

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV307
NAME: Ruth Posner
DATE: 28 October 2024
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is the 28th of October 2024 and we're conducting an interview with Mrs Ruth Posner, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. Can you please tell me your name?

My name is Ruth Posner, I remember that.

And when and where were you born, Ruth?

I was born in Warsaw and moved to Radom, so I was born in Poland.

And when?

On 20th of April 1929 and somebody reminded me of it, that I share the birthday date with a very famous, nasty man and I don't want to think about it.

Okay.

Hitler.

Yeah. Ruth, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. Thank you so much.

Thank you for asking me.

Tell us, please, let's start maybe by just telling – if you could tell us something about your family background.

Yes. Well, first of all, I would like to say I wasn't born into a very religious family. My father, my mother, were not religious. Although my father used to take me once a year to the synagogue, because he liked the sound of *shofar*, you know, the horn which was being played. And that's –

The ram's horn?

Yes, that's what I remember. We had a number of Catholic friends, which was kind of unusual in Poland, because the Polish Catholic Church was very anti-Semitic, there is no doubt about it. But we mixed in with all kinds of people and had, as I said, many Catholic friends. [00:02:00] And I survived because of the help that my father got from them, but I'll tell you later.

So, tell us, can you tell us a little bit about the milieu your parents grew up in, their families and...?

Yes, well, my mother's family were traditional and quite religious, but lovely people. And they didn't visit us. I mean, they loved us very much. I was always invited to my grandmother for tea and cake and whatever. But you know, because we didn't keep a kosher home, because we ate ham, that wasn't approved of. But it didn't prevent them from offering love and help when necessary.

And where did your grandparents live? Where? Did they live in Warsaw?

No, they lived in Radom.

They lived in Radom?

Yes.

So, when you were born in Warsaw, how old were you when you then moved to Radom?

Well, I must have been just a baby when my parents decided to move to Radom, because I think my mother had some business there. Anyway, they both wanted to live in Radom. I can't remember.

And how far is that? And how far is it from Warsaw, Radom?

Not very far. I don't know exactly how far, but it isn't very far.

And both grandparents lived there, or your mother's parents, in Radom?

Yes, yes.

Both your father's and mother's parents?

Yes, yes, yes.

And tell us, professionally, what did they do, your parents?

Well, my mother was a very hard-working woman. She wasn't a very good housewife; she wasn't interested in it. [00:04:01] She designed underwear and had three women working for her. And that's what they were doing, designing and selling underwear, bras and corsets and stuff like that. So, she was very, very busy. My father, who worked as a chartered accountant, was really interested in the arts and he loved painting, making things. And you know, so it was a very sort of, as I said, not a religious household, but a very artistic

household. My mother had a beautiful soprano voice, and she used to sing and I still remember even some of the songs that she sang.

Yeah, like what?

No, I will not sing now [laughs].

No, just tell us, what sort of things? What sort of...?

I've a very bad throat.

What sort of things? What did she sing?

Well, she sang some very well-known kind of national Polish songs. But sometimes actually very more classical stuff, a variety of things. But she really had a superb voice and I do remember that. And maybe she just sang to me sometimes, whatever it was, maybe national Polish songs, variety. And my father –

So, they had a joint interest in the arts?

Yes, yes. And my father, I remember my father making me a beautiful pair of wings, which I was going to use, because I was chosen to be a seabird in a school play and needed wings. And he really made a pair of beautiful... I was very proud of that. So, I remember vaguely things like that. [00:06:00] It was an extremely happy household. Strict, not spoiling, but encouraging. Encouraging to – you know, I used to go to church every Sunday because we had a housekeeper, because my mother, as I said, wasn't very good at it [laughs] and didn't cook. And she used to take me, so the housekeeper used to take me to church every Sunday. And it was beautiful, I thought. It was very highly theatrical from my point of view. And I came home after one session, one of those sessions, and said to my father, 'I want to be a Catholic. I love the church. I love the singing, the voices of angels, and everything about it.' And I will still, although I forget a lot of things, but I have not forgotten what he said to me. He said, 'You can be whatever you like, whatever you choose. There is only one thing.

Choice has to be made out of knowledge and wisdom. If you don't know enough and you don't have enough wisdom, and you don't have enough knowledge, then you cannot choose.' And that's all I remember.

Wise words.

Very wise words.

So, he wasn't upset, or he...?

No, I wasn't. No, no, no, no. I wasn't upset, I tried to understand. Well, he believed in that. I mean, there were a lot of discussions. He believed in that, in exchanging ideas, even from a very, very tender age.

[00:08:00] *Yeah, we were talking about your parents. What other things? What do you remember of growing up in Radom? What are your earliest memories?*

I was a very happy child. That's all I can say. I just, in general, I don't remember many isolated things, because it was some time ago. But I realised, you know, I'm very interested in psychoanalysis and I go to take all sorts of courses. And I realised how dependent we are on our childhood and what our parents do to us. And it stays with us and affects us for the rest of our lives. All I can say, with all the tragedy that happened and followed my childhood, my childhood was extremely, extremely happy. And as I said, strict, because my father didn't want me to be totally spoiled and get everything I wanted. But there was this open mind, there was discussions, there was encouragement to do things. And so, it could – and there was plenty of love. So, what is better than that?

