

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Tom
Interviewee Sex:	Male
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Interviewee POB:	Berlin, Germany

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Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV227
NAME: Tom Jacobs
DATE: 5th November 2018
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

It is with Mr. Tom Jacobs in London and the date is the 5th of November 2018.

Thank you very much indeed Mr. Tom Jacobs for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Project today. May we start by going back to your early childhood in Berlin, your experiences there, how you felt about them and your family?

Yes, indeed, by all means. I was born in 1928 in Berlin. My mother by then had separated from my dad. I never actually met him. And so, my family in Berlin was my mother, her two brothers, my grandfather and *Omi*, his wife. We lived in Berchtesgadener Straße. My grandfather was the head of the family, and he was an ear, nose and throat doctor.

And what were your experiences? What special memories do you have of your early days in Berlin?

Well, I went to a Jewish school. A synagogue was in the centre of the building. Boys' and girls' wings were attached to the synagogue, but on opposite sides of it. And it was a proper Jewish school. We had to learn Hebrew, at which I was absolutely no good whatsoever, getting others to do my homework for me. We enjoyed the Jewish festivals, especially *Laubhütten*, which is the harvest festival when they were- we built a hut in the yard of the

school from branches, which was hung with fruit, to celebrate. Sukkot - it is. And at the end of the festival, we got to eat the fruit. But we were not a Jewish household, as such. At Christmas stroke Hanukkah, I lit both sets of candles, those on the Christmas tree - and in those days there were real candles - and the Hanukkah candles. So, I had a sort of mixed religion upbringing. Enjoyable, because I was well looked after, but also a bit scary, because presently the Nazis burned down my school. I went to school, rounded the corner and the school was ablaze. The school was in Prinzregentenstraße. And the fire engines were busy playing their hoses on the walls of the flats adjacent to the school, but not on the school itself. And I couldn't understand that. I was eight years old at the time. Why were they not playing their hoses on my school? And many other secondary inferences that the Nazis were in charge, were part of my childhood. My grandfather had a shield on the fence, and they defaced it with an arrow and 'Jude' on the pavement.

[0:03:59]

The nearest shop around the corner, an ice cream shop was similarly defaced. I couldn't in the park sit on benches. I had to sit on yellow benches, which were especially- for Jews only. So, without understanding what was going on, I was after all, a real youngster, I was conscious that all was not well in our community. And presently a decision, sorry- my mother by then had emigrated- separated from my father at [my] birth, had emigrated to London in order to make a home for me. Pretty difficult for a single German Jewish lady at that time, in London.

Do you know which year that was?

Pardon?

Which year that was? Do you know?

She must have come- I came in '38. So, she probably came in late '36 or '37. I think late '36. With the- she saw better than my family what was going on. After all my grandfather was eminent. He was given the Iron Cross in the thirteen- in the First World War for services to medicine at the front. So, it was very hard, I think, for my grandparents who were- and uncles, who were really in charge of me once my mother was in Great Britain, to appreciate the full horror of what was going on. I just had secondary signals. The Nazis with their

swastikas singing Nazi songs as they marched up and down the Grunewaldstraße which the Berchtesgadener Strasse joined into. And in various ways, life was made difficult for us.

[0:06:19]

Visas were very much part of Britain's policy in order to limit the number of Jews who could escape. And a new visa was introduced in 1938. And my family decided they had to get me out of Berlin before the effects of that visa became evident. So, quite suddenly, I was told I was going to be taken to London. Packed a little suitcase, was taken to the *Hauptbahnhof*, the main station in Berlin. And I remember my carers, an uncle and a grandparent, walking up and down the platform, saying to the people who were going on that train, "*Fahren Sie nach London? Fahren Sie nach London? Fahren Sie nach London?*" And in the end, they found a couple who not only were travelling to London, but were willing to take me with them. And so, I said to my family, on the platform of the *Hauptbahnhof*, and of course, I never saw them again. Because those who hadn't escaped to Great Britain ended up in Auschwitz. So, I lost quite a substantial chunk of my family to the Nazis in concentration camps. I got to London.

Could I- could we pause there just for one moment, please? What did your mother do in London? What work?

[0:07:59]

She was a secretary. She spoke German fluently, of course, and English and was a secretary. The only work she could get, I imagine.

And how did you feel about the prospect of coming to Britain? When you were told that you were going to leave Berlin, leave your family behind?

I was baffled by what was going on. I was only an eight-year-old kid.

Were you frightened?

