

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Association of Jewish Refugees

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive, prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

AJR

Winston House, 2 Dollis Park

London N3 1HF

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	14

Interviewee Surname:	Sondhelm
Forename:	Walter
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	3 April 1919
Interviewee POB:	Leipzig, Germany

Date of Interview:	29 April 2003
Location of Interview:	Manchester
Name of Interviewer:	Rosalyn Livshin
Total Duration (HH:MM):	3 hours 37 minutes

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

INTERVIEW: 14

NAME: WALTER SONDHELM

DATE: 29 APRIL 2003

LOCATION: MANCHESTER

INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN

TAPE 1

Tape 1 : 0 minutes and 41 seconds

RL: This is an interview with Walter Sondhelm and the date is Tuesday, the 29th of April 2003, the interview is in Manchester and I am Rosalyn Livshin.

OK, if you could tell me first your name.

WS: My name is Walter Sondhelm.

RL: Do you have any other names?

WS: No... Yes, my middle name is Simon.

RL: And do you have a Hebrew name?

WS: Yes, Shimon ben Jacov.

RL: And when and where were you born?

WS: I was born in Leipzig, in Saxony, on the 3rd of April, 1919.

RL: What does that make you today?

WS: 84.

RL: If you could tell me what your parents' names were and where they were born?

WS: My father's name was Jacob Sondhelm and he was born in Kleinlangheim near Kitzingen in Bavaria, and his Hebrew name was Jacob ben Zeev. My mother's name was Selma Loewi when she was born, her father was Simon Loewi, and her Hebrew name was Sheina bat Shimon.

RL: Starting first with your father's family, if you could tell me about his family background and your memories maybe of his parents, your grandparents?

Tape 1: 2 minutes 36 seconds

WS: My father came from a family which had been settled in Kleinlangheim for at least two hundred years. His father was a very important member of the Jewish community in Kleinlangheim and the synagogue and the *Lehrers* house was in his little compound. He was a very orthodox Jew, but very much involved in the community. He was on the little city or village or whatever council, he was obviously a highly respected person, because I remember when I was eleven he took me one day to the local monastery where he acted as adviser and it brought home to me for the first time what an important person he must be by the reception I got and the abbot called one of the monks to show me around and show me the museum whilst he had a discussion with my grandfather. I also know he acted as advisor to the local very minor Fürst, so he had an interest in life. I never met my grandmother; she died shortly after I was born. My grandfather was one of an identical pair of twins, and for many years I had the greatest difficulty telling him and his brother apart. His brother was a matzo baker, but during the seven months he didn't bake matzo, he helped my grandfather in the business. On my mother's side I only knew my mother, my mother's mother, my grandmother, because her husband died from blood poisoning when she was very young. They had lived in Bamberg for some time, and they also came from a fairly well-settled Bavarian family. My mother had uncles who went to the United States in the 1880s and got well-settled there, and both on her mother's side and on her father's side.

Tape 1: 5 minutes 54 seconds

RL: And were they in touch with those...?

WS: Yes, they were in... my mother's mother was in touch with her brothers, and I still remember one of her brothers, no two of her brothers coming over from the States, but one of them I got to know very well. He, again, had achieved quite a lot in the States, and when I came to England he was a great help because he helped me to begin with here, and I remember him as a lovely man when he came over here, every two or three years, he'd come over to Europe for about six or eight weeks.

RL: What was his name?

WS: His name was Jack Jacob Goodman. And I'm still in touch with that part of the family. I don't know what happened to my grandfather Loewi's family in the States. My grandmother didn't know English, I believe they also died young, so there was very little contact with her, and none at all after she died.

RL: Do you know what your grandfathers did for a living?

WS: My father's father was in the wholesale meat business, and he bought and sold flocks, he sent animals to the big markets. He would hire a train from the nearest station and take a whole lot of animals to the big markets in Germany. My mother's father was in the waste paper business, so he was a paper merchant, in fact.

Tape 1: 8 minutes 36 seconds

RL: What siblings did your mother and father have?

WS: My father had one younger brother, and one elder and one younger sister. He was number two. My mother had two brothers and two sisters. My mother's elder brother fell into the local river when the maid wasn't watching when he was two years old, and he drowned. My mother's other brother died in the battle of Verdun. Her sisters, her elder sister married the editor of the local Jewish paper, but he was fortunately United States citizen, so when the Germans didn't want to let her go because of her family connections, she simply went to the United States embassy and got a passport and went to the States. My mother's second sister, unfortunately, was killed by the Nazis.

RL: And your father's brother and sisters?

WS: My father's brother went to the United States with his family in 1937. His elder sister went to then Palestine in 1936, and his younger sister came to England in 1939.

RL: What kind of religious upbringing did your parents have?

WS: Both my parents had what I would call standard orthodox upbringing. Not very orthodox, but definitely orthodox.

Tape 1: 11 minutes 36 seconds

RL: Can you sort of define it a little bit more, what's the difference between very and standard?

WS: The difference is, for instance, my grandfather was *Shomer Shabbat*, my parents weren't, but they were observant, generally speaking, and were very keen that I should have a Jewish upbringing.

RL: What kind of education had your parents received?

WS: My father was sent to board at the higher school in the nearest little town, and as there was no railway going from their local place to Kitzingen, when he was taken to school he went still by stagecoach. My mother to the Höhere Töchterchule, again about as high an education as a girl could get in those days. At school, my father was good in mathematics, and they wanted him to study mathematics, but he and my grandfather discussed it and decided in Bavaria there was no place for a Jewish mathematician in academics. He could become a school teacher, but he was effectively barred, not officially, from any senior appointment in university. So they decided he should leave school and go and learn a profession, so he went to a textile wholesaler and learnt all about cloth. And at the age of 21, he decided he had enough of working for other people and set up his own business.

RL: Where was he living at that stage?

WS: He was in training in Württemberg, in Bopfingen, probably eighty miles or so from where his parents were living. And then, at 21, he moved to Leipzig.

Tape 1: 14 minutes 46 seconds

RL: Why did he choose Leipzig?

WS: He felt it was a busy place where he could use his knowledge, and he did not want to do trading, he wanted to go into manufacturing. So he set up a small business making aprons, very, very small. But he... to begin with, he also acted as a merchant to some of the people he had got to know, and by the time I was born the business had developed, and he continued to build it up until Hitler came to power, and at that stage, he employed about two-hundred people.

RL: Was he still doing aprons?

WS: Yes, he was still making aprons, but aprons had gone out of fashion, so he was making mass-produced clothing, mainly ladies' dresses for the big stores. He had the advantage he knew all about cloth, so he bought the grey cloth from the weavers, and had it finished to his own specification.

RL: And did he have a factory?

WS: Yes. That's right.

RL: Where about was that?

WS: That was in Leipzig.

RL: And was it one building?

WS: When I was born it was, I think, a very small place. He then moved to a much larger building which he rented, and after about another ten or fifteen years he rented an even larger place.

RL: Did he export the dresses at all, or was it just within Germany?

WS: He did a little bit of export, but I should imagine 95% of his business was within Germany. But as a young man, he had done a lot of travelling, so he knew England quite well, and this is probably why he decided in 1933, as soon as possible, he wanted me out of the country, and I came here. I came here in 1935.

Tape 1: 17 minutes 49 seconds

RL: Coming back to your father... Do you know how he met your mother, how did they meet?

WS: I think it was family introductions.

RL: But where was your mother living?

WS: In Bamberg, and he, at that time, was living in Leipzig.

RL: Did your mother do anything after she left school?

WS: I am not sure what she did before she got married. After she got married and until I was born she helped my father in his business.

RL: When did they marry?

WS: They married in 1913.

RL: What happened to your father during the First World War?

WS: He was exempt from military service because he had some heart trouble, but he was also making uniform materials, so there were two reasons for his exemption, and he was not particularly happy, in spite of his background, with the German case.

RL: In what way?

WS: I think he knew too much about the world.

RL: Was he interested in politics?

WS: Not generally, no. He was very interested in the world in general. He had probably as a child got some insight into military matters, because his uncle, not the twin brother but an elder one, brother of my grandfather, had served in the Bavarian army in the 1870 war, as a quarter master, and they again had very close relations, so young Jacob will have been told quite a lot of what was going on.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 22 seconds

RL: Was your father involved in the community, the Jewish community in any way; was he active in any organisations, or...?

WS: He was not active in any organisations; he was a member of the largest of the Leipzig congregations. He would attend service on the main holidays, they worked, the factory worked on Shabbat, so he wouldn't go, but my mother would take me on Friday evenings. Saturday mornings I had to go to school, during holidays again my mother would take me on Shabbat morning.

RL: What was the synagogue called?

WS: Gottschedstraße.

RL: And what level of observance was it?

WS: It was orthodox, but I would say barely orthodox, and I am saying that because they had an organ in the synagogue, but they would observe all the holidays, men and women strictly separate... not that far different from South Manchester Synagogue when I came to Manchester.

RL: Who was the Rabbi of the synagogue?

WS: Rabbi Cohn.

RL: Was your father involved with any non-Jewish activities, any non-Jewish societies?

WS: No. I mean he was fully involved in his business and with bringing up his son. But he worked very long hours and I remember in the evenings often entertained customers at home. He would also, twice a year, bring all the details of the new collections home and he would sit until two or three in the morning and would work out all the details of what things cost, and after that he would look at the new designs and look at his price and decide what was likely to sell and what wasn't at a reasonable price. So at this stage having made detailed costing himself and looked at it himself, he would discard probably half to two-thirds of the designs.

Tape 1: 23 minutes 36 seconds

RL: Did your mother have a say in that process at all?

WS: No, he trusted his judgement.

RL: Did your mother ever wear any of his dresses?

WS: Yes, yes. I think at home she very often wore his dresses, but if they went out, she'd wear better things. I mean he went for the mass-production market.

RL: Moving on to yourself, what is your earliest memory as a child?

WS: My earliest real memory is when I was about six and begun to go to school, and I have various memories of my first school, various memories of Leipzig, but they are much more difficult, because as you superimpose one thing on another, I shouldn't like to say what was from my sixth or eighth or tenth year. But I remember clearly from six onwards some of the family holidays, and both at six and at seven I was taken to Italy and I had a very clear picture of one place in the dolomites and I could picture it and thought 'what a fantastic place', and about twenty-five years later when I was in Italy I decided 'you must go and have a look', and it was just as I remembered it.