And what do you mean by strict? In which way was it strict?

Well, strict, like, for instance, he would wake me up. I was asleep and he said, 'You left a terrible mess in here. Look, everything's lying around all over the place. Get up and tidy up.'

And even my mother used to say, 'Oh, please let her alone. Come on, she was tired.' 'No, get up and tidy up.' [Laughs] So that's the kind of strictness, part of the upbringing.

Yeah, but –

So, I was very, very lucky to have had this, because in my life, throughout my long life, I met people. [00:10:03] And of course, we talk about our younger selves and what life was like. And I know quite a – I used to know even more, people who really were lacking, lacking attention and love at home. And either a father who couldn't care less because he was busy, or the mother. And they are affected for the rest of their lives.

So, you feel your child had helped you for later on?

Yes, absolutely, absolutely. My first 10 years, short time, unfortunately, were extremely, extremely happy. My father used to take me skating regularly and encouraged me to do figure skating and to really challenge myself and to do more than I did. And was very appreciative of what I did. All this encouragement to do things that parents often do, but many, many, maybe many don't. I was lucky. Unfortunately, when the war broke out, it all changed.

Before coming to the beginning of the war, you said they sent you to a Catholic school. Tell us a little bit about the school you went to.

Well, yes, the Catholic school was a matter not of any kind of conviction, but it was very nearby. It was in walking distance and it had a very good reputation. So, all I remember was I was the only Jewish girl in the class. And a priest used to come to give religious instructions once a week, and I was told I could go out and play. And it was perfectly acceptable and I had very good time, except towards the end. [00:12:03] And I'm not sure because I think it was before the outbreak of war, I was accosted by a girl, not from my class, from another class. And she said, 'You killed our Lord and you should be punished for it.' And it was a shock to my system and I didn't know what she was talking about. And I ran home and I was absolutely in tears. Why did she say that? What did I do? And she said, 'You should be punished for it.' What is it about? And that was the time when my father decided to take me

away from the school and maybe send me to a Jewish school. But didn't manage because the war broke out.

So, that was the only negative experience at the...?

That was one very, very big negative experience, because I received – I made a lot of friends in my class. There was never – there was actually curiosity about things that I did, because I was from a Jewish home. But I – there wasn't much difference because, as I said, we were totally assimilated. And also, my identity was more Polish than Jewish in a way that, for instance, on my seventh birthday, I remember I received a Polish national costume, which is very beautiful. Why? Because I love dancing and this was a costume which was worn to dance the Krakowiak, which is a Polish national dance. And I was absolutely thrilled with it. So, that's what I mean, that was my identity. I didn't speak Hebrew; I didn't go to a synagogue.

[00:14:06] *Or Yiddish? Any Yiddish, your parents? No?*

No, no. In fact, my mother was called the *shiksa* [Yiddish for a gentile woman] [laughs] by her friends, she didn't speak Yiddish. No, they spoke Polish at home.

Yeah. So, they had a strong Polish identity?

Sorry?

Your parents had a strong Polish identity?

Yes, yes. Yes, I think so. It never – it was something which was never actually realised or presented, so I didn't know much. I, of course, knew I was Jewish. My surname, Weisberg, is very Jewish.

What did it mean to you, you think, as a child to be Jewish at the time?

Well, it didn't mean very much, because, as I said, we didn't adhere to any special rituals which qualified that. So, my –

You said you went to the synagogue sometimes with your father?

Oh, yes, yes, once a year. My father enjoyed listening to the *shofar* at New Year and for a while, I can't remember, but he used to take me. And that was just a sort of, you know, a thing to go out.

In Radom, in the synagogue?

Sorry?

In Radom, the synagogue in Radom?

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

And you accompanied him? You went with him?

Oh, yes, yes.

And your mother?

My mother was probably too busy [laughs]. She was a wonderful mother. She was very loving, but she was also incredibly busy. Not many women were as independent as she was, you know, in that period of time. So, working women were very rare and when they were working, they truly were. They were very busy and too busy to do other things.

Yeah. So, did the housekeeper live with you? You said you had –

Yes, yes.

[00:16:03] *What was her name?*

Oh, Wojciechowa [laughs].

[Laughs] *Ah, ha.*

Yes, I remember that and I remember the church visits.

You liked going with her? You were close to her?

I loved it. No, I loved it. I really loved it. It's – I think it sort of encouraged my theatrical interests, and I found the whole business of church and the songs and the music and everything and the costumes, I found it personally, because I didn't have to pray, very theatrical.

That's interesting.

Yes.

Yeah. So, for your seventh birthday, you received this costume, the Polish...?

Yes, yes.

And did you do some dancing? Did you do these dances?