Well, the journey itself was pretty awful. The couple who picked me up, to take me to London, on the train from Berlin, to the Hook of Holland, to Harwich, to Liverpool Street

Station, which was the classic way of getting out of Berlin at the time - they had cameras. They were photographers. And on the frontier with Holland, the Germans instituted a thing called “*Eine Stichprobe*”. It was a [random] sample- search of people who they thought might be smuggling, who were taken off the train. The train departed without us, so I - because I was in their care - was held back on the frontier while they went through a twenty-four- hour search procedure. So, I actually got onto the train on the following day. But being held back by the Nazis was, even for an eight-year-old, pretty scary. I'll give you one example of how horrible it was. I wanted to go to the lavatory to do a number two, and made this known. And a woman warder accompanied me. And I was not allowed to shut the door of the toilet in order to do the number two, presumably ‘cause they thought I might have something hidden about me that they should know about. So, I couldn't do it. So, I became constipated. I couldn't do my number two under that- so it was not a comfortable journey at all. But of course, it was a great joy when I met my mum- who had gone through torture! Because the train that I was come- to come on, I didn't come on. I came on one twenty-four hours later. So, she had a tough time of it.

[0:10:49]

She must have been absolutely terrified on your behalf.

Absolutely – absolutely. Yes. She'd got a message that I had been held up, but she got that message when I was already underway.

But you must have been terrified as well.

Well, I was a kid. And the things that mattered to me like being allowed to go to the loo, and being separated from my family in Berlin, and- it was not a good time for a child.

No. Do you have- do you have nightmares about that?

I had some bad times, once I got to London, yes. Because- mainly because my mother was aware that she would never see her parents again. And it was her tremendous distress - affected me. She wept. And to see one's mother weep is pretty scary for an eight-year-old.

Once you were here in Britain, did you go to school here straight away, or what happened to you?

[0:12:14]

My mum lived in a row called Parliament Hill. She had- in those days, they had – and still - very nice stone-built det- terraced houses. And she had the room over the front door, which was tiny. You know, it was smaller than this room. Half the size of the room that we were in. And she has no hope of looking after me, as well as going out to work. So, she found a boarding school for me. It was called The Randolph Caldecott Community, and it was in Maidstone, in Kent. And within days of arriving in London, I was taken to the community who had agreed to accept me - they took several refugees by the way - and was introduced to live there. It was an odd- on reflection, it was an odd community, because Mr. Randolph Caldecott decided to have no male staff. So, the entire boarding school was run by ladies, very many of them, of course, spinsters. So, it had an atmosphere all of its own. And wasn't an easy place for me to assimilate within. Thank goodness were- there were some other refugees there. But the thing that was really important, and we soon recognised, is, that we were seen quite often as enemy aliens by other children. After all, we were German. So, we could not really group together as a group of refugees, because all that did was to emphasise that we were not British. And we were pretty desperate to be seen to be British, or to be seen to be becoming British. So, it was a- not an easy time for me in- in the early years. And in Maidstone, we were under the flight path of Nazi planes into London. And I actually lay in- in the lawn there watching German planes going overhead and Spitfires having a go at them. So very soon, the school was evacuated - the entire school, boys and girls - first to a miscellany of people who were prepared to take children. Mine was... in Oxford, in the house of an author. So, I went to Chipping Norton School. Grammar school by then I was old enough to have left the junior school and went into senior school.

[0:15:36]

Could I just ask, please? Did you speak any English before you came to Britain-

No.

-or did you have to learn the hard way?

I had to learn the hard way. My grandfather sought to teach me. And there's a photo somewhere here, of me sitting on his lap, and he, using his textbook: a copy of *The Times*. It's not the best vehicle to teach in- a kid the language but he did his best. He was a lovely man, and he did his best.

Was- was it any easier being at the grammar school, or were- or was it more difficult? Were there other refugees there also?

There were a few others, but we were of different ages, girls as well as boys. And this was a boys' school. And I didn't have an easy time of it there. But gradually I- I assimilated. Spoke English pretty quickly. I had not a word of English when I got here. Spoke English pretty quickly, made some friends and became an English school boy.

Were you proud of that?

I was - and still am - tremendously patriotic. I've never forgotten that it was only due to Great Britain accepting me, that I got out of Nazi Germany at all. And to give you an example of my patriotism, I got nationalised as soon as I could, knowing that I would be called up into the British Army. And people said to me, "Tom, don't get nationalised now. You'll be in the army! Wait until you're beyond the calling-up age and do it then." I said, "No, I want to be British." So, I was nationalised in the late years of the war. And by 1947, I'd been called up into the British Army, which for me was the thing I felt I wanted to do.

[0:17:56]

And where did you serve in the army?

