a …university scholarship. But… that was the time, '48, that was the time when the servicemen were still returning. Because you know they couldn't all get out in one go, millions of men, so, gradually. And so in '48 the servicemen came out, and the government decided rightly, that they must get an opportunity of an education after having spent five years - up to five years – in, in the Army. So, I mean my brother spent five years in the Army. And so this, there was a law, that …only …students, young students, with a state scholarship should be given university places. And ninety percent of all places should be reserved for ex-servicemen. Ninety for ex-servicemen, ten for, for, for students coming from school, and only with state scholarships. Well I didn't get a state scholarship, I got an ordinary scholarship, which would pay for all my studies and so forth. And I couldn't get in. And that went on for one year, so I spent my year reading a lot.

[1:41:44]

And I went to the Rylands Library, which you might know, in Manchester. And I read a lot of literature; I loved the German and English literature. I read a lot of Wilde and …Shaw. And of the Germans, I mean I used to devour Stefan Zweig, for example. I read every one of his books during my year off.

Yes?

Nowadays you go to the, the Antarctic for a year, you know. But in my days, if you couldn't get in, hard luck! You know. Keep, you know… Anyhow, so that's what I did. Anyway, I had difficulty because it still- It still wasn't- you know there were still too many returning servicemen. So then I got in to, I decided do I really want to be a physician, you see. And I came to the conclusion that, maybe not. Maybe that's not my destiny. Why should I, why should I spend so much time and effort on that? Let's- and that was the great period of the drug revolution. Those were heady days. You had, for example, the discovery of the sulfonamide drugs in the 30s, at IG Farben, by a man called Domagk. And that opened the way. The sulphonamides, the first drugs which did, were very effective in a whole variety of bacterial diseases. But, even more important, in '39, '40, penicillin was developed. And I was following that. And I was very, very interested and excited. And I thought, good God, look at this! And, you know, they discovered …penicillin and streptomycin, the first drug in the treatment of TB. Anti-hypertensives. Other cardiovascular drugs. Drugs for the treatment of rheumatology, for severe pains. Vaccines. The Salk vaccine for the prevention of polio. And it was a fantastic period! And I thought to myself, do you know, why do I want to go to medicine? Why don't I rather do something in drug discovery? This is so exciting! And I really was sort of, '*Feuer und Flammen*' [great enthusiasm] you know, and I was very, very interested. So then I decided when I went to university, when I find- I could do pharmacology. And pharmacology of course is the study of drugs. Of the effect of drugs and how they work, where they work, why they work, metabolism, absorption, excret- et cetera. And I thought, that is the most interesting thing. That's what I want to do. So I did a PhD in pharmacology instead.

[1:45:15]

And related to medicine of course.

Which is…

Yes.

Look the doctor spends most of his time proscribing drugs, I mean. And the pharmacologist really knows what it's all about. The doctor knows, "Oh, well, you've got high blood pressure. You take this, this and that." But it's people like me then you know, who really have done the work to make, to understand how to- what to- how does the body work? What is the physiology? What has, what is needed to bring the, the pressure down? With infections. There are all sorts of infections. Drugs which can prevent infections, or treat infections. You know, it was an unending. And cancer, for example. What about drugs to prevent or treat them? And I was very interested in this topic, so I did pharmacology and I managed to – to also get the first prize of the year. The Wilde Prize, which was quite a coveted prize. And then I also got on my PhD I got a research fellowship, the Charter Fellowship, which was also quite a nice thing to get. And I was allowed to choose, where do I want to do post-doctoral work. And I ended up in Rome, with two very famous men, both Nobel Laureates. And, and I did what, ten or twelve papers with them, you know, which really helped me greatly and I mean if I can just finish my career bit…

Who were the two people?

Pardon?

Who were they…?