RL: Did you regularly go abroad for holidays?

WS: Very often. We generally went to Switzerland or Italy.

RL: You say you remember your school. Can you tell me a bit about school and your experience of school?

WS: For the first four years, I went to a private school in Leipzig. And I learnt in the usual way things being taught then. I obviously was not a person who was very forthcoming because when I was about six and a half, my form teacher took my mother on one side and he said to her: 'I am a bit worried about Walter, I think he is rather backward, he doesn't seem to get on that well, he never says anything'. So my mother came home very upset, told my father, he just laughed, he said: 'if a man doesn't know what he's talking about...' and things continued, and by the time I was eight I was doing pretty well at school.

Tape 1: 28 minutes 0 second

RL: What was the name of the school?

WS: Schusterte Schule [?]. And at eight and a half they wanted to put me forward so that I could enter the high-school one year early, but that was put down because on the 1st of April I

would not yet have been nine and I was very fortunate because I then became ill and missed three months of school, so I would have been in real trouble. At ten, I went, passed the entrance exam, and went to one of the local Realgymnasiums. Leipzig had two Gymnasiums and two Realgymnasiums. Realgymnasiums started with Latin and went on to English, French and Greek, whilst the full Gymnasiums started with Latin, went on to Greek and then... so on. And my parents felt that I was more likely to be interested in mathematics and science than in languages, and they were absolutely right because languages were never my strong part, except for the languages in which I was living, whilst I was pretty good at science. At the Realgymnasium, I found the influence of Hitler fairly soon, and only as I grew older did I realise that one thing, for instance, was impossible, and that was that a Jew should be top in German. So I was always good at school, but somehow I felt there was some pressure which as a young child I couldn't explain, but later on became very obvious.

Tape 1: 30 minutes 48 seconds

RL: How did you get on with the other pupils and with the teachers?

WS: I got on very well with the teachers. I liked some, I disliked others, some were lousy and some were good. They were very different from English teachers because most of them could never be wrong. I had no problems for the first few years with my co-pupils, but once Hitler came to power I was the only Jew surrounded by people who were largely in Hitler Jugend-uniforms. And people, boys, who had been my friends suddenly no longer dared to know me. It was not a very pleasant existence. Very different, for instance, from the existence you may have come across Thea Hurst, who went to the Carlebach-Schule in Leipzig. Now they didn't experience that because they were surrounded only by Jewish students. I had one other Jewish boy in my form, but generally I was the only Jew in my year, the year above and so on. I was not sent to the Jewish school because that did not provide entrance to university, and my parents felt they wanted me to be in a position that if I wanted to I should be able to go to university.

RL: Before Hitler came on the scene, how friendly were you with the non-Jewish children?

WS: I was on very good terms with one or two of them. They would come and see me and invite me to their houses. Most of that ceased on the day Hitler came to power, and I remember one parent who always told my father what a good socialist he was, was seen the following day in SA-uniform. His son obviously did not want to know me after that.

Tape 1: 33 minutes 56 seconds

RL: Did these boys, when you say they didn't want to know you, how did they behave towards you?

WS: Most of them behaved correctly, but one or two kicked me... the teachers kept order, but it wasn't very pleasant. I should imagine anyone who was near the bottom of the form, if he had been Jewish, would have had a hell of a time.

RL: Coming back to your younger years... First of all, can you describe where you were living, your home?

WS: I was born in central Leipzig, but I remember nothing of that because when I was about three-and-a-half, my parents moved to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Straße which was a very nice road

with a big tree-lined avenue in the middle, separating the two sides. They had a large flat; we had three large entertainment rooms and bedrooms and kitchen, and a hall which was 18 meters long. It was like a string, in some ways, half of it was wide, but then it turned through a right angle and the rest was narrow and leading to the kitchen and the store. It was a very nice flat.

RL: What floor?

WS: Third floor.

RL: And how many apartments were in your particular block?

WS: There were four apartments, one on each floor.

RL: Were there any other Jewish families?

WS: No.

RL: Anywhere near you?

WS: There were very few Jewish people living in that area. But we ourselves had very many Jewish friends. I mean, whilst my father wasn't active in the Jewish community, he was well-known and, as I say, most of our friends were Jewish.

RL: What would your parents do for entertainment?

WS: My mother would occasionally go to the theatre, very occasionally to a concert. My father was, he wasn't tone-deaf, but like myself semi, so concerts weren't for him. The other thing is most of his time was taken working and both my parents enjoyed reading, so there was very little time.

Tape 1: 37 minutes 44 seconds

RL: What about yourself? What would you do in your spare time, leisure time, as a child?

WS: I was taken for walks in the local woods by my mother. And I was occasionally taken to the theatre, and occasionally I invited people, I was invited by people, or... I did not play any sports.

RL: Swimming?

RL: Pardon?

RL: Swimming?

WS: Yes, yes I could swim by the time I was six or seven.

RL: Was there the cinema?

WS: Yes.

RL: Would you go to that?

WS: Yes, probably once every three weeks, four weeks.

RL: Did you join any groups, any youth groups?

WS: No.

RL: Nothing like that.

WS: Nothing like that.

RL: Who would you say that you mixed with most as a youngster?

WS: Most with adults, with the friends of my parents. Because they invited a lot of people and we were invited out, so I also met their children, but I grew up as an only child in a very much adult world.

RL: Do you have any particular memories of any of the Jewish holidays?

WS: I mean, I remember most vividly Pesach, which was treated always as a family event. We sometimes went for the second evening to the home of some friends, but I found that rather a torture, because it went on until midnight or one o' clock, or two o' clock, and for a young child to be on best behaviour until that time wasn't easy. But Pesach at home was very enjoyable. I obviously remember the main *Yom Tovim*, I mean especially Yom Kippur when you had a synagogue full of people in top hats. I remember before Rosh Hashanah my father or my mother would take his top hat to shul and it would stay there until the end of the *Yom Tovim*, but the impression, you see, on Yom Kippur, of a full house of top hats, it was a remarkable sight.

Tape 1: 41 minutes 28 seconds

RL: With the coming of Hitler, did that... you say your father, from the very beginning, wanted to get you out, really. That's quite... I mean, how usual was that?

WS: Unusual. My father took a very dim view of Hitler, and he felt that there was nothing good coming out of him. And he, for the first time, that he reacted in a big way, was a few days before the first of April, 1933 boycott of Jewish shops. He came home from his business one lunchtime, and said to my mother: 'I decided we're going to take three weeks holiday, get packed up'. And in the afternoon, we took the train to Marienbad, Mariánské Lázně, in Czechoslovakia, and we spent three weeks there, or nearly three weeks, before he returned. He didn't say to people that he'd gone because of the boycott, but he said it to us. He said 'you don't know what's going to happen, I don't trust the man'. On that occasion, they just smashed some Jewish shops and misbehaved towards obviously orthodox Jews, and we found out since that some people were murdered even at that stage. After we got back, he started looking round of how he could get me out of Germany. By then, Hitler had prohibited the export of money, or any goods, effectively, belonging to Jews. So he could no longer send me to England to go to school here and pay for it. And he looked around to try and find a way of doing it, and in the end he decided the only possible way was if he could get some money from one of the members of the family living in the States. And my mother's uncle, at that point, offered to pay for me to come here. They... he himself would have liked to leave

Germany at that time, but he felt he couldn't because his father was 85 then, and however well-known he was, and respected in the community, my father realised that things weren't going to go on, and that he wasn't going to live for that much longer. So he tried to wind up things but he never succeeded properly, and in the end he was more or less forced to sell his business.

Tape 1: 45 minutes 49 seconds

RL: When was that?

WS: In 1937. And my grandfather had died about the same time. They decided to go to the States for a holiday, to have a look around what can be done. And on the way home, they called in England to see me and looking at it from here was totally different than looking at it from Germany. He wanted to get out, but they didn't quite realise how things, how I was seeing things. And at that point, I persuaded him to stay here so there were three of us without any means. But we managed.

RL: Up to 1937, then, your father was still in charge of the business or trying to sell it. Did he suffer in any way from the laws and from what was going on at that stage?

WS: Yes.

RL: If you could tell me how?

WS: Things were made very difficult for Jewish businesses and I know he ran into all sorts of problems. I cannot give you details because I was living here. And once my parents came here it wasn't a subject we ever discussed.

RL: Whilst you were still in Germany, did your parents experience any anti-Semitic incidents?

WS: Whilst I was in Germany, no. They themselves never ran into any major problems. Obviously, after the Nürnberg Laws, my mother could no longer have a maid, and there were all sorts of problems of that type. But they were never attacked, he was never arrested.

RL: What kind of support would you say there was in Leipzig for the Nazis? How strong a support do you think your neighbours and...

WS: Very strong. There was no doubt that the general opinion was: 'give him a chance'. And the German way of looking at things was very different to the way here. People felt the world owed them something. And it was very interesting, when I came to England, to see the difference in attitudes, and the difference in teaching.

Tape 1: 49 minutes 37 seconds

RL: Can you tell me then, really, the way in which you managed to get to England, you know, you said that an uncle, great uncle paid for you, but how was it all arranged, and how did you get permit and whatever, what was needed?

WS: Nothing. Very fortunately, at that stage, England, not officially but effectively, operated an open door-policy. As long as you could prove, or semi-prove, that you were not a burden on the community the home office did not object. When my father decided to bring me, that I

should come to school in England, he brought me over... we had been in touch with a number of schools, we looked at some, I know it sounds crazy, but the Southern Railway published a book of schools and we looked at the schools in that book, which covered a small area of England, a great deal of Surrey, for instance. And we looked at schools which seemed to have an ethos which was in line with ours, and which did not look too posh. My father then brought me over and he'd made appointments with three of these schools. He took me to look at them, and the two of us decided on the school we liked, and that's how I got there. My uncle was able, or not able, he paid, sent some money. I must have been one of the very few school boys who paid his own fees. After I had been here for three or four months, the father of a friend of mine, we are still friends now, vouched for me and I could establish a bank account. And a sixteen year-old school boy walked into the school office and paid for whatever I had to pay. My school was very generous, I was very well-treated by them, and the same applied afterwards at university.