I was- even then, I was fairly technical. I'm a physicist now, and I was good at engineering matters even then. And so, they put me into The Royal Signals. And I was attached to a fine British regiment, the Fourth Queen's Own Hussars. And they were quartered in Colchester Barracks. So, once I had had six weeks of primary training in the army, and then another four weeks or so, of training on their particular radio apparatus, which is what it was all about, I

was sent to the- to join a small signals group attached to Fourth Queen's Own Hussars in Colchester. And we will not there long before the lot of us were sent to Malaya, where we had a bit of an insurrection at the time. The Malayan People's anti-Japanese Army, having crossed out the 'J' and replaced it with a 'B', to become The Malayan People's anti-British Army. So, in 1948, I was in- attach to the regiment there, and the regiment was doing battle with terrorists.

Did you have any qualms about fighting the terrorists in terms of...?

Not at all.

...independence or...?

[0:19:46]

No. I was still a youngster, you know? And my immense relief at being in the army at all meant that- I was just a soldier; you do as you're told. And in those days, the liberty of the individual in the army was less than I think it has become since.

But, in terms of the Malaysians, were they fighting for inde- for their independence?

It was a colony. And the greatest source of American dollars, was through the export of rubber and tin from Malaya. We didn't have anything to export here. But the colony produced products that the Americans were prepared to buy in dollars. So, it was very important for Great Britain that we succeeded in Malaya. Which we did.

So, you were proud to have served there?

I'm not sure that I was proud, but it was the right place where I wanted to be. Because, I was only a signaller, which is the lowest rank in the army. But it was very good for me. You know, it- I went in as a schoolboy, and I came out as a young man. Very important. And incidentally, having been a- a soldier, I got a very good education grant. And when I came out of the army, I went into the university to take a degree in physics. And I was, by and large, better off than very many students, because I had my army disbursement. It was called

“a further education and training grant” given to ex-servicemen. And I never had to rely upon my parents for finance, because I had sufficient money in my own right, which is good. My mum, by the way, had re- remarried during the war, a lovely man called Heini Jacobs, a refugee lawyer, also from Germany. And he became my stepfather, and was a lovely man.

[0:22:41]

Could I just ask please, which university did you go to?

I went to London University. Because my entrance to university he engineered. I mean, I was in the blooming jungle in Malaya at the time, and there wasn't much I could do. But he organised my university place for me, while I was still in the army. And when I came back, he said, “You're going to go to the Chelsea College of Science and Technology” - which I did, and took a degree in physics.

And what did that degree lead you to in terms of your profession?

Well, physicists, then- then, as now, were much sought after. And I had decided, as an undergraduate, I wanted to be in manufacturing industry. The process of turning raw materials into finished goods, creating wealth. It was all part of being a refugee, you know. You wanted to serve your country in the best way that you could. And I felt the thing to do was to go into- into industry, and thereby add to the nation's wealth. Which I did. I got my degree. I went into the milk round, as in those days- I think it's still exists actually. Companies looking for particular skills, met undergraduates in the milk round and interviewed them. And I got a couple of offers - job offers - straight away. One from Standard Telephones and Cables. I only went to technical interviews. The other from NV Philips Gloeilampenfabrieken, a Dutch multinational. And I took the Dutch offer, because they said, “If you join us, we will put you into our research laboratory.” And every young physicist would like to do some research. Whereas Standard Telephones and Cables would have put me into factory engineering. And the possibility of doing some research outweighed that. So, I joined Mullard Research Laboratories, a company called ‘Mullard’ in those days, who were down in- near Redhill. And met the man- manager- the chief executive of the research laboratories when I got there - Peter Trier.

[0:25:35]

He's no longer alive. He was a German Jewish refugee. So- I felt doubly at home to be in the research laboratories and I did five years there. Perfectly good research. Greatly enjoyed it. But after five years, I realised I was not intrinsically a researcher. I couldn't keep that up for the rest of my life. So, I told the company, "I've got to leave to find a job outside research." And they said, "No way will you leave. We will find you a job outside research." So, I stayed with Mullard Limited for a long time, in their technical commercial management departments - which again, was great. You met the company's customers. And you dealt with a customer's problems, some of which were pretty dramatic. So, as a youngster, I was sent straight away to a company to introduce myself. And I was then their voice within Mullard's. It was great. Do you want to hear about one of the marvellous things that went wrong? You don't have to put it into your account.

Just briefly. Yes.

[0:27:05]

Briefly. We made components for car radios. And our components were breaking down in manufacturers' products once these had been installed in cars. Now for us that was a disaster, because the bits that we were making, meant that the cars had to be taken back to their source. The owners had to be lent other cars. It cost them a fortune. So, the pressure on us to find a solution was immense. And luckily, we found it.

You must have been so pleased about that.

Yes. Oh, it was exciting. The real stuff of manufacturing really, you know, things go wrong.

But you then moved on to teaching.