[1:47:00]

Well, there was Ernst Chain… Well, first I went foremost I went to a man called Bovet, Daniel Bovet, who was the man who… was the most important pharmacologist from the point of view of drug discovery, in, in the world. And I wanted very much to work with him. And he was at the Institute of Health in Rome, having done most of his work at the Pasteur

Institute in Paris. But born in Switzerland. So he was Swiss-born - Neufchatel. He worked in Paris at the Pasteur. Married an Italian woman in Paris, and went back to, with her to Italy after the war. So '45/'6 and he became the Head of Pharmacology at the Instituto Superiore di Sanita. And I joined him first for one year, with this scholarship. And… I managed to get two more scholarships to keep me there for three years. And during that time I met Sir Ernst Chain, or rather, Professor Chain; he wasn't knighted yet. And Chain was the man who actually isolated penicillin. He was the man who actually extracted it. He did the actual biochemical work to extract penicillin. And that was the greatest discovery …so far. Saved millions. And it's a big story. That's a big part of my life, is, has been devoted in one way or the other to this. Not that I ever worked with penicillin so much. But my whole life has been so much influenced by working with the man who did it, and not only working with them scientifically, but we worked on diabetes and so forth together. Published a lot. But he was also a great musician. A wonderful pianist!

Yes?

You know Benny Chain?

Yes.

Well, it's his father. And I worked very closely with his father on music. Gave lots of recitals together. Raised thousands of pounds. And I was, you know. And it was wonderful.

In Rome?

In Rome. And that's where I – where I also became interested in music.

Yes, so you didn't tell us about how you continued the music in England…

[1:49:30]

In England, I didn't. I was a passionate… I didn't do anything in England in music, to be honest. I went to concerts passionately… in Manchester mainly. And I heard recordings on the radio, and this and that. But actually I didn't go back to the violin. But I didn't yet feel the

need to express myself in music. I loved it more than anything. But anyhow then… It's only in Rome, when, because I was- I was sort of working with, and being very friendly with some of the bohemian characters in Rome. And there were lots of singers, and male and female, and... And I had a very, very active role in this sort of- In this sort of community, you know where they were studying music. The instruments. Vocal music and so forth. And then I thought, well maybe this is the moment to get into music again, you know?

Yes.

And that's where it happened - in Rome.

And did you start singing there?

Yes. Yes, that's where I took singing lessons with a very famous singing teacher, who was a great friend of Gigli. Do you remember Gigli? Yeah. And, a man called Mark Antoni who was a very fine teacher. And that's when… when, when the bug - the singing bug - sort of you know, came my way. And I was very, very, very keen to work. And then I tried to, and then after- after Rome, where I altogether stayed three years. They were very happy years. That was the…that was the- Those were the years of '*La Dolce Vita'*, if you remember it. But you weren't around yet. But it was a great…

I know the film, yes.

Great, great years. Really happy and sort of, of carefree. And you know, wonderful, wonderful relationships… et cetera, into which I shall not go any further. [laughs] Pardon?

That's fine, yes.

No, but they were very happy days. And so that was that, and then…

Stimulating. A stimulating time.

[1:51:00]

Very, very stimulating, in every sense. And in Rome I also heard… wonderful music at the opera house, at the… *Teatro Argentina*, where they, where they also, where the orchestra performed. And then the *Terme di Caracalla* in the summer where the operas were. It was- Absolutely great, great years. And also I had the great good fortune of living in the artist colony. There's a place called, there's a wonderful famous street called the Via Margutta. You might have heard of it. That's- That's the bohemian part of Rome. Very lovely. Near the Piazza di Spagna. Anyhow. So then I had another fellowship to take me to America, to New York with another very well-known man, called Gilman, Alfred Gilman, who was perhaps the most influential pharmacologist in America. Wrote a great book, which everybody, everybody in the world who was a pharmacologist must have studied. And so he actually put it to me, he said, "Do you want to stay on? Do you want to stay in America?" I was still a bachelor, you see?

Yeah…

So, "Or do you want to…?" So I said, "Well, I don't really think that I want to stay in America." I liked what I saw, you know, many things. But, but I didn't take to America the way other people have. I thought, life is a bit too superficial. And a bit, you know, they haven't, haven't got their priorities right, I thought, in many cases, you know. Anyhow, rightly or wrongly. Anyhow I joined the pharmaceutical industry. I thought, now we have to start earning a living. After all, I've now been living, having had a parasitic existence. Scholarships and fellowships. Now better start doing an honest day's work. So I did that. And I became very much involved in, in again, always sticking to drugs because that was my - the centre of my interest. But I felt that the drug evaluation, the clinical evaluation of drugs was not good. And I decided after twelve years, that as a senior executive in the industry, to set up my own organisation. Because I felt that drugs have to be dealt with in a very much more definitive, decisive way. Much more carefully, and much more attention has got to be paid, and we've, to know exactly what- So I think, I was probably the first one to set up an independent medical research organisation for the clinical evaluation of new drugs. And don't forget, fortunes are being spent on new drugs, by the industry. A billion dollars today, for a new drug. Ten years' hard work, until you get to the point of marketing. And I thought with at all that amount of money spent…But I'm, things are different today, but I'm talking now in the 1960s and when I – when I started, 1970, drugs were not carefully investigated. They were not done by good people. They were not done by the, by really top clinicians. And