RL: So, coming over with your father, first of all, what were you able to bring with you?

WS: A suitcase. My parents came here with a large suitcase. We left everything behind in Germany, but we were safe.

Tape 1: 53 minutes 21 seconds

RL: Do you remember your journey across?

WS: Yes. My mother and two or three friends, three friends, brought us to the Hauptbahnhof, the main station in Leipzig. We caught a train to the Hook of Holland, took the night ferry, arrived in Harwich, at about five o' clock in the morning, and on the boat train I had my first introduction to kippers. London looked a very strange place, totally different from anything I had seen before. I mean, my father knew London so it wasn't strange to him. We stayed with one of my father's friends, who was incidentally very, very different from my father, but they were very nice to us, and we then had a few days here, and after a week during which I had to get from Hornes a new suit and one or two other things, which were required for school, I started school. My father went back to Germany, and the first time I saw my parents afterwards... that was in May, arrived here on the 6th of May, the silver jubilee of King George V, and the first time I saw my parents again was in December, when we met in Italy. My introduction to England was ideal because although I was tired, a friend of, my father's friend took me into the city to see the procession, and we saw it twice – it was quite an experience for a schoolboy who just arrived.

RL: How did you feel about leaving Germany?

WS: Relieved. I mean, I had, apart from being kicked and this and that, not been attacked. And for someone who was in a totally by then Nazi atmosphere, I had done reasonably well, but it was an enormous relief.

Tape 1: 56 minutes 34 seconds

RL: And how did you feel about the thought of going to England?

WS: How do I feel?

RL: How did you feel about the thought of going to England?

WS: Very happy. Frightened, obvious, I mean, to be for the first time in your life on your own... I mean, I had been to my relatives for a week or so before, but I was suddenly in a new world, and very quickly I had to be totally independent, because I found I had nothing in common with my father's friend. So I established, I wrote to my parents and told them and said, 'do you mind if I ask Uncle Jack to deal with me directly', and they wrote back 'no'. So a just sixteen year old boy had to establish his independence. You can do things if you want to, and if you need to.

RL: How was your English?

WS: Lousy. My first Latin class at Caterham was remarkable, because with the difference in pronunciation I couldn't tell when the teacher was speaking English and when Latin. But when you are thrown in, you learn to communicate very quickly.

RL: Had you learnt much English in Germany?

WS: I had learnt English for four years. But I wasn't good at English, it wasn't my strong subject, and it doesn't help if you, you know, I'm not tone-deaf, but you know, in between, that doesn't help... But it worked quickly.

RL: The school that you went to, where about was it?

WS: It was in Surrey, about eight miles south of Croydon.

RL: And where were you living?

WS: It was a boarding school. Two-thirds of the boys were boarders, one third were local boys, and it was in fact a congregational establishment, which meant it was very liberal. And they fully respected my feelings, no one ever suggested I should attend anything relating to Christian education, and they asked me whether they should make arrangements for the festivals in London, but I knew some people, so I could do that.

RL: This tape is just about to end...

TAPE 2

RL: You were telling me about the school. Were there any other Jewish pupils at Caterham?

WS: One other pupil. And a year or so after I left another refugee came.

RL: How did you... you say, they treated you well, can you tell me a little bit more about that, how you fitted into the place?

WS: The teachers took great care to make me understand things at first. The man to whom I owe most was the English teacher, who spent a great deal of time with me, and helped me, and, in fact, after I left school, we became great friends. He was quite an outstanding man, brilliant knowledge of English, good knowledge of the world. And when I spent most of the Easter term in hospital, before my General School Certificate, he did everything he could to bring me back to scratch. All the other teachers, as I said, were nice. People who stick particularly in my mind were, for instance, my mathematics teacher, who was brilliant, he'd

been a Senior Wrangler, his appreciation of arithmetic and mathematics was fantastic, and when I compared him with what I had experienced in Germany, and how willing he was to listen, it says everything. My physics teacher, again, a subject I liked, was most helpful. The headmaster himself, who had been professor at Rangoon before, with the government there; again, he was an outstanding man.

Tape 2: 3 minutes 9 seconds

And so the level of teaching was totally different from the level I had experienced in Germany, although both schools, you'd rank them roughly of the same grade, I mean, Caterham School, to this day, is a very good school, Petrischule in Leipzig was equivalent. But the other, the other thing is the approach to all subjects, like, say history, was so different, and I found that you, on occasions it was a different world... I remember learning in Germany about the biggest German naval success in the history of Germany, the Battle of Skagerrak, how they sunk a large part of the British fleet, it was a fantastic German win. At school here, I learnt about the Battle of Jutland, which, again, was a great success, the navy never sailed afterwards. Now I wondered, here they don't mention the Battle of Skagerrak, in Germany I never learnt about the battle of Jutland. So I went to the school library and dug out a reference, and I soon found out, yes, the Germans had sunk more British tonnage than they lost, but at the end of the battle, there was no German navy left which could sail out of the port... so, a difference in approach.

RL: Who was the headmaster at the time?

WS: The headmaster in England? Professor Hall. Who, at the outbreak of war went to the School of Oriental Studies to teach people there, who had to go out on short terms, got commissions to serve in Burma, in Malaysia and all these places. He was a really great man.

Tape 2: 6 minutes 0 second

RL: How did you get on with the pupils?

WS: Very well. No problems. Some I liked, some I didn't like. The boy whose father guaranteed me with the bank is still a very good friend of mine to this day. And I am still in touch with one or two other boys from school.

RL: Did you ever come across any prejudice?

WS: Life is full of prejudices, people are prejudiced about everything. And when I came to England, I referred to a Scottish boy as English, he was very upset. But when you look at people around you, I don't believe there is a person alive who hasn't got preferences. But I was never disadvantaged at school, I wasn't disadvantaged at university and in my industrial experience, I again found no problem. And it's not because I hide my Jewishness, I have never done that.

RL: You mentioned before that the head offered to make arrangements for you, for the Jewish festivals. What actually did happen when it got to the Jewish festivals?

WS: Oh, I stayed in London for a few days and went to service there.

RL: Who did you stay with?

WS: Friends.

RL: Friends of...

WS: Of my parents. Other friends, not the people with whom I had fallen out. I hadn't fallen out with them, but, you know, I felt I couldn't deal with them. They once or twice tried to give advice which I was unwilling to take. They, for instance, felt I shouldn't sit for my school certificate after spending two months or so in hospital, but Professor Hall said: 'what have you got to lose?' And I said: 'nothing'.

RL: Why had you been in hospital for two months?

WS: I got scarlet fever, and then complications.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 4 seconds

RL: And did any, did your family come over during that time?

WS: No, no, I was on my own. And an isolation hospital in those days wasn't a pleasant place. You could talk through the window to someone standing outside, and someone came over from school probably once a week or once every ten days. And I spoke to them for ten or fifteen minutes. They also sent some books in, but for the first few weeks I wasn't in a fit state to do anything.

RL: How long had you been in the country when you contracted that?

WS: Eight, nine months.

RL: Were you in touch with your parents?

WS: Oh yes. I think they baked [sic] the mail before it went out. My parents could write to me and, as I say, I could write to them. But it wasn't nice.

RL: You obviously did sit your school certificate, how did you do in it in the end?

WS: Alright.

RL: And how long were you at the school?

WS: Four terms.

RL: And after that?

WS: After that... I had studied all the prospectuses and realised that if I did well enough I could go to university. And I left school, had no money, but I managed to get some money together again, and then I also managed to get one or two interviews with people in industry. The most important of those was... through friends, I got an interview, I was just about seventeen then, with the managing director of Saltaire, the big, the largest cloth supplier to Marks and Spencer. I had about an hour with him and at the end of the hour he said to me: 'you can have a job, I'm sure I can get a permit for you. But having talked to you, I'd advice you to university now, whenever you can'. So I took his advice, it was basically what I

wanted to do anyhow. But the next problem was I had to persuade Manchester University to have me, because it was after registration day and everything else. I was well out of time. But I finally persuaded them to admit me late.

Tape 2: 12 minutes 52 seconds

RL: Why Manchester?

WS: I was fascinated by textile and textile machinery. The textile fascination no doubt came from my father. As a child, I always felt I wanted an industrial connection. But my other interest was law. And I thought, go in and learn something and then possibly change over to law, and when I was on my own in England, I felt I had no guarantee, the thing you have to do is to learn something you can export, if necessary. Law certainly you can't. So I narrowed it down and once I decided on engineering and textiles, I got very little choice where to go. So I came here.

RL: How did you manage to persuade them?

WS: I read through the small print and I went, late in November one day, to UMIST and saw one of the clerks and said to him: 'I want to register' and he said 'you can't'. So I said 'but I can, there is clause in the regulation that under special circumstances, you can register'. So he said 'what's the hurry, you're only just seventeen anyhow', and I said 'I want to get on'. So I talked to him for about ten or fifteen minutes, and then in despair he called the senior clerk with whom I had a long chat, and I convinced him that I had a case. And he said: 'I can see your point, it's something we haven't done before, but you're absolutely right, I'm going to see the vice principal'. So he went off and after about half an hour I was ushered into Dr. Cartwell's office who was the academic dean, effectively, academic vice president of the Faculty of Technology. We had a nice chat and he said: 'yes, you've already said, you know you have to do three years as a student before you can graduate' and I said 'yes, I know that, but that doesn't stop me from taking the courses'. And so I then was... he said: 'I support you, you have to see the Dean' and then I had to see, I went over to Owens and saw the registrar of the university. And after three years I was a student of Manchester University. So that was that.

Tape 2: 17 minutes 7 seconds

RL: Where did you live?

WS: I found digs in Chorlton-on-Medlock. I didn't have much money, so I found digs for a pound a week, which included breakfast and evening meal and weekend lunch as well. So, it wasn't very sumptuous, but very nice people.

RL: Where were you getting your money from?