I stayed in the research laboratories, then in the company's head office, then decided I needed more experience. And... I was pretty good at it all, then. And I joined a- a firm of consultants and became a consultant to technical industries. And that was a very good career, because by then I knew a lot. So, I could go to companies that had problems and offer them sound

advice. By the way, one of the great customers that we had was the government of- the German government. And they had huge union problems at the time, and strikes, against the technology in the printing industry. And- because lots of people were- would go out of- get out to work, and they were shocked at this. They- they- their industry had not faced up to it. So, we were employed - my company, Macintosh Consultants - to work on a contract for the German company, to explain to them what was going wrong. Which we did. I and another consultant, spent, I don't know, six months working for the German government. And of course, I was chosen very much so because I spoke fluent German anyway, and knew my way around. And we spent half a year on this contract, very well paid by the German company, to explain to them what was going on in their industry.

[0:29:58]

So, your German became very useful. You hadn't forgotten it-

Yeah. That's right-

...because people had not spoken German while they were in [inaudible].

Absolutely not. *Ich kann immer noch sehr gut Deutsch sprechen.* [I can still speak German very well].

Yes. Would you like to say something about how you moved into teaching?

Yes. Consultancy is a fairly tough profession. After all, you're there, and you've got to be better at- the people who are employing you, whatever the nature of their problem. And I could do that, because I'd been in industry. But you gradually drop behind. And once you're not at the [inaudible] face anymore, you haven't got the immediacy that I had through coming out of industry. So, I realised that I didn't want to become an 'old' consultant. I had to find something else. I'd done lecturing in the evenings, quite a lot. So, I knew I liked teaching. And ILEA, the Inner London Education Authority, put an advert in *The Times*: "Come and teach science for ILEA." So, I filled in- I applied for the form, filled it in and was interviewed by ILEA, who were seemingly very happy to employ me and my-gave me a three-year contract. The first year, I was back at college, getting a PGCE the Postgraduate Certificate of

Education, without which you can't teach in this country. So, I went back to college. By then I was fifty or something, but they didn't mind, they saw that I could do it, because I had the knowledge and the personality to- to give me a three-year contract, I went to college for a year, and then taught two years in schools of their designation. Then I was free to teach wherever I liked. It was great.

Did it give you a lot of satisfaction, personally?

I beg your pardon?

Did it give you a lot of personal satisfaction?

Teaching?

Teaching.

[0:32:28]

Oh, it was marvellous! I- I thoroughly enjoyed it. And there were advantages in being old, relatively, because you're not trying to build a career for yourself anymore. You're just glad to be doing the job. And so, I was very self-confident. And that rubbed on the kids, and they got on very well with me. I got on very well with them. And I could handle very difficult classes, which younger teachers would have been- found immensely difficult. Because then, as now, there were some fairly tough classes around. I taught in the Holloway- in the- not in the Holloway school. I taught in- it'll come to me in a minute. And- it's just across the river. I'm beginning to forget things in my age. And- I'll ask Joycie, is that okay with you?

Oh, don't worry about it.

Oh no- okay. And in one of my early classes there was a gang who called themselves "The Vice". I shall never forget The Vice. And The Vice explained that my predecessor had left with a nervous breakdown because of them. They felt it was a matter of pride. So, they gave me a hard time. But you know, by the time I'd – blooming hell, I'd had a big career, I'd been

in the army and I could handle it. And I got The Vice round to my side. And they became very keen pupils. This was lovely, great thing to do.

That's a real achievement.

Yes. It was because of my history, you know. I was a very grown-up bloke by then and wasn't going to be put down by The Vice.

When did you get to see your mother or your father? Your stepfather? What- how did they cope with life here, and did that impact on you?

[0:34:58]

Okay, my only family in England was my mum and her brother, Klaus Meyer. My mum was a Meyer. The rest of the family had been wiped out in Auschwitz. My grandfather happily died before the removal of Jews from Berlin to Auschwitz. But my grandmother, my uncle Uli [Ulrich], his wife Annemarie, and their little baby Michael, all ended up in Auschwitz. And I'm still immensely upset about that. We have, plates in the road [Stolpersteine] in Germany. You- you must have heard of them.

Yes.

For the people who the Na- Nazis, exterminated.

In- in the pavement, by the doors?

Yes – yes.

Yes.

Yes. We have them there. And... I miss them all to this day, and especially the young one, Michael, because if he had survived, he could- he could be living down the road. And I'm still hugely- you can see from my demeanour, just talking about it is a matter of great sadness to me.

Yes. It must also impact severely, from what you were saying earlier, when there is such a resurgence of- resurgence of anti-Semitism here in this country.