I thought I would… play a part to try and remedy that. And that was a very successful… move. And we did very well, became extremely well-known all over – all over the world, I would think.

What was the name of the company?

[1:56:09]

The company was called '*Advisory Services, Clinical and General'*. And that was the company but now it's a holdings company and so forth. But in those days- and we, and then I had set up another two companies. And then I had another, a drug which I personally sort of took over, under another company. You know. And which again, was very successful. And so I… you know, I, I, I really played my part in, in drug research. And I didn't invent anything, I didn't but I think my contribution to drug research is that drugs are properly looked at. Because… this is a drug rises or falls on the outcome of your clinical work. Because that's what matters. What it does in the mice, or rats, or guinea pigs, and all that - you know, that's all important additional work. But you know the crux is, what does it do in man? How does it behave in certain clinical conditions? And is the activity significant? And what about the side-effects? Are they acceptable, and so forth? So I think you know, that has been the major part of my work. And I spent about thirty years in that to develop these techniques, and you know, that's that. And you know we got the Queen's Award for the,…Industry for our contribution to medical science. And… that's that part of the story.

So what is your proudest achievement in that field? Is that the testing?

What is…?

…Your proudest achievement in the pharmaceutical field?

Yeah…what is?

Would you say that you established…?

[1:58:24]

Well I think, yeah. I think really our contribution to, to the, to medical sciences is providing the essential services and particularly the clinical services required to establish the action of the drug, and whether its activity merits for it to be given to patients suffering from whatever it might be. And also looking at the side-effects, for example. I mean you have a new drug, let's say, for the treatment of cancer. Serious condition. Right. It acts on the cell, on the- any particular, or the metabolite of a cell or whatever. And that's sort of well and good. But what is the dose at which you have to give the drug? And over what period? And what does it do in addition to the positive effects? Does it produce any side-effects? Cardio-vascular, on the kidneys, on the nervous system? Wherever. And you've got to get that balance right. You've got to get to know a drug at its therapeutic level. If, for example you're treating a very minor condition, you cannot accept serious side-effects. That's not on. You can't do that. Because then the side-effects… overrule – overrule the therapy. But if on the other hand you have a serious condition, you know, like, like cancer or you've got a serious respiratory condition, and you have a drug which is effective, then you've got to make sure that the side-effects are within reason. Not that people might be killed from the side-effects. I mean, then that's - that's not an answer. So you know, this is the thing: I would like to think that we have really played a role in making sure that drugs are used carefully, and that they are- that you use effective drugs, and that you are always aware that the drug can produce side-effects and so forth. I mean we've had this terrible tragedy with Thalidomide, if you remember, years ago.

Yes.

With Chemie Grünenthal. Whose. And we were advising them afterwards, after it happened. So we were called in actually.

[2:01:17]

Afterwards?

After it happened. How it could, what continue. What- we then guided them into a different side of this because it was a very effective molecule. And they were, the company, Grünenthal, was owned by the Wirtz Brothers. And they were very nice people to deal with. So I remember going to… to Aachen, Stolberg near Aachen; that's where they had their

company. But we advised them for a time, how to, how to really sort of handle this… in a way which, you know, which – which could perhaps still use this particular molecule in other – in other ways.

But it must have been one of the major pharmaceutical failures I would think... in…

If…?

The Thalidomide, that problem, in the pharmaceutical world…

Well, it was a serious problem in Germany, because you had many cases in Germany. You had- you had also in England. But it wasn't marketed- in Australia, there you had- you had a man called McBride in, in Perth, who picked it up and, and then you also had people in Hamburg who - who were very…who showed it.

It had a different name in Germany: 'Contergan'.

Pardon?

'Contergan' - was the German name.