WS: At that stage, I got from another relative in the United States some money. And very soon, the university treated me as a local student and I won the odd price. And I got the odd shilling surreptitiously from my parents. They could send through a friend a few pounds. But I managed. And as I said, by the beginning of '38, I felt sufficiently happy to persuade them to stay here.

RL: During this early time in England, did you have any contact with other refugees?

WS: I went to Woburn House when I came to England. I also told them when I moved to Manchester, but they didn't take any interest in me. So I had no input that way, I was on my own. In Manchester I went to Wilbraham Road Synagogue, but they also weren't very interested, and during the war I went to the Great Synagogue in Cheetham Hill Road because it was much easier to reach and I had a much warmer reception there. After the war I've been very welcome at Wilbraham Road, too. It was very interesting. At university on the first day, I met two Jewish boys, and the three of us became friends.

Tape 2: 20 minutes 21 seconds

RL: Where were they from?

WS: One was a refugee from West Germany and the other one was the son of the director of the Anglo-Hungarian Bank. The two of them didn't get on well together, but I became a friend of both of theirs, and after the death of the boy from Hungary, I married his widow whom I had known ever since she married my friend. And the other friend of mine who came from Wuppertal, we're still friends, great friends.

RL: What course were they doing?

WS: They were both doing the same course as I did. The boy who took, from Hungary, then changed over to physics. And during the war, he was with his uncle, the person who helped to develop conductive glass. The other lad was very unusual. He obtained record marks in his first and second term at UMIST, the second one a straight line of zeros. Thereupon, he got his marching orders. He got into London University with equal results, then went to the States and had one or two more miserable experiences, but then suddenly took off and within he took his Bachelor's, his Master's, his Doctor, he became a professor, he's one of the great men now. The world is very queer.

RL: What were their names?

WS: The first one was Peter Markus and the second one was called David Kirschheimer, and he changed his name in Canada, in the States, he lives in the States now, to David Kirk. And he was the first person, for instance, who published an attack on Irving.

Tape 2: 23 minutes 45 seconds

RL: Could you tell me a bit about your experience at university?

WS: In the first term, not first term, first year, I had to work very, very hard, because having done my homework at school, I decided to drop chemistry where I was so far behind. In Germany you take a very broad band of subjects, or I took and I don't think it changed, but all at very low level. So at Caterham I had to do a lot of catching up, quite apart from learning English. And so I realised physics was more in my line than chemistry, so when I came to Manchester at the beginning of December, I had to catch up two months work and start with chemistry from scratch, because at the end of the first year I had to pass my exams. So I had no spare time in the first year except for talking to people. After that, I had a normal university existence. I was very young, so socially not very active, that wasn't harm probably, and it wasn't as serious as work went. I played badminton and I took part in one or two other activities, went, was a member of the Textiles Society, went on every works visit I could, I

wanted to see what industry is like and that paid off in the end. So I had a very good time, a very satisfactory time.

RL: Was there a Jewish Society?

WS: No. I had no Jewish input to begin with in Manchester. I always kept in touch, basically, and for instance I was at the first meeting of what was called the Jewish Help Society and became the AJR in Manchester. But I was never active, I participated. I had a lot of interests.

Tape 2: 27 minutes 7 seconds

RL: When was that first meeting?

WS: I think in '41, something like that. I can remember very little about it, except going and I was the odd bod out.

RL: Where did it take place?

WS: Somewhere in Central Manchester.

RL: Do you know how you knew about it?

WS: I had a look at Jewish papers, kept my ear open, ears open, don't know exactly how I heard about it, but I did.

RL: Who was involved with it?

WS: To be honest, I cannot remember. So I'd never had a big input into the community here. I mean, my main interest had been in Israel.

RL: You say your parents came over in '38.

WS: Beginning of '38, yes.

RL: And you persuaded them to stay. Was that in Manchester?

WS: No, they were in London. I knew a cheap place there from the period between school and university, and I found them a bed-sit there. And, as I said, none of us had anything. Then during the war, during the heavy bombing, they moved first briefly to Leicester and then to Bedford. And in 1942, when I was working in Hyde, I found a little house which I could rent and they joined me.

RL: Did your parents need any kind of permits or guarantors to stay in this country?

WS: No. That came in much later.

RL: So they just came on a visit...?

WS: They came on a visit after I think they got a permit to land for three months, no work, no anything. And they then applied to have their permit extended; saying that they felt it was unsafe for them to return to Germany. It was granted.

Tape 2: 30 minutes 8 seconds

RL: Did your father work?

WS: No. He wasn't that well by then.

RL: So how did they manage to live?

WS: At first, my parents got again a bit of money from the States. And in 1939, I got a major scholarship, which helped. And then from 1941 onward, I earned a bit of money, which also helped, as I still got a bit of money, from the States. So, we managed.

RL: So they were living in London whilst you were in Manchester?

WS: Studying.

RL: Was there also like a gap between school and university? What were you doing in that period?

WS: Two things. One, I was looking around what I could do, should do. I realised I wanted to go to the university, but I had to decide what, where, how to finance it, how to get the money.

RL: Did you have any help or advice with this?

WS: No. I had my friends from Caterham, so yes, I talked to them. I stayed for some weeks with the parents of one of my friends, so yes, I could bounce my ideas off various people, but most people thought I was mad in two ways: one is, why do you want to go at this stage to university? And even worse, why do you want to specialise in textiles, when you could take a respectable subject?

Tape 2: 32 minutes 32 seconds

RL: So you came to university, and then what was your qualification, what did you gain at the end of the three years?

WS: I got a Bachelor of technical science degree, and I came top of my year, and I got a major scholarship, and I then had another piece of luck... I knew what I wanted, or with whom I wanted to do my research. I had to get a scholarship, because I got the prize for the year and various other things. But I couldn't graduate with my friends, because I hadn't done my nine terms. So I needed a scholarship to carry me through or something, the next three or four months until Christmas. But I also realised that I could use that time to work for a second degree, a research degree. So I got that scholarship and then my professor decided he wanted me to work for him. So I became his research student. He turned out to be a magnificent supervisor, who had time for his students; he only had two of us. And twenty-odd years later I found out that it was his reference which got me my first job in the industry.

RL: What were you doing your research into?

WS: It was at that stage shaped by the Ministry of Supply, because war was imminent and then broke out. And so I worked very largely on the bending of materials and of textile materials. The first thing, it sounds ridiculous, but it is one of the things which are of effective importance. It was on petersham bands, which were used for ATS uniforms. And the poor ladies got very sour, because after washing the petersham bands in the uniforms caused creasing. So what do we do to stop it? And as time went on, I did some more important work. Very interesting, and it gave me also a chance to learn about cloth geometry, which was then a brand new science, which had been developed by an Australian who was working at Shirley Institute. He had written two years before, three years before what is still the basic paper on the subject. And I was able to use that later on to much better use than on petersham bands.

Tape 2: 36 minutes 33 seconds

RL: Where were you living at that time?

WS: I stayed in my cheap digs for three and a half years, and then I found digs quite near here in Clothorn [?] Avenue, because High Street was during the war not an ideal place. And I stayed there; I finished my work at university and then started work in Hyde.

RL: What was your first job?

WS: I was a side-kick to the technical manager. And he was a very clever man, so I learnt a lot from him.

RL: What were they making?

WS: The company I joined had a range of fabrics. They were the leading towel maker in the country, but they also made the top quality poplins and, from my point of view very much more interesting, they made all sorts of industrial fabrics. They had 95% of the household vacuum cleaner bag trade. They supplied half of the chafer fabrics for Goodyears. And during the war, they made all sorts of fabrics for the military and that's where I did most of my work during the war.

RL: What was the firm called?

WS: Ashton Brothers.

RL: When war broke out, did you have to appear before a tribunal?

WS: Yes, I did. I was classified as a friendly enemy alien.

RL: Do you remember that appearance?

WS: Oh yes.

Tape 2: 39 minutes 12 seconds

RL: Can you tell me about it?

WS: You had to apply and you had to come with one or two references. And the judge in charge was an elderly man, very pleasant, very kind. We had a little chat, I obviously

convinced him that I wasn't a spy and I was classified as a friendly enemy alien, I continued working at the university until the last week of the round-up of enemy aliens, when I was taken into custody and had six, seven months until the university got me out from internment to continue on work of national importance. I... those seven months were probably the period when I learnt most about life. I went into three camps, the first was a tented camp where I met some very nice people and had the great advantage of having been a scout in this country, so I knew at least how barrel tents operated... and how latrines could be made.

RL: Where was this camp?

WS: Prees Heath in Shropshire. I then was transferred to Huyton near Liverpool where there was a very large internment camp; where after a week or two doing odd jobs someone decided I knew a bit about English education. So I was roped in to organise the excellent education services they were running there. So I learnt quite a lot about people there, and about things. And after six weeks I was transferred to Sefton Camp on the Isle of Man. And a letter of recommendation went forward that I had been organising this and that, which went to Sefton, and after about two or three days I was approached: would I be willing to help in the intelligence office? So for the rest of my time there, I worked outside of the barbed wire, but slept inside and learnt more about humanity than you can imagine. And I'm probably in the unusual position that I made out my own release orders.

Tape 2: 43 minutes 11 seconds

RL: What were you doing in intelligence?

WS: I did two things. One is, there were masses of documents which I could read, and they couldn't. And the other is, I could deal with correspondence, and I even had a secretary sitting there. And the third is, there were lots of releases and all sorts of things going on and I organised all the movement orders, which pleased me enormously because that was a time when we were afraid of an invasion, and at least I knew pretty well everyone who mattered. So I felt, if there is a boat in which you have to get, you at least have a chance.

RL: Where were you working?

WS: At Sefton Camp, in the office outside. So I had a pass to go across. I mean, I did nothing which you would call intelligence work, but basic organisational work.

RL: And you say you learnt a lot about humanity. Can you give me some examples?

WS: How people behave under stress. How they are... certain non-obvious conditions blow up, what you can do to pacify them. They came to me, who had no experience in life, really, with all sorts of problems: family problems, other problems, can you arrange for a letter to go out, can you see the intelligence officer that I should write to this or that? I was a little boy in whom people confided. It was a frightening experience, but you learn.

RL: How were people treated in the internment camps?