Which is going on at the moment. Oh! I think it's terrible! And I don't understand the Labour- I used to be- support the Labour Party as a youngster. I don't understand- I do not understand what is going on. But the minute anti-Semitism arises anywhere, I'm keenly concerned about it. And even now, a bit scared about it.

Does it bring back memories-

Yes.

Early- of your early memories?

Yes, but... they don't need to be brought back. They're still very much in my mind in the present. I'm still hugely sad and upset about what the Nazis did to my family. And while I'm not a practising Jew, I'm still very much on the Jewish side. I have Jewish friends. I'm a member of the AJR, of the Association of Jewish Refugees. We have parties together. I meet people of my generation. There's one, I think, the next week or the week after. Susie [inaudible]- do you know Susie [inaudible] Suzman?

No...

Okay, she- she's the hostess for AJR tea parties. And I feel very at home there and Joyce comes. Now Joyce is very much - not Jewish. But she's- I wouldn't have married her if she couldn't have put up with us. And she comes to these parties and they love to have a young - she's relatively young - because we're all very old. I'm ninety next month. So, she's very popular. And I love going to the AJR meetings. Somebody speaks. We have lots of chats. Wonderful tea. Perfect.

[0:39:25]

That's wonderful. When did you meet Joyce?

Um...

And she's your second wife?

She's my second wife. Evelyn and I, my first wife, Evelyn was Jewish. And we had three children.

What were their names?

Jennifer, Susan and Richard. And Jenny lives in the north, in Harrogate. Susan lives in St. Albans and Richard, a fortnight ago, emigrated to America because his employers wanted him to work there for them. His employers were a computer company called Oracle. You may have heard of them. So, Richard is now in the States. We're- we're a bit sad about it of course, but he- his career demanded that he took up this offer.

And what work do your other children pursue?

Richard is in computing. Susan works for the health service. And Jenny works- is a housing officer in Harrogate local authority.

[0:40:48]

And when and where did you meet your second wife, Joyce?

Joyce and I met when I was teach- just starting to be a teacher. And we met- I won't enlarge on how we met cause it's rather private, but we met when I was a teacher. And where did we meet? We met at the Tate Gallery. The old Tate Gallery on the banks of the Thames. And I thought she was rather a super lady and invited her home. I had a flat. I had a bachelor flat in Pimlico. I was teaching in Pimlico School and I invited her home, said I'd cook supper for her. And she took the risk of a bloke she'd never met before, to come with me to my bachelor flat. And the rest is history.

So, when did you marry?

When did we marry? I think I – did I tell you earlier? I think it was 1987. So, we’ve- we’ve got thirty-one years of marriage now, haven’t we? Eighty-seven, ninety-seven, two thousand- [counting] - Yeah. We’ve been married thirty-one years.

Could I go back a little bit...?

Of course.

...To the wartime? Were you evacuated?

Yes.

Was the school evacuated?

[0:42:42]

Yes. The whole school was evacuated. And I started in Kingham, which is in Oxfordshire, in the home of a then eminent writer, Basil de Sélincourt.

You mentioned earlier that you had been evacuated, but how did you feel about that? Was it very unsettling? Did you ever get to see your mother while you were away?

It wasn’t- it was wartime. And all sorts of weird things were going on, quite honestly. We had our home in London and we got bombed out and things like that. So, it wasn’t in itself particularly remarkable, almost. My whole school was moved out of its home in Maidstone... and eventually reassembled in Dorset. But in the period between, “We’ve got to get these kids out of here” and, “Wow, we’ve found a new place where we can put them”, we were put all over the place. And then I ended up in the home of Basil de Sélincourt. With some other boys, by the way. The de Sélincourts were lovely elderly people. He was quite eminent. And they wanted to do something for these poor children. Well, the poor children arrived in their home and caused a certain amount of a poor children havoc. [Jana laughs] For example, Mrs. de Sélincourt made stone jars of jam. And she offered us one, and we finished it off in a day. So, she had to get used to-

Little boys at that age.

Ab- absolutely right, yes. But it was good, you know, despite the war I had a good upbringing, I think.

Were you aware at all either then, or perhaps later, of perhaps your mother's fears or your step-father's anxiety about being interned?

Being?

Interned.

[0:45:15]

My uncle, Klaus, he's the only one who escaped. And my step-father, Heini, were both interned on the Isle of Man which I think was a big internment camp at that time. Heini, the lawyer, is a linguist. He spoke most European languages. And they very soon cottoned on that he would be much more useful to them, than being salted away. And he joined the British Army and became an Intelligence Corps sergeant. He joined the Army and became a sergeant straight away. That's pretty good. After, presumably, the first six weeks which we all had to went- go through, he became a sergeant straight away because of his tremendously-tremendous ability with languages. And law. So, he did OK. And I did OK. I joined the British Army 'cause I wanted to, and got sent to Malaya which rather fitted my view of the United Kingdom which I was then, and I'm still, immensely dedicated to. They saved my life, this lot.