'Contergan' yes. Yes. Contergan was the German name. But I knew the Distillers Company as well in England, who had the license from Grünenthal. And there was a man called Dr George Summers, who was the pharmacologist of the company. And he then developed a method by which you could tell whether a drug produced significant damage to the developing foetus. And that was done on the white New Zealand rabbit. That was the way the test was done.

Do you think this could have been prevented by better testing?

Well, this is a big- well, obviously. But, you know, with hindsight, you, you, you know. But I think at the time, it wasn't used, you know. A drug wasn't tried out… in pregnancy. But anyhow. But we've been involved in, in so many different drugs that…

Ralph let's talk about your private life, you haven't told us about what happened in the meantime.

My private life?

[2:04:06]

Yeah. Meaning, when did you meet your wife…?

Ah, oh good. I'm glad to hear your…

[laughing] …the ominous 'private life'…

I see, I, I thought. I wasn't quite sure what you were getting at. I got married in 1963. I met Zahava in Holland for the first time, and… And we, after a relatively short engagement. We met in August on her birthday, actually, on the 5th of August 1962. And we were engaged that Christmas, '62. And we were married in March '63. And… very much a similar background to, to ourselves as far as the parents are concerned. Continental, Orthodox, et cetera, et cetera. And unfortunately, well of course it's not Zahava's story here. You'll be interviewing her separately.

Yes. What was her family name?

Yeah. Kamarek was the family name. And we have three wonderful children. Hephzi, Michelle and Maxine. I don't know if you know them all. Do you know them all? You have met them at one point. And they have lovely children. And the girls are really, I mean, extraordinary I think in, in so many ways. Hephzi is, is a brilliant, I mean, she's a, she's a highly intelligent person. And she's an LSE graduate; has done a lot of work with Zahava as you know. And she is really doing that magnificently. And a lovely family.

This is Holocaust education. They go together and give talks.

Yes. And they were given, they were given the Freedom of the City of London as you probably know. And really, an outstanding. And she has done fantastic work, and very warm

and lovely, lovely girl. Then Michelle is a doctor. She is an oncologist. She is interested in… in cancer. And she is set up for the LOC, which is the London Oncology Centre, which is quite a well-known. Daniel Hochhauser is one of the consultants there and so forth. And so she is in charge of a whole concept: 'Living Well'. Very briefly put, it's, you know the consultants concentrate: cancer. That's it. We've got to do either this, that or the other. But what happens is that, the consultant who might be looking after certain cancer let's say suggest surgery, chemotherapy or radiation, the three standard sort of things. And then more or less leaves the patient to get on with it. And now Michelle comes in to these people, and says, "Now, what else is going on?" Because it's not just cancer. Because you might have psychological problems, you might go into deep depression because of what you've got. You've got problems at home. You've got…You might have rheumatological problem. You might have arthritis of the hip or knee and you can't get about. You've got, all sorts of other things, which really has- You cannot just talk about a person who has got cancer. You've got to take a holistic approach. You must look at a patient. I want you to get better. Now Doctor so and so is looking after the specific. I am going to look after your whole being. I want to make sure that your life gets back to normal as quickly as possible; and what's required? Now that's Michelle, who is doing a wonderful, wonderful job. And she's got a great personality. And she is a doer. She gets done, and you can't escape from her. Once she makes up her mind to do something, no wild horses won't sort of stop her. And the third one is Maxine, who is a brilliant - probably the most intellectual of the girls. And she is a senior executive with Google, and is across the Atlantic every two, three months to tell the boys what to do there, in So she goes over to, to California. And she has just come back actually couple of days ago from California. So she is a very, very lovely girl. Married. Her husband is non-Jewish, which was a great blow to us, I must be very frank, but there you are. The children are, are brought up… in some sort of way. The boy has been - has been circumcised. And we flew out to Hong Kong where she was at the time, with a Rabbi, with a Mohel, to do the job in, in Hong Kong. So… And of course, we're all on wonderful terms. Excellent; it hasn't estranged her, which I'm very pleased to say. And of course, we still have- we have the closest, and as I say she's the most intellectual of the three. And she has a fantastic pen. And a great- and as I say, she has one of the senior positions in Europe for Google. So those are the girls.