WS: Basically well. By that I mean we were left to do our own. If we managed badly, we did badly. But if a camp was well-organised, and I think most camps had people in of such calibre that they were organised, the camp had it... the internees set up their shops, their library, ran

their own kitchen, their entertainment, issued a camp newspaper, everything. So if you wanted to do this or that, or learn, you could.

Tape 2: 46 minutes 43 seconds

RL: I mean were there the facilities for a library and...

WS: Yes. People sent in books, there were all sorts... you had lost your freedom, but you hadn't lost your mind or your will, and no one attempted to brainwash you or anything. You got on with it. And the officers in charge, I think, were happy as long as there was no trouble. So it was a little world within a bigger world.

RL: Were you involved with the newspaper, the camp newspaper, producing it?

WS: No. I mean, I was, I probably worked six hours a day in the office, and I wanted to have some free time, I enjoyed talking to people. I had enough with one job; I even paid to have my laundry done. You see, you got some camp money, so with what I earned I could afford for someone to do my washing and iron my clothes.

RL: What about food? Was that cooked for you, or did you have to...?

WS: The internees did their own cooking.

RL: In a communal kitchen?

WS: Yes. Some people would supplement their food by things which were baked, and people had things sent in, and all sorts. It was a very liberal regime.

RL: Were there non-Jews interned with you?

WS: A few. But by then, there had been a separation into what you might call friendly enemy aliens and real enemy aliens. But the friendly enemy aliens included some non-Jews. And there were no problems.

RL: So the non-friendly enemy aliens, were they in a separate...?

WS: In a separate camp, we had no dealings with them.

RL: Had you ever been together with them in the first or second camp?

WS: No.

Tape 2: 49 minutes 38 seconds

RL: How big was the first camp that you were in?

WS: Difficult to say. I should imagine it probably had about a hundred tents, so five, six hundred people, could have been slightly bigger. Huyton was very big, a few thousand people. Sefton was one of the smaller camps, three or four hundred. Incidentally, the Sefton newspaper, I brought it out, the copies that were issued whilst I was there, and they are now in the Manchester Jewish Museum.

RL: Was there any religious activity in the internment camp?

WS: There were Shabbat services, and on the *Yom Tovim* there were also services. There was no great Jewish activity, and people could do what they liked. Some were very *frum*, some were Jewish on paper, and everything in between.

RL: Was there any provision for kosher food?

WS: I don't know how much provision there was for people like myself, whilst I don't have a kosher household, I mean, I don't eat pork, I don't eat shell fish, I don't cook or eat things milk and meat together, so that was easy, because there were sufficient offers. So no, no problem, I should imagine someone who was very religious would have found it very much more difficult. I don't know whether there was special provision made for these people in one of the camps.

Tape 2: 52 minutes 25 seconds

RL: Looking back over those seven months of loss of freedom, how do you feel about it?

WS: It was a very interesting experience. I have no bitterness whatsoever, because I could see why it happened. I know it was part of the general disorganisation after the second evacuation. And I think people, some people were unfortunate who were shipped off and things like that, but you could benefit from it. That depended on luck, probably. The right person approached me in Huyton and said 'why don't you do this, and why don't you do that'? But I certainly learnt an awful lot. I lost some time, but you occasionally lose time in life.

RL: How was your release organised?

WS: There were about five different reasons for release. One of them was being a student, and one of them was doing scientific work of national importance. And I applied for both, and submitted the papers and, having worked in the office, I had the experience of receiving two releases within a week. It took its time.

RL: When did you come out?

WS: In February, I think it was February, 1941. January or February... I could no doubt dig it out, I got the papers, but it's not a day of any particular importance, because life resumed when I came out.

RL: Where did you go to live on coming out of...?

WS: Back to my digs. And you see, I had the university having applied for me to carry on with research. The day after I was back at work.

RL: When you went to your first job in Hyde, if you could take me forward from there?

Tape 2: 55 minutes 41 seconds

WS: I got that job, let me go right to the beginning... I mentioned earlier I had been on every works visit I could go to. There was one company which had impressed me enormously; it

seemed so much more interesting and better, and that was Ashton Brothers. So I had the cheek to write to the chairman of a very big company and told him, a brief letter, 'I've been to your company three times on works visits, I think it's an outstanding company, I've got my Bachelor's degree, I have finished the work for a research degree which I shall receive in due course, I'd like a job with your company'. And I was summoned to see the great man and he asked the technical manager to see me, and after an hour or so, I was taken back to the chairman who offered me a job. I said earlier it was a great piece of luck that I had the professor as my supervisor, because twenty years later, when I was on the board myself, one of the directors told me in great confidence that the chairman had sent him to see the professor and told him to ask certain questions, especially relating to the technical manager, who was very, very clever but not an easy person. And apparently, I got three, a three word-reference from the professor which was: 'he can cope'. And after that I was summoned, and I got my job. From there on, I...

TAPE 2 ends

TAPE 3

RL: You were telling me about your progression in the firm, and how at the very end you were saying that you became the head of the spinning section first?

WS: First, and after probably the seven most interesting years of my life as a spinning manager, I became production manager of the company and then general manager. And I stayed in that position for a relatively short time because Courtaulds launched a bid for us. We were the fifth largest textiles company in the country and among the hundred biggest in the world. But Courtaulds were a huge company compared with us, we were a little flea compared to them. And they decided they wanted to buy us pretty much at any cost. So they bought Ashton. My style of management did not agree with theirs, so I'm not sure whether it was because they thought I would be useful or because I had a decent contract, that they offered me a very senior post in their research organisation, which gave me fifteen months of high calibre learning time, unintentional as far as they were concerned, no doubt I earned my keep. And then, a little hand-written, scribbled, gold-rimmed card arrived from the chairman asking me to go and see the chairman of the weaving division, because they were having problems. So I found myself a senior technical manager of the weaving division and, apart from moving office an endless number of times, I moved on from there as they made changes to become senior technical advisor to the fabrics group. And I retired twenty years ago, more than twenty years now.

Tape 3: 3 minutes 14 seconds

RL: Did you continue with your connections with the university?

WS: Yes. I never dropped that connection once it had been re-established. In fact, even before they asked me to take some of the classes, I always had contact. And I always did, even when I was purely in management, some technical and scientific work. So I maintained my contact with the universities, which I have found very interesting, which has enabled me, in fact, in recent years, when I did not want to do a big consultancy job or anything like that, to keep my mind active. So I've still got various involvements with university activities to this day. And I am still on the Board of Governors to Shenkar, which is the smallest of the top-flight Israeli institutes.

RL: But how did your connection... Could you just take me through your university career?

WS: I mean, I... very weird. I mean, I obviously as research student got to know the people, senior people in my department. And after two or three years, one of them approached me to write a paper on certain methods of testing, having said what had been going one was stupid. And then I was approached to join the university when I was 26 to take over a department and I refused. I liked industry. But I said, alright, I help you. So over the next fifteen years or so, I would lecture for two or three hours, mainly in spinning, that's why I said it came in helpful afterwards. But, for instance, once when they were in a squeeze because the man in charge of weaving had had a breakdown, so I was able to switch subjects. I hadn't got any more time. And I took the weaving people for a year or two, for two or three hours and later on, I concentrated on administrative and financial matters. I ceased to give regular lectures when I became involved in Ashton's with the management of mills. And at the same time, I also was beginning to have a family, so I had no, not much spare time.

Tape 3: 7 minutes 6 seconds

But I always kept in touch, always gave the occasional lecture. And that's continued. I think I was also the first person to be asked as the outside examiner to examine someone for a PhD in my own department. There were none, even at the time when I was studying, my professor, who still holds a record, he's no longer alive, of having served on the senate longer than anyone else, he only had a Master's degree. Certain groups of engineers used a Master's as their research degree, but that has changed over the years. So I have acted as external examiner both at the University and at UMIST for research degrees. It's good fun. At the moment, when I say at the moment it's an annual thing, but it's last month's, last year's finish, I had been acting as assessor for awards to universities by the Weaver's Company, which is the oldest of the livery companies of London. I'm not a member, but I've helped them for many years, and they've always been very nice. So recently, I have, for some years now, had the applications from technical colleges and universities for research and related grants from them to assess. As I mentioned, I am still involved with Shenkar, and I've been helping with their research projects. So... it keeps my mind active.

RL: How did you become connected with Shenkar?

WS: With Shenkar? Through the Textiles Institute. You know, life is full of weird coincidences. Israel has had a big textiles industry ever since its foundation. And in 1950, when I went over for the first time, I saw one of their big mills, and I thought: doing very nicely, that mill is more modern than anything in this country. And they always knew what they were doing, but I had been on councils, and god knows what, the Textile Institute, for a long period, and I'd mentioned to the General Secretary that I wouldn't be available from then till then, because I was going on a holiday to Israel. And on the morning of the day when I went to, we went, I took my wife, for a holiday in Israel, I got at nine o'clock a phone call of the General Secretary and he said to me, 'you're going to Israel'? And I said, 'yes, I'm going later today', he said 'we've had a letter from the honorary secretary from the manufacturer's association; they want us to suggest someone to give a lecture there'.

Tape 3: 11 minutes 16 seconds

And I said: 'what do you want me to do'? He said: 'when you get to Israel, please phone the man'. And so, the following day I phoned him and we arranged to meet over lunch. I'd thrown, let me be honest, after the telephone conversation, some work I'd done recently on

high-speed weaving machines, into my bag before we set off. And so I saw him, we had a chat, he was a very nice, is a very nice person, he is now president of Shenkar. And I talked to him, and he introduced me to the then president of Shenkar, and he said to me: 'couldn't you possibly give a talk to the manufacturer's association'? I thought about it, I said to him: 'the only chance I have, I have mapped out what I wanted to do. I could come back one day earlier to Tel Aviv and give a lecture'. So we got to Tel Aviv in the morning, I said to my wife: 'you'll have to spend the morning on your own', and I sat down and decided what I wanted to talk about. And that lecture went down quite well, so we became friends, and I also knew one or two people in this country who had been involved with Shenkar. So I was then asked to join the board of governors.

RL: How far back does your connection with Israel go?