Yeah. You're very grateful.

I am. If I hadn't gone- got on to that train, and been entered Great Britain in Harwich. And I had a Kinder- passport. And it was stamped: "Allowed to stay in Great Britain for one year". That was 1938 and a year later they couldn't send me back to Germany.

No. Did you encounter any physical hostility during your early years in Britain?

Not- not because- not because- not so much because I was Jewish, but because I was German. Cause kids are pretty tough and if you were German you were a Nazi. You know. Didn't matter what you were, you were the enemy. And after all patriotism ran very high in the early years of the war. And I hadn't really mastered the English language, let alone English behaviour patterns. I only came in '38, so, we were at war in '39, so, it was being German rather than being Jewish, that probably caused me the most problems.

How did you react to that? How did you cope with it?

[0:48:28]

Well, I was pretty upset, as you can imagine, that- that my country where I lived was- but it was only kids. And, you know, kids are- can be a fairly ruthless bunch. But I survived it.

They- they did perhaps did not understand that- what you had [inaudible].

Absolutely not. And one didn't really want to- the fact that I was- I was and am Jewish, was not something that I was particularly wishing to stress at the time. I mean, German Jews to young British kids must have been a bit of a conundrum. I wanted- we- I wanted to assimilate. We all did, by the way. That was what Jewish refugees wanted to do, to assimilate.

And to be accepted.

Pardon?

And to be accepted.

Yes, that's- that's what we wanted to be - and were.

You mentioned earlier that you lit candles for Hanukkah and for Christmas.

Yes. In Berlin.

In Berlin?

Yes.

Do you still do that here, in Britain, now?

Yes and no. We- we have Jewish friends, Joyce and I. And at Hanukkah I visit one of them when they are lighting candles because his wife was born in Israel. She's a Sabra and she knows the entire Hanukkah words and songs off by heart. And it's very nice. I feel very comfortable. And she sings- lighting the candles and- I don't go every night, but I go enough to be within that-

[0:50:33]

To feel part of it?

Yes, I feel part of it. Still feel part. We- we had a very nice menorah but Jenny pinched it. It's in Harrogate now. I think we've got the sort of-

The little one.

Up there, we've got a little one there, but that wasn't- our original one, like the one in Berlin, had a candle on a removable- it slotted into the candelabra, and was used to light all the other ones. But that hasn't got that, so I don't think it's the real thing.

How do you feel yourself to be now? Is part of you still a little German, or do you feel totally British now?

I feel totally British. Have a British wife and three children and grandchildren, so I feel pretty British. But I'm able to- and I'm able to go back to Germany now. I first went to Germany because I joined Mallard's. I then joined the techno-commercial department. And Mallard is part of Philips, so I had quite a lot of meetings in Germany. And I was sometimes chosen to attend them 'cause I spoke German. And originally, I was very scared. Really, going back to

Germany the first time was absolutely unnecessarily! You know, the war was over. We were accepted. Jews were accepted! But I was pretty scared. But I very quickly got on very well with the Germans and they with me, and did overseas trips with them because it's a multi-national so you end up in all sorts of places. That was fine. And then I got, suddenly got a German family.

[0:52:38]

And that happened because my father's family by another marriage - he had four marriages in all - found out about me. And Christine, who is now a sister-in-law, decided she'd find me. So, they knew of my existence. And she decided she would find me. They knew of my existence from a book. I'm going to get up in a moment and show it to you. May I do that? It's just in the bookcase behind you. This is the book of my-

One second.

[Sound break]

This is the book of my father's family. A father whom I never met. And his surname was Stoltenhoff. And mine, when I entered the United Kingdom was Stoltenhoff, and became Jacobs when I adopted my stepfather's surname when he married my mum- when he and my mum got married. And in here, on page thirty-three... or very near it, is a picture of me. And certainly, mention of me. Here's my father, and here's my mum Susi Meyer, and here am I. "Thomas, born in Berlin", and "*verschollen*", that means disappeared [missing]. They didn't know where he was. So, they had the family book and they knew of my existence, but had no idea where I existed. And Christine, who is one of my father's other children, decided she would find me. And one of our survivors was Ernst Herman Meyer, and he was quite eminent in the GDR. A musician, a composer, a professor of music. And my father's family lived in Dresden in the GDR. And so, Christine- and they decided, my father's family, to emigrate to West Germany. And the minute you express a desire to emigrate, you- your work is taken away from you. So, Christine had nothing to do and she said, "I'm going to find this Thomas that I- I have read about." And with the help of my uncle, Ernst Herman Meyer, who was in a senior position in the GDR- and he didn't really want to help her at all, because the Stoltenhoff family were not accepted, ever, because my mum and my father had separated