[2:10:27]

Speaking of identity, how important- 'cause you mentioned Jewish identity. How important is your Jewish identity to you?

Mine?

Yes.

Very important. Very important. I- it's one of the important things in my life. And, and coming from a very Orthodox background, I can't claim to be in that league. But certainly, you know, I - I keep to the dietary laws, I keep, not entirely, but, the Shabbat – Sabbath - means something. The High Holidays and others we keep strictly. And of course lots and lots of Jewish friends. We're members of Dunstan Road for example, and support many Jewish charities. Chai, and and Laniado and Share Tzedek and, and you name it. I mean all sorts of other …Jewish things. Jewish opera, for example. The JMI, and so forth. So I am supporting many, many Jewish…and not to speak of Yeshivas. The Son of the what-do-you-call-it, the Gateshead, Israeli Yeshivas and, and then of course also we, we support the… the…what's the one called….the, the one in Jerusalem you know, the music centre. Which David Stern created. It's the Mishkenot Sha'ananim, the Mishkenot. And we - we sponsor masterclasses there which I coordinate with Murray Perahia, who is the President of the, of that, of the what do you call it, Mishkenot. And also people like Graham Johnson, who go over to – to every so often to Jerusalem and then also the Israel Philharmonic and other... so we have…

That's the one side. We haven't talked about your musical involvement. So that's the one side that's that, but the other side there is Leipzig and Bach.

Yes…yes. Yes.

Maybe you could just briefly tell us…

Briefly that. Well, Bach of course is the great – the great joy in my life. I mean, you know it's like Max Reger said, "*Anfang und Ende aller Musik*" [beginning and end of all music]. I'm not as fanatic as Reger was in his uttering. But I would say that that plays a very important part. And as you know, we support the Cantatas…and that's…

At the Royal Academy…

[2:13:19]

At the Royal Academy of Music. We are – we are the ones who have started the International Song Competition at the Hall, and support music and prizes. The Bach Prize for example, at the Royal Academy. And in, in Leipzig for example, the Bach Archiv in, in, you know, which looks after, after the Bach Scholarship, Bach Performance, Bach Research and so forth. And we are very much involved in that. Also I have great personal friendships with all these people. And the great …man in, Christoph Wolff who is the great Bach connoisseur in the world perhaps. He held the Chair of Music at Harvard, but he is now retired from that. But we are still very close with the Leipzig people. John Elliot Gardiner is now the President with whom I've also worked together very closely. I've given many recitals…

Yes.

…in the course of the years, and sixteen CDs mainly with Graham Johnson. All the Schubert …cycles and Schumann, and Beethoven and Mahler. We've done, and so forth and many other things as well. And then I've got four CDs with the English Chamber Orchestra, which again has been…. And in my book I've got a selection... Did you ever listen to that, or not yet?

I haven't listened to it yet.

No, well, you must try and listen to it.

Yes.

Yeah. So music is a, is a very important part of my life.

But it's also a particular music. I mean it's in a way unusual that in a way you play an important part in Leipzig, so to speak and it kept, you kept this connection.

Yes…yes.

You didn't keep- you reinvented it in a way, for yourself.

I reinvented it, yeah. But Leipzig has, has, has been very, very generous towards me. They've made me an Honorary Citizen of Leipzig, you know that?

Yes.

And I've also had the Order of Merit from the President, for my contribution.

So what was it like? When did you first go to Leipzig?

I went first to Leipzig in 1961, when it was still under the rules of Mr., of Mr. what was his name, not Honecker…the other one.

Ulbricht?

[2:16:05]

Pardon?

Ulbricht? …Ulbricht?

No, no. That was…Who was the man again? The…the first President they had after the war. It will come to us. Yeah, so I went back for the first time in 1961, on the occasion of – of one of the *Leipziger Messe* exhibitions. And since then I've gone back very, very often.

And what was it like to go to Germany for you, post war? I'm sure other people said, "How…" especially in England said, "How can you be in touch and...?"

True, true. But you know, Bea, the point is I've been dealing with German, German scientists, German pharmaceutical industry. So Leipzig wasn't the first place I went to after the war. I had dealings with the German pharmaceutical industry. At meetings I met German

scientists and so forth. And I must say, their reaction… Germany has been very fine in its recognition of what they've done and making amends for it et cetera.