WS: My connection goes back quite a long time. Because, I think to the disgust of some of my parents' friends, when I was twelve or so, they engaged a student as the cheder was miserable and certainly not of the type that I appreciated who would give me some education like he should. And it was to the disgust of many of the friends of my parents, because the young man was a great Zionist. So apart from teaching me something, I learnt from him about Palestine and Jewish ideals of Zionism. So that was one contact. One of my father's cousins was a founder member of Naharia. One of my cousins went to live there in, I think, 1935 or '36. So I've always had contacts, pretty well as long as I can remember.

Tape 3: 15 minutes 17 seconds

RL: How did your parents feel towards Zionism?

WS: Oh, very much in favour. I think it blended with their attitude towards Germany and Hitler.

RL: Can I just ask you, because it's something you haven't mentioned before, we just touched on it that was your Cheder experience. Which Cheder did you go to?

WS: I went to one organised by the synagogue, and I went once a week for three hours. It taught Hebrew in, what is unfortunately for people like myself the standard method. You have a piece of text; it was in German, obviously, and the same text in Hebrew. So once you knew the letters or barely knew the letters, you were supposed to learn it that way. I knew many of the yeshiva until this day work on this principle. I'm not good at languages, and my mind certainly doesn't work the way: that's it, that's it, that's it, that's it, remember it! I remember nothing, I like to work it out, so if they had taught Hebrew or Aramaic as a language with a grammar, with a letter before means this and that, a little might have gone in, but to learn anything off by heart, I find a nightmare. So my *Cheder* was unsatisfactory, apart from Jewish history, which I enjoyed.

RL: Did you, how did you celebrate your Bar Mitzvah?

WS: Oh, in the usual way. I was called up; we had a party at my home. It was just about when Hitler was coming in, so it was slightly muted, but I wore a hat, which was custom, a bowler hat, and it was very pleasant, but I wished I had known more.

Tape 3: 18 minutes 30 seconds

RL: Did you have to read Haftorah or anything like that?

WS: I read it, because the Chazzan said to my parents: 'don't make him sing it, he can't sing, he doesn't know the notes, anything. He can read it, I teach him, let him read it, it's unusual'. I did. I, to this day, don't want to read the Haftorah because, you know, it wouldn't be in an acceptable way.

RL: Coming back to your support of Zionism, when you came to this country, were you active in any way or did you connect to any groups?

WS: No, no. I mean, at school I was cut off; at university I had no contact with them. I mean, I always kept myself informed and I would read the debates in parliament, and I think I still have somewhere in the garage in one of the boxes, big debates on Palestine. Yes, I was very interested, I was always interested.

RL: Do you remember the foundation of the state?

WS: Oh yes, yes. Great day, followed it very anxiously and followed what went on, on the road to Jerusalem and the battles, I was obviously interested in what went near Aka because I had family in the area, I had relatives in the Haganah. So, yes, I was interested, always. But I had no involvement here; I think my only involvement here, basically, has been to buy trees. Some of those in recent years I've bought in Israel.

RL: You say, you visited the country quite early...

WS: 1950.

Tape 3: 21 minutes 12 seconds

RL: 1950. What made you go at that point?

WS: I just wanted to go. It was a much more difficult enterprise than nowadays. A fascinating experience, and I was very much impressed by what I saw, technically and otherwise. I was very impressed, for instance, by the Technion. It's a little bit of a museum now, the old Technion, but in those days they did enormous work, and I've always been interested.

RL: The other thing that we have not spoken about is how you met your wife, and the family on that side?

WS: Right. Let me put it like that: I didn't meet my wife by accident. I had an aunt who knew her aunt, and one day, I was invited to her aunt's 70th birthday party. And at the dinner, a little family dinner, I found myself sitting next to her. She was twelve years younger than I was, but within half an hour, I knew two things about her: she was obviously a very modest person and an extremely impressive person. And before we parted, I said to her: 'can I meet you again?' That's how I met her.

RL: When was this?

WS: That was in 1957. I was getting on in years. I wanted a Jewish wife. I was living and working in a totally non-Jewish area. I obviously met girls in *shul*. But I had met no one who attracted me sufficiently to say she is likely to be the wife you are looking for. That's wrong. I

have met one or two people but they were spoken for. Yes, it is quite wrong to say I met nobody. Among Jewish people, the girls I met had boyfriends.

Tape 3: 24 minutes 32 seconds

RL: Did you mix in any social groups? Did you meet people?

WS: Not particularly. I have never been a person to go to charity dinners or anything like that. Somehow, I've never fitted in. If I want to give, I give. I don't want to dress up for it. And when people asked me: who do you want for your wife? I said: 'a person to whom I can talk over the breakfast table'. And in my first wife I found someone to whom I could talk over the breakfast table.

RL: Where was she from?

WS: She was born in Frankfurt, well, brought up in Frankfurt until she was seven, she went to the French school there, and she fairly late she was sent out of Germany and her parents managed to get out a few weeks before the outbreak of war. They then settled in Welwyn Garden City. She was a very able young lady. She did well at school, she got a scholarship to King's College, and she did extremely well there.

RL: What was her subject?

WS: Chemistry. She got every award you could collect. At twenty-three, she was head of the toxicological bureau of ICI, and told them: 'I am a scientific officer; this is obviously a job for a senior scientific officer'. They said to her: 'it is, but no one, no woman under thirty in ICI can become a senior scientific officer'. So she said: you better contact Millbank, and the word came back as soon as she's thirty, she will be promoted. So she found a better job with May and Baker. And two years after that, she became Head of Information Services and dealing with patents and everything else in one of the research associations. So she had a very impressive record. I didn't know that. I knew the job she had when we established that, on the first meeting, but just whom I had married I had no idea until after we got engaged and we got married.

RL: What was her name?

WS: Ilse Hamburger. So... she was a lovely person.

Tape 3: 28 minutes 18 seconds

RL: When did you marry?

WS: We married in 1958. It was, we were courting over a distance. We spent one holiday touring the north of Scotland, and two-thirds through the holiday, when we were walking past Loch Morloch, I proposed to her, and she accepted.

RL: Where did you marry?

WS: We married in Welwyn Garden City. Her parents had been founding members of the synagogue there, and we had number 5 wedding certificate, and I am glad to say the shul is still going strong.

RL: And where did you live after that?

WS: She joined me in Hyde.

RL: Where were you living in Hyde at that point?

WS: At the point when I married Ilse, I was living in number 140 Dowson Road. I had a nice house there.

RL: When did you buy that?

WS: I bought that a few years before. I had two rented houses first. First I was in digs and then I rented two houses. And then I bought a small house, and at that time, I was living with my parents. And then, my father died and my job improved, so I bought a bigger house. I moved there with my mother, and when I married Ilse, we built a bungalow for my mother, and we lived in the house. And when we had three children, we moved to Boedecker Road, where I lived until last year.

Tape 3: 30 minutes 48 seconds

RL: When did your mother die?

WS: My mother died... in 1967. If you want, I can give you the dates. My father died in 1955, yes.

RL: And what children did you have?

WS: We had one daughter and two sons. And my mother... my wife fell ill shortly after the birth of our third child.

RL: What are your children called?

WS: The eldest Sonia Anne, the second is Peter Jacob, and the third is Martin David.

RL: Are they named after anybody?

WS: Yes. The second name of Peter's is after my father's name.

RL: And when were they born?

WS: In 1960, '63 and '65.

RL: What school did they go to?

WS: They went first to what nowadays would be described as one of the sink schools in Hyde. The only alternative would have been the local Church of England School, which had a very good reputation, but when my wife went to see the headmaster, he was very nice, but he said

they teach religion as part of the general curriculum, so I cannot exclude your children from that. So we decided, at five, a child isn't old enough to be able to sort things out, so she went to Greenfield Street and the boys followed her. Teachers were very nice; the quality of teaching was very poor. We were fortunate that Sonia, at eight, got into Withington, and Peter and Martin, at seven, got into King's, Macclesfield. My wife, by then, when she helped the boys, was already very ill. But Ilse taught the children at home, so that they reached the basic standard required for the entrance exams. Sonia was always very, very happy at school in Withington.

Tape 3: 34 minutes 22 seconds

She was impossible in Hyde because she wasn't in any way stretched. Of the three, she has the highest IQ, I'm sure. I decided not to attempt the boys for Manchester Grammar. Both would be equidistant roughly, and difficult. But I felt that if I sent them to Manchester Grammar and they would not be in the top stream, they would be somewhat neglected, and in those days, the school was very, very keen to get them to Oxbridge, but much less interested in the lower down ones. And I felt, probably King's would, from that point of view, be a better school. Also, it had the disadvantage of practically no Jewish children. Looking back, Peter would probably have been fine at Manchester Grammar, because he was very good at maths. I think me made the right decision. For Martin, I mean once you decide it's better to send both. And both did very well at King's.

RL: Did they go for religious education?

WS: Yes, they went to South Manchester to the Cheder every Sunday morning, we took them, or I took them, my wife could no longer take them, and Sonia went, for a short period, also on Wednesday afternoons, but there were never any proper classes there. I mean, she could do it from Withington fairly easily. The boys... for some time, Sonia and also Peter went past Bar Mitzvah to Sale where there were running classes. But again, their education wasn't of the standard I should have liked... very sad.

Tape 3: 37 minutes 19 seconds

RL: Did they mix with other Jewish children?

WS: They mixed through Cheder to some extent. And one of Peter's Cheder friends is still probably his best friend now. But living in Hyde, and having first, a wife who was ill, and then being a single parent, and running rather responsible industrial jobs, I couldn't take them to all sorts of youth activities. They were to some extent latchkey children, who had to fend for themselves.

RL: When did your wife die?

WS: My wife died when Sonia was fifteen and Martin nearly eleven. And I didn't marry Anna till both Sonia and Peter were at university already. So there was a long period when I was a single parent.

RL: Did your children belong to any youth groups?

WS: No, they didn't. Partly for logistical reasons... they tried one or two, but it never worked out. And South Manchester never had, in those days, much youth activity anyhow. So...

RL: You mentioned South Manchester Synagogue, which you say you joined...

WS: Oh yes, I've been a member for fifteen years.

RL: What made you join that particular one?