close to the time of my birth. So, my uncle didn't really want to help her but help her he did. And- he spoke to- she- Christine spoke to my uncle and said, "Would you give me Thomas's address in London and any other contact?" And my uncle said, "Out of the question. We don't want to have anything to do with the Stoltenhoffs." But he had an English wife. And she said to him, "It's not up to you. It's up to Thomas whether or not he wants to meet these people." So, he then somewhat reluctantly gave them my London address at the time.

[0:57:28]

And which year was this, roughly, or when - approximately?

Can I bypass that for a minute? Joycie will probably help. Joycie is better at dates than I- can I come back on that and let you know? So, I then got a letter from them, with pictures. Little pictures of some of them in it, and hoping to make contact with me, in this letter.

How did you feel about that? Was it a- a shock that it came out of the blue, so to speak? Was it very unsettling?

It was totally out of the blue. It was a- a considerable shock, because this name was not an acceptable name within my Meyer family, because of the nature of the divorce between my mother and my father. So, it- it was a bit of a problem. But my immediate reaction was, of course I want to meet them. This man is my father. So, I got this long letter describing them. And we have been great friends and relatives ever since. So, I have a nice German family on my father's side now. Not Jewish, of course. My father wasn't Jewish, only my mother was. But they are perfectly OK and we get on very well. So, I've got a foot in each camp.

That's really something.

Yes.

That's really something.

I mean, the minute there's anti-Semitism anywhere, I become pretty intensely Jewish. I very much like my Jewish friends and my connection with the Jewish community. And it's very

important to me. But I have another side to me, on my father's family. And I'm very happy to have that as well.

[1:00:06]

In- in broader terms, beyond your German family, is there any bitterness on your part against Germany? Or hatred?

I'm constantly, now, never not appalled at what the Germans did to the Jews. Appalled. I think it is inexplicably dreadful. And... immensely painful. I'm still very much a refugee. But nobody who worked in a concentration camp can be allowed- can be alive anymore. They're all dead. And you can't- I can't carry my dismay and hatred of what went on. I don't carry my dismay and hatred at what went on to the next generation. And I have perfectly sound, friendly, loving affectionate German relatives who are Aryans. And you can't- I can't run my life any other way. That's just me. I'm very Jewish when anybody's being anti-Semitic. And I love being in Jewish company. When I go to Suzi Suzman- I think it's next week - I'm totally at home. But they're my sort of generation. And - we love each other.

That's tremendous. That's tremendous.

I'm sort of a crazy mixed-up kid.

Is there anything that you would like to add that perhaps we haven't covered thus far? Or to return to? Anything that comes to mind now which perhaps you'd like to have said earlier on, but didn't?

[1:02:36]

I think the only- [regarding his attached microphone] Sorry, I must have switched this off, forgive me. You've gone all- gone all quiet. I don't see what I've done.

I don't want my children to ignore, forget, disdain that they've got a Jewish father. It's important to me. And they live their own lives, and have their own marriages. But if you were to meet them, you would detect in their demeanour that they have Jewish ancestors.

And I want to keep that alive. Richard, who's- who's the most Jewish of the three, the one who's gone off to-

To America?

To America, is- can be quite indignant. I've forgotten what the incident was, but one of his sisters was doing something that he thoroughly disapproved of. And he said, "You can't do that! You're Jewish!" So, it's- it's important, but not in a religious sense. Cause I don't actually believe in religions. Physicists often don't.

So, there's that family interest, that sense of continuity and respect?

Yes. That's important to us. Important to me.

Yes. Speaking of family, do you know what happened to your father- to your own father, during the war?

He had a career - and he died. And the story- his career's in that- in that book. And there's pictures of him in the book. I've got a picture of him up there somewhere. Never met him.

Do you regret that?

[1:05:16]

Yeah, of course one does. And he tried to meet me. I was- discovered when the family book was written. And he wanted to meet me. But my own family denied that. "We don't want anything to do with you." And I can understand that. But it's still sad, as far as I'm concerned. And then it was his daughter, Christine, who said, "I'm not having this. I'm going to find this bloke." And this bloke she found. So, I have, an important to me, German non-Jewish family on my father's side.

Does that help to give you a rounded sense of identity and a-

I think so, yes.

...link to your roots, in a way?

I think so.

Would you have a, a- a special message for anybody in the future looking at the DVD or the memory stick of this interview? Would you?