So you never had a personal- did you ever feel you had a problem with, I mean, of either dealing with post-war Germany…?

Well…

I mean, some of the companies have dubious histories, like IG Farben…

Yes, of course, of course. That's right. I mean, that's absolutely true. There was one - one occasion when… when I had to deal Boehringer Mannheim. And the Research Director was the Rector of, was it Göttingen, one of those which required the *Führer's* approval. And I knew about this man. And… And I told them at Smith Kline where I was employed at the time, I said, "You know, I'm not all that's keen." But they said, "Well look, you know, this is part… You've got to do this." So I said, "Well, I'm not very keen to meet this man, but if it's obviously something I have got to do for the company, I do it." So there have been, opport- I have never personally felt any animosity, any antagonism, any, anything that's ever. I mean what they say behind my back, I can't – I can't tell. But I've never felt animosity.

[2:18:50]

But I mean also from yourself, you didn't feel anger or…?

No, I, I'm not the sort of person who has. I mean yes, I could hate if I know this person has, with his own hands has been responsible. But I can't… I mean, I'll be very frank. If you ask me, the bombing of Germany: Do you regret what happened to Dresden for example? In all honesty, however much I love that beautiful city, Dresden. Beautiful city. But I…I say to myself, "Six million people you've chucked into the gas chambers. I think you should pay a price for that. And if your populations in, in, in Hamburg and in Berlin and in Munich and in all these – and the Rhineland and the Ruhr. If that- if all that's been destroyed during the war by the Royal Air Force, with many people killed, I am not crying for you. I don't say- I know for example somebody very well-known here, who said to me once, they said, "You know we have behaved like criminals in, in Dresden. We should have never done that. This great city.

Doesn't matter. If they've killed so many Germans, I wouldn't care, but how can you destroy a city like that?" Well, you know, I don't hold this view. I think- my personal view is, "You should have felt the pain yourself. You can't go around murdering people right left and centre, and the *Einsatzkommandos* [subgroup of mobile killing], all those – all those gangsters to go around, and what they've done to not only Jews but others as well. Killed so many millions of innocent people. I must tell you, when… when … [*noise interruption*]

[2:20:59]

I was just going to say, I'll be perfectly frank. When I heard in 1942, '42, that Britain sent 1,000 bombers on the first …1,000-bomber attack over Cologne… I rejoiced. And when, you know, during the war, we gave back some of the medicine we had received. It did not fill me- I wasn't sort of wringing my hands and saying, "*Och*! I'm so sorry, I'm so sad to hear what's happening; Germany's getting all this." No. I'm afraid I was totally and utterly in sympathy with what the Royal Air Force did and the American Airforce in destroying, and giving them some of the pain which they have inflicted. So I'm not an apologist for this at all. And even today, if people say to me, even if Germans were to say to me, "But don't you think what's happened to German cities…?" And my answer is, "But do you realise what you've done? And do you expect people to just sit back and not retaliate? No, I'm sorry. I have no sympathy." So I am not one of those who is sort of guilt-ridden, you know, and say, "*Och*, we should have never done that." No. I say, "Serves you right." That's- I mean I don't like to see human suffering at all! But… "that's what you wanted; that's what you deserve. In fact, you should have had much more than that."

But in a way through the music you are- you stay connected.

[2:22:46]

Of course, no. But we never- I've never actually had any apology- sort of discussions, serious discussions and people saying to me, "Oh, what you have done…" and so on. Never. I've always had very good- I don't touch the subject. They know how I feel. When I go to Leipzig, they know I'm a Jew. They know everything about me. And I come as I stand. Never apologise. This is what I am. My wife is a survivor from Bergen-Belsen, and so forth. And take it or leave it, that is what it is. We have the best relations but they know, no-

nonsense. I'm not one of those sort of you know, apologetic things trying to hide or so. I never believed in that. And I think you get more respect by people; they know who you are. When I became an Honorary Citizen of Leipzig and it was done in that magnificent baroque *Börse [stock exchange]* in Leipzig, by the *Bürgemeister [mayor]…* Yes? Who himself came, and he took me under his arm. And this is the gospel truth. And he says, "Herr Kohn, this- Can you see that table?" And there was a big sign, 'Kosher' over it. "We brought this especially from Berlin so everything that is on that table is absolutely kosher. So you can have this…" Which I thought was a very nice gesture to make. You know. And they know- They know that.