WS: Convenience. I mean, I'm Ashkenazi. So the effective choice was South Manchester or a Sephardi shul. If there had been no Ashkenazi shul, I would have joined Sephardi shul. I never found that I fitted into reform synagogue. I may not be a very observant Jew, but I don't want to move the goalposts.

Tape 3: 40 minutes 20 seconds

RL: After school, what did your children do?

WS: After school, they were keen swimmers to begin with. Sonia was a very good cricket and lacrosse player. So she played lacrosse, she was lacrosse captain and quite successful, played cricket as long as she could and played for Oxford and then for Birmingham ladies. Peter played chess, which kept him very busy. And Martin played chess at a somewhat lower level. So their activities, basically non-social activities, kept them quite busy.

RL: And in terms of education?

WS: Education? Sonia went from Oxford to Withington and took physics. Then she worked during her vacation there in the low temperature laboratory and got a post graduate offer from Birmingham and got her PhD there. Peter... they all wanted to go to different universities as first choice, went to Sheffield and studied mathematics, and did quite well there and became an actuary. And Martin decided he was going to study physics and went to Birmingham where his sister landed and she made it a condition, she was also demonstrating, that she shouldn't have to demonstrate for her brother. He graduated at Birmingham, the year before he graduated we talked about his future and he said 'I'd like to become a chartered accountant' and so I said 'have you considered industry'? So he said 'yes, but if you can tell me any other way of becoming a director in the industry at 28 than becoming an accountant, I am listening'. I could not, he was right and so he became a chartered accountant is an FCA and did not find it particularly interesting went over to taxation became a chartered member of that institute and now works in tax.

Tape 3: 43 minutes 51 seconds

RL: And what do the other two do?

WS: Sonia, at the moment, is project manager of E2V1, one of the successor organisations of failed Marconi. It's not a job which stresses her in any way, but she has always been very involved in Jewish affairs, so that takes up her spare time. Peter is a manager at the FSA. He became an actual manager of one of the bigger insurance companies, but they moved to Peterborough, he felt he wanted to get married, and Peterborough wasn't a place where a Jewish boy can find a wife. So for... they wanted to keep him. So he commuted for a about fifteen months and then he got an offer for a job in the government actuaries department, moved there, was seconded to the treasury as a deputy director where he did supervision, and then when the FSA was set up, they were effectively booted over, and so he now works for a

quango. And I mentioned Martin already; he works for one of the big KPMG as a senior tax manager.

RL: And have they married?

WS: Both boys have married. Peter married a Susan Albert who is teacher. She taught, for some years, in Israel, and at the time when they got married was a teacher at MMK. And she had their second child five months ago. Martin married Angela Ezekiel, and they had their second child about eight weeks ago. I've got four granddaughters now.

Tape 3: 46 minutes 40 seconds

RL: And your daughter?

WS: My daughter has never married. She, as I say, has been very active in Jewish affairs. She's been honorary treasurer and then chair of the Jewish Chelmsford community, which are about the only two jobs an orthodox girl can take. And she also got involved with Limud and she's been bursar of Limmud and in charge of their small activities and conferences for small communities. And she's some involvement with Limmud, some involvement in Chelmsford, and I think at the moment she's wondering what will happen to her future because Marconi hasn't done that well.

RL: And both boys married Jewish girls?

WS: Oh yes.

RL: And would you say that that was something they were keen...?

WS: Oh very much, very much. I think we have always been a very Jewish family. And in spite of what people say, I believe it depends on what you see at home, not where you live and to which community you belong. And obviously, I have always mixed in any society. I mean, you couldn't have done my job, I was the only Jew in a very large firm, but within the home, we've always been very Jewish. And I tried, my wife certainly was the same, and I tried to continue to bring them up in that way. You live in a community; you have to participate in that community. But that doesn't mean you cannot maintain your Judaism, or maintain its values, which is the important thing. I mean, I probably the man who had the biggest influence on has been Rabbi Altmann, the former communal Rabbi in Manchester, and I went for some years to listen to his lectures, and yes, I'd always been Jewish, but I learnt an awful lot from him, he was brilliant.

RL: Where did he give his lectures?

WS: At the university. Extramural lectures.

RL: And how long was he here for?

WS: Till he went to Brandeis University. I'm never quite sure how his job as communal Rabbi and his other things fitted together. I don't think he was ever an easy bedfellow for the Manchester Beth Din. He was very much more a general scholar. In certain ways, Sacks reminds me of him.

Tape 3: 50 minutes 47 seconds

RL: But why do you think that he didn't sort of fit?

WS: He was willing to listen to any argument, and tell you exactly why he felt you were wrong. But he would never say something is right because I say so. He was less of the yeshiva at school than the academic school. I mean, they both fulfil, to my mind, a wider function, because we are all different, and certain people will find it easier to listen to Ehrentreu and others will find it easier to listen to Sacks. Fortunately, the world consists of a multiplicity of people. But I mean, we all agree, I mean the Jews agree on certain basic principles, or can agree.

RL: So how would you describe your Jewishness? What does it mean to you?

WS: It basically governs my behavioural pattern, means an awful lot. It in no way reduces my respect for other people. But I can see the many differences we have in laws. They may appear minor, but they are in many ways very fundamental. And I value ours.

RL: How would you describe yourself in terms of nationality?

WS: I'm definitely British, no question.

RL: When did you take out naturalisation?

WS: At the first possible opportunity after the war. I couldn't before the war because I wasn't old enough. And I was amongst the first batch after the war because I could claim to have done work of national importance.

Tape 3: 53 minutes 43 seconds

RL: Do you think you've got any kind of continental identity?

WS: No. I mean I may have a *Yekke* identity, little doubt, but certainly not continental. You learn from wherever you are, but I have nothing in common with Germany. I have never been back to my place of birth. I have been frequently to Germany for work, but I have no ties. I feel more at home in Italy, say, with the people, than in Germany, possibly because I don't understand them. My wife who had, my second wife, never been to Israel until I took her, and then would have loved to go on aliyah and I said to her once: 'I know why you are so happy; you don't know when people swear at you'. But the disadvantage that I have in Germany is that I obviously understand everything. I have an English accent in my German, people comment on the fact that my German is very good and I say, 'sure it is, I went to school in Germany for many years'. But somehow, they talk to me quite freely and I feel deeply uneasy, deeply uneasy, because the basic principles have not changed. I have the advantage of having been at school both in Germany and in England, so I've seen some of these differences, which may be more apparent to me than to a person who didn't have that advantage. So no, I have no personal links with Germany. It's a very useful language to know. I know my younger son came to me and said: 'I think I ought to learn some language properly' and I said: 'yes, by all means'. 'Would you object if I go to Germany, for a vacation?' And I said 'no', and I helped him first to get a job in an engineering firm and second year, he was offered a job there to translate some of their pamphlets. So yes, I have no hostility, but I shouldn't want to live there. And I don't value, let me put it differently... I feel Germany has never lost the ideal of

Realpolitik. 'You change as convenient, you are always right', which I summed up earlier when I talked about the battle of Jutland.

Tape 3: 57 minutes 36 seconds

RL: When you went back for work visits, how did you feel?

WS: Just like I would feel when I have been to work visits to other countries, and I've been around quiet a lot. I have always felt a slight personal unease. It has not been the type of unease I felt when I, for instance, had to go repeatedly to Czechoslovakia whilst it was a communist state, and I was treated like royalty there. There was political unease, not personal there. Big Brother watches you. Once I took my wife, and because... the only time I took a car over because she wanted to show me where her roots were in Hungary. And when we wanted to talk privately, we had to go out in the evening and go for a walk, because there was no doubt the rooms were bugged. So that was a totally different unease. The people in Czechoslovakia I liked. The system around us was frightening. It is very interesting, but...

RL: This tape is just about to end...

TAPE 4

RL: You mentioned before that you might be a bit of a *Yekke*. What do you mean by that?

WS: I don't work to Jewish mean time. I like, if I make an appointment, to keep that appointment. I keep a diary and try and keep to the times, I write into it. I rather waste a little time by being early than being late. But this is very different from what I would call the German qualities.

RL: And what do you identify as German qualities?

WS: An unwillingness to listen, and a belief that blood is everything, the *Volksdeutsche*, that is still in existence today. You may have had people in Romania for four hundred years, but they are still *Volksdeutsche*, because of their blood not because of their beliefs. Angela, my daughter-in-law, her mother was born in Burma and her father in Calcutta and they're both Sephardi, but they are just as Jewish as I am. That doesn't go by blood, that's a case of belief. And when you go to the Kotel [the Wailing Wall], look around you and see what you meet. So there are differences in belief there, which come in.

RL: Do you think there is, in this country, a German-Jewish identity?

WS: I think it has largely disappeared. When I came to Manchester, people said to me that Wilbraham Road was a German shul. And yes, they had had quite a few members who had come from Germany, but they weren't particularly interested in me, for instance. By now, most of these people have children and grandchildren who have nothing in common with the German identity. I mean, I feel I have nothing in common with it, just think about my children. So you have, in the AJR, obviously, a certain German identity but when I look at the members I know, they wouldn't fit into Germany. So no, I don't think there is much. There are the old ladies, still, or the old gentlemen, who have never settled in here. There was a frightening spectacle on the TV when some money was made available for compensation and an elderly gentleman said how grateful he was because it gives him the first chance, four hundred pounds he got, to have a holiday in twenty-five years. I don't imagine he has much of an

identity of anything. He can't be very grateful to Germany, and I don't think, from the impression I got, that he has settled in properly in here.

Tape 4: 5 minutes 5 seconds

RL: How well do you feel you settled in here?

WS: I've settled in as well as any newcomer can do. After all, I am first generation here. I have seen an awful lot of change, and I have obviously very close ties with Israel, so... but I feel absolutely settled.

RL: Do you feel different to the English?

WS: Can you define English for me? I think that is the problem. When you look around, yes, I know some people who are by descent totally English, but they are small in number. So I find it extremely difficult to define what is English. I can define easily what is British, but not what is English. Because I don't think the philosophy is any different from the philosophy of the Scots. And if you go to the Outer Hebrides, they will tell you they have more in common with London than with Edinburgh. So yes, British is easy to define, I can't define English.