[Cameraman: Sorry, I'm just going to fiddle about with this.]

For the benefit of anybody watching the DVD or the memory stick of this interview, do you have a special message for your family members that you would like to pass on?

No, I don't think so. We are- in January- my ninetieth birthday's in December, but in January, we're having a British family lunch together. Not very many of us, fourteen in all. And we're going to celebrate my birthday. I don't want big parties, but I thought it would be lovely to have that- that group of people, and I'm really looking forward to it. So, in January we're all meeting and going down to a restaurant that we've chosen where we have a room. We're going to have a meal together. And I'm- I'm thinking actively what I should say- to them. But all I really- I'm going to say, is how tremendously happy it makes me that the fourteen of us - doesn't happen very often- fourteen of us are meeting together, full of affection for each other and interest in each other's lives. Things like being Christian, or Jewish or being nothing- do you know the French word, *derrière la façade*? *Derrière la façade*. They're there, but not a matter to be dwelt on. It's quite unusual for me to tell you all the things I'm telling you.

[1:08:44]

It's greatly appreciated, and it's very important and we value that, as you value your family and your connections. Is there anything else that you would like to say, to add?

Only- only one thing, really. Joyce is not Jewish. She's a Scouser from Liverpool. And it is to that family's tremendous credit that they have accepted me wholeheartedly. When I first - her parents were still alive – was taken to her parents' home in Liverpool. Lovely, very working-

class, friendly people. The- 'cause Joyce has been married before. We both have. I think the family's attitude was, "What's she brought home this time?" Cause she had had other boyfriends obviously, men friends- "What's she brought home this time?" But I have been totally accepted by them, and that's lovely.

I'm delighted to hear that. Thank you very much for your time, and for sharing with us your thoughts and feelings today.

It's been a pleasure to meet you and one always likes talking about oneself.

It's been a great pleasure to meet you too. Thank you so much.

Thank you very much. Can I invite you to a cup of tea or a cup of coffee or something?

That would be wonderful, I think.

OK? Oh - sorry.

[End of interview]

[1:10:36]

[1:10:50]

[Start of photographs and documents]

Alphabetically again?

No, just who's in the photograph?

Photo 1

OK. This is a photograph of my dad, who was a principal of a mental hospital in Dresden.

Oh, his name. His name is- I was a Stoltenhoff and he is a Heinrich Stoltenhoff.

[And where was the picture taken?]

In Dresden.

Photo 2

Here are my- was my lovely mum. Very much in love with her- early in my youth- I was born in '28 so that was probably about '29 or '30. Oh, we lived in Berlin at the time, but we had a country cottage in Kladow, and I think that was taken in Kladow. [*And your mother's name?*] My mother was Susanne – that's the German version of- of Susan. Of Susan. Susanne Stoltenhoff.

Photo 3

These are two half-brothers from my father's later marriage. I've got quite a lot of half-relatives in the family. Although we never use the word 'half'. They're hundred percent relatives, as far as I'm concerned. And these are the half-brothers Christian and Stefan. I wish I knew when it was taken. I'm sure it was taken before I was born. Could it be?

Joyce: No. I don't think so. I suspect it was taken in Berlin.

Yes. OK.

Jana: Cause that's a studio photograph, isn't it?

Joyce: Yes.

Photo 4

My absolutely wonderful and greatly loved mum, without whom I wouldn't have survived, because she was the one who recognised what was happening in Nazi Germany and emigrated in time to make a bit of a home for me in London, where I followed her, in 1938.

[1:13:14]

Photo 5

Here are four Stolpersteine to remember members of my family who were murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz. And one- I'm desperately sad about all of them. But one of them, has a little boy, my cousin Michael. And if he had not been murdered, he would be alive today!

And he and I could be going down to the pub together. And that's a really sad, heart-breaking memory.

Document 1

Alright. This is my naturalisation certificate. I very much wanted to be naturalised, and it was a great ceremony, in front of a notary, in the City of London. My father, step-father actually, Heini Jacobs, took me there. And I swore an oath to our King, at the time, "To King and Country", and was hugely glad to be able to do so. [*What date was that?*]

And that was- I've forgotten the date. '46? That happened in '46, just after the end of the war. Although I'd applied to become British during the war. But they were a bit cautious about making Germans British while the war was still on.

The naturalisation certificate is also indicative of my family history in a way. It's got my name, my father's name, and the name I adopted, my step-father's name, Heini Jacobs. Both names on the one certificate.

It's not lying flat.

Photo 6

Nice, cheerful photograph at graduation day for a grandson, Jamie, and his sister – no, his mum! Sorry, grandson Jamie and his mum, my daughter, Jennifer.

[End of photographs and documents]

[1:15:57]