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

I am, I am a British citizen, with great pride in his Jewish background, great pride in Israel. And its achievements. And …that's it. That's it.

And …looking back on your life, how do you think did being a refugee, which you were, how did it shape your life?

I think perhaps it gave me the additional stimulus to… make up for all that. The fact that we've had to run twice to, first Holland then to England et cetera, it's given me sort of something to work and to achieve and say, "Right. OK, that's happened. Right. Now let's not- let's not …cry over this. Yes, remember. Yes, make- just be aware of all that. But get on with life. I've always believed in 'There's something else'. Carry on. Go on with your life, with what you want to achieve." And, and my refugee statement, status has never, has never inhibited me. I have no inferiority complex at all. If people sort of want to get at me for whatever it is, it doesn't disturb me.

[2:26:21]

And you were Knighted. What was that like for you? Was it important?

Oh, that was- That was great, yeah. But that was a very unusual citation. I don't know if you remember it. It was for services, unique actually, because there are three items: 'Knighted for

services to science, music and charity'. That was the citation. So that actually sums it up very nicely.

Very nice…

That I have done… But we haven't' finished yet, Bea. We haven't finished. I still want to do a few things.

What do you want to do?

I want to- I want to still sing a bit. I want to make another recording. Because I got, I think my voice is better today, than it ever was before. And Graham Johnson can't wait to start to do it. Zahava says, "Oh, stop this. Stop this. You can't do this!" But I'd still like to do it. And I've still also got a lot of work with the Royal Society. I could go on and tell you really some wonderful things, still.

Yes.

But I think you've probably had enough of all this.

Just a very few last questions. How do you think- how would your life have been if Hitler hadn't come to power?

Well, I suppose I would have lived in Germany and done whatever. It- it's very difficult to answer that question. How would I have? How do I know?

I don't know; how would you? Do you think about it sometimes? …No.

Not really. Not really. I take life as it comes. What it might have been. What would it have been had I …got into medical school and done medicine, and so forth. I don't know. *'Für das Gewesene gibt der Jude nichts'.* You know that, don't you?

Yes, could you translate it for us please?

'For what has happened the Jew… doesn't really sort of spend his time on things of the past'.

But having said that, you wrote your autobiography. So the past is important to you?

[2:28:33]

To be recorded. To be- as a record, yes. But don't live in the past. I mean I don't, you know, just- yes, of course it is important to me. I hope some other people will think, yes, there are some interesting things there. But I- I don't want to say "*Och*, you know…" To…to romanticise too much. Yes, you have happy memories; you don't, have memories which are not so happy. But – But I think…I don't want to dwell too much. There's too much- rather than dwell on the past, I dwell on the future. Does that sound sensible?

That sounds sensible. And that brings me to my almost last question, which is: Do you have a message for somebody who might watch this interview, in the future?

Yeah, I think you should try and live your life with… enthusiasm, with …wishing to achieve something which is meaningful to you, and do the things with energy, with determination. And also always remember there is, there is, you can never know in advance how things are going to work out. So don't dwell too much on things which haven't gone right. Just think that what hasn't gone right in your life, is an experience. But you've learned from it; you've taken note of it. Your life is now perhaps a… little different. And try and don't be discouraged by things which might not have gone right. Because there may be a far greater thing still ahead. And far better things for you to be happy and satisfied. And do it with, with enthusiasm as, as though it's the most wonderful thing. But do it not because - because your parents say, "Well, I want you to be a dentist or an accountant". You will only be happy doing what you wish, and what you feel. And don't be, don't diverted from… what you would like to achieve in life.

That's a very good message. Is there anything else we haven't talked about which you would like to add…?

We haven't started yet, Bea!

[Bea laughs]

I mean, we could stay here still a long time.

Yes. But anything comes to mind now which you think we didn't mention?

I don't really think so.

OK. In that case, Sir Ralph. Thank you very, very much for this interview. I'm going to look at another point, at some photographs.

OK…OK. Lovely…lovely.

So it's just to say, at this point, thank you very much.

Oh, it's a great pleasure. Great pleasure. Thank you for giving me the opportunity of pouring out my heart to you. [laughs]

[End of interview]
[2:32:05]