RL: Do you... How far back does your connection with AJR go? You mentioned...

WS: As long as it's been in existence, and when I say connection, I have always subscribed to it, I have always looked at their journal. I pass them to my elder son who is quite interested, but I have never had any active involvement. There are so many things in which I am involvement, that membership... No, there are so many things of which I am a member that involvement is something separate. I mean, I am a fellow and a life member of two of the chartered institutes. I got involved in one, but not the other. I have never become involved, really involved in South Manchester. I have in recent years taken an active, more active interest because of some problems which I felt one had to overcome. But there's a limit to what one can do and I have always felt that my first responsibility is to my family.

Tape 4: 8 minutes 30 seconds

RL: You joined AJR during the war years? At that stage, you didn't have any contacts.

WS: No. I felt they fulfilled a useful role, there is a need for them, and it is there to this day. So they have my full support, but I cannot make any useful contribution.

RL: Do you go to any meetings today?

WS: Very rarely, very occasionally I go to something.

RL: How interested are your children in your background?

WS: Very.

RL: Was it something that you told them about when you were younger?

WS: Yes, we've talked about everything. And many years ago, one of my sons said: you know, you must establish, for instance, a family tree, because you are the last one of that

generation who has a chance. So I have collected as much information as I could, and in recent years I've tried to codify it. We have been unusually unfortunate that someone decided to take the Sondhelms as a research project and spent years going through the archives in Germany, drawing out a phenomenal amount of information. So we've got that information now, and whilst I have disagreed with him, on one or two matters for instance, he feels the name of Sondhelm came into existence in the early part of the 19th century. I'm fairly certain it existed before. And my father told me that he had been told by his parents that originally, they were known as the van Sondhelms, which is... the answer to that was really provided my one of my sons who said: yes, probably they came over at one stage from Holland and they might have gone during one of the pogroms in the middle ages from a place called Sondheim in Germany, to Holland, where it was turned into 'from', van Sondhelm. So yes, we have had an interest and we've been extremely fortunate in the documentation which this gentleman provided. I've also, I said to you I've got thousands of photos. As we brought out nothing, I have over the past forty or fifty years collected from my family whenever I could. The odd photo... what you see here, is largely collected stuff. And unfortunately, most of them or many of them have no names on.

Tape 4: 12 minutes 25 seconds

RL: Did your parents get compensation?

WS: My father got practically nothing because his business was in East Germany, and the only compensation we got was for a small part of the business which had been transferred by the people who more or less stole it off him, to West Germany. So after my father died, I managed to get a few thousand pounds out of the Germans for that. I have got an ongoing case which I hope to settle shortly, I am not spending any time on it, really, because it wouldn't be worth it, but I don't want to leave it to my grandchildren as a problem. I myself got nothing because the Germans claimed, turned down my claim for a break in education and said: you lost nothing because you couldn't have become a graduate in Germany at barely twenty and done the jobs by twenty-five or so which you did in England, so you had no break in your education. It's fairly unusual, that position, but fortunately I can live without it. I was told some two or three years ago that I could claim insurance, old age pension from Germany, if I paid a nominal sum into their insurance fund, and probably it would have been a reasonable pension. There was one condition attached: I would have to be 'wieder eingebürgert', re-naturalised and I pointed out I have no intention of becoming a German citizen. I can understand if someone hasn't got enough money to live, by all means, but I have no intention of becoming a German citizen again. I was told it has no effect, it won't affect you and your British nationality, I said I know, but I have nothing in common with Germany, I've got some very bitter memories, and even if you pay me for it, I have no intention.

Tape 4: 16 minutes 7 seconds

RL: One of the things I have not asked you about is your second wife...

WS: Yes. My second wife came from Hungary. She survived the war in Budapest, they lived with false papers. Her father had been an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. He had been to the Reitschule in Vienna, so he could command people alright. He had also got a high decoration, so he was advised that Germans have taken all the papers, they won't be able to prove it. And he had two certificates for this very, very high honour, simply declare you exempt from all roots applying to Jews, take your Star of David down, tell your wife and daughter to take it down and they carried on living. They lived in a large flat house, the

bottom two floors were kommandiert by the SS as one of their Lager, and Anna, my wife, who was then sixteen became employed as a cleaner in the Lager. They were very nice to her and she had the keys and everything else. Her father was an architect and a very skilled craftsman, and whilst in daytime he worked as an architect, in the evening he forged papers and Anna went downstairs, and to use her term, “borrowed” the actual hand stamps of the SS. So the documents they produced were fully authenticated... very useful. They obviously lived in enormous danger because if she had been caught, or he had been found out, they would all have been killed immediately, and not in the kindest of ways. It took me a long time to find that out, it explained some of her behaviour, she was quite badly damaged by this experience. I persuaded her to record all her experiences for Yad Vashem and they’re on record now. Her father was an architect, her grandfather was an even more famous architect, and his fame rests very largely on the 21 synagogues he built including possibly the greatest synagogue in Hungary, in Szeged.

Tape 4: 20 minutes 34 seconds

People can argue whether it’s the Utca synagogue in Budapest or their synagogue in Szeged. Once when we were in Israel, we were told that there was in Yad Vashem an exhibition of synagogues of the continent, and when he walked in we were greeted by a huge photograph of her grandfather’s famous synagogue. And of the hundred and odd pictures we saw of synagogues, about a third were of her grandfather and father.

RL: What was the family name?

WS: Baumhorn and then they changed it to Szomoszy [?] . But all the synagogues are under the Baumhorn name, and I’ve seen it on dust covers of books in this country on synagogues and things like that. And that’s why I once took a car over to Czechoslovakia because we went on to Hungary, she wanted to show me some of the work. She herself was the black sheep in the family. She didn’t want to be an architect, she would have loved to be a ballet dancer, but she was too heavy for it. So she studied as a graphic artist and changed over to puppetry. By sheer chance she was sent to produce a programme for the Hungarian state puppet theatre, and she liked it so much that she became a puppeteer, a puppet designer, a puppet maker. Excellent training, continental puppetry... Then in ’58, she escaped from Hungary and came to this country, and carried on with her puppetry work here. And you may have come across her because she worked as a Jewish puppeteer. Her professional name was Anna Markus and she worked at the Jewish Cultural centre and all sorts of places, in London...

Tape 4: 23 minutes 37 seconds

RL: When did you get married?

WS: We got married in 1980, and she died five and a half years ago.

RL: You mentioned that previously she had been married...

WS: ...to Peter Markus, who I’ve met at my first day at university. A small world... And when I say a small world: in the puppet theatre, she worked with her future sister-in-law, and when she got out of Hungary, she was interviewed at the British Embassy in Vienna, and she thought the man who did the interviewing looked familiar... it was her future husband. So I have known her son ever since he was born.

RL: And what's his name?

WS: Francis Markus.

RL: So this is your stepson?

WS: My stepson.

RL: And what does he do?

WS: He works for the BBC. He is a linguist, Chinese is his main foreign language, but he speaks Vietnamese, and some Japanese, and half a dozen European languages. He is at the moment in charge of, he works for the overseas service, he's in charge of the Shanghai office, but a day after I'd spoken to him in Shanghai, I suddenly heard him broadcast about SARS, from Hong Kong, and for the past week, he's been broadcasting from Beijing. So I'll be pleased when that's over. We've got very good relations.

RL: How do you feel about the situation today with regard to Israel, and Iraq and the whole of the Middle East situation?

Tape 4: 26 minutes 14 seconds

WS: It is a situation fraught with danger. I can see no rapid solution. I have no doubt the only hope is a two-state solution because Israel cannot afford to take in the people living on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip I mean. It would kill Israel completely. I mean, that's assuming they were incorporated in Israel. Whilst a two-state solution may seem obvious to me, a large number of the Arabs are determined to see the end of Israel, and have no interest whatsoever in a two-state solution. I mean, Hamas and Hezbollah are widely supported in the whole of that area. To my mind, Yasser Arafat has never changed his spots and doesn't want a two-state solution either. But I feel it is an essential. We also know that neither Egypt nor Jordan wants the Palestinians. They could have had the Gaza Strip long since, and most of the West Bank. There are many difficulties which are not appreciated here. When people talk of all they want back is the parts occupied by Israel after the Six-Day War, they overlook the fact that these people list the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem as a typical example as occupied territory. When we talk of ethnic cleansing, I feel I'd like to take some of the people on a tour of the old city and show them the Hora [?] shul, and the other, what remains of the other thirty which were dynamited within, what, twenty-one days? And ethnic cleansing didn't take any longer. And I remember the soldier with the machine gun or sub-machine gun on David's Tower... I've also, I also remember a train being shot at, the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv line in 1950, and I was in the main market in Jerusalem when a pipe bomb went off fifty yards away. So I've seen all sorts, but it doesn't make me feel any less determined.

Tape 4: 30 minutes 20 seconds

RL: Ok, I've asked more or less everything that I had down, is there anything that you would like to add?

WS: Not really. I think you've covered most things and I'm here to answer your questions.

RL: I'd like to thank you very much then.

WS: Pleasure.

Tape 4: 31 minutes 20 seconds

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. WS: Minna Loewi, my grandmother on my mother's side. Taken in Germany, Bamberg, about 1926.
2. Wolf Sondhelm, my grandfather, taken in Germany, Bavaria, in about 1932.
3. Selma Sondhelm, my mother, taken in Bamberg, about 1906.
4. My father, Jacob Sondhelm, taken in Leipzig, about 1913.
5. Myself, Walter Sondhelm, taken in Leipzig, about 1920.
6. Myself, taken in Manchester, in 1939.
7. Ilse Sondhelm, née Hamburger, my first wife, taken in about 1959.
8. Anna Markus Sondhelm, née Szomoszy [?], my second wife, taken in Israel, about 1995.
9. Sonia, Martin and Peter Sondhelm, my children, taken in Hyde about 1968.
10. This is an exclusion certificate from the German army. In 1939, all German nationals in the United Kingdom were required to register for military service. As I had still many relatives left in Germany, I decided to follow the official procedure and apply for exclusion from the German army, and received a certificate saying that, as a Jew, I am permanently excluded from it.