Oh, yes. I danced the Krakowiak [laughs].

Yeah?

Yes. I mean, unfortunately, we are coming to the point where things have changed completely. 1939 and it's a date I remember, because I'm hopeless remembering dates now.

But that one you remember?

Yes.

Which was exactly when?

Which was 1939, when the war broke out. And it was shock to the system and we didn't know what the hell was going to happen. And shall I go on?

Yes, please, yeah.

Well, all I remember was looking out of the window and seeing soldiers, German soldiers marching through the streets. And it looked very challenging and worrying, and I didn't know much about it. And my father, yes, I forgot to mention one thing, which I think is very important. [00:18:01] My father had two brothers and a sister. And before the war, they were members of the Habonim, which was a sort of Jewish organisation. And they approached my father and said, 'Look, things are going to happen here, which are going to be terrible and we're very frightened. We're going to', then, 'Palestine, why don't you come with us?' And he said, 'I understand what you're saying. Best of luck, you go, I will not.' He was also in the Polish army. Simply because he, yes, again, he felt a Jew but not strongly enough. And his identity, as we mentioned before, was kind of Polish. He didn't speak another language, so he decided to stay. But he was very, very encouraging and blessed them and that's what happened.

So, they left in the thirties?

They left, they left, yes. And then things were going to – beginning to change. So, shall I go on?

Yes, please, yeah.

Well, again, I can't remember exactly the dates, so you'll just have to forgive me. But one day there was a knock on the door. Two men in black uniforms, Gestapo, saying, 'You have fifteen minutes to leave. Take what you want and *heraus*, and out.' And we were absolutely shocked. I mean, where were you taking us? We lived in Radom, in an area which was not at all the ghetto, you know, where lots of Poles lived and so on. And we couldn't understand what was happening. [00:20:02] And he said, 'Come on, don't ask questions.' My mother said something which, and I don't know whether she said it in German, but she said to the man, 'You are wearing a black uniform, but your heart can't be so black.' And he hit her. He just went, swipe. And it was the first time that I watched any kind of violence. He said, 'Don't talk, come.' So, we had whatever we gathered and we were marched across the street with other people. Taken to a place in Radom, which was ghettoised, which was where the Jews were living. And this was the first time I actually met very religious Jews with *payot* [sidelocks], with big hats, which we didn't mix with or we didn't come across with. And we were absolutely shocked. We were given one little room. It was very little food. And my father immediately started to think, this is a place, somehow, we have to get out from. He knew that this must be leading somewhere else. And I can't remember how long we stayed there, but we heard the noise of trucks. We heard noise, '*Heraus, heraus*', where people were being thrown from other – we were absolutely downstairs at the bottom. And we heard other people are being thrown out. And my father decided something must be done about me and my aunt, by the way, who came with us, because we – my mother had a sister who had two children and a husband. [00:22:05] The husband died. The children were placed with Polish farmers. They were also very assimilated, you know.

How old were the children?

Their children were six and eight, blonde, blue-eyed and they were staying with the farmers.

Separate or together? Together?

Together, yes. And my mother wouldn't dream of leaving my father. You know, they were very close. And my aunt then, with children gone, the husband gone, my father thought it would be a good idea if both of us would do something to get out from where we were. Now,

I don't know the details and I will never know 'till my dying days. But it was with the help of some Catholic friends that he had, they arranged a false passport for both of us. So, my name became not Ruth Weisberg, but Irena Slabowska, and I remember that. And the idea was to find a place from which we could escape with our Polish new personalities. And a place was found, a factory near Warsaw. They were making rucksacks and leather goods, and they needed slave labour. And my father thought that was a fantastic – and my father and the friend who was helping him, that it would be a fantastic place to go. And at least we'll be out of the possibility of being taken out in a car, taken somewhere. We didn't know where at that time and –

[00:24:04] *And you were ten, ten years old at the time? No, a bit older.*

A bit older, I think, I can't remember exactly.

You must have been older. You were ten in '39.

No, a little bit older, yes.

So, maybe twelve, thirteen?

Yes.

Yeah.

So, we were there. I remember once being swiped because my hands were – I'm not, even to my dying days now, I'm not a very good sewer or not very good in needles and cotton. And I did something which wasn't accepted and I was swiped by a woman who was a *Volksdeutsche*, in other words, a woman who was working for the Germans.

In that factory?

In that factory, working at –

What was it called, the factory, do you know?

Sorry?

What was the name of the factory?

I can't remember, I can't remember.

But it was in Warsaw? So, it wasn't...?

Just outside of Warsaw. Now –

Yeah. So, how did you physically get there from Radom to...?

Well, I'm just getting there.

Okay.

The Germans were very hygiene conscious [laughs] and the hygiene possibilities were hopeless. I mean, there was nowhere to wash, nowhere to bathe. So once a week, we were taken by the Germans to a place very close to Warsaw, very close to the outskirts of Warsaw, to a public bath. Marched on the streets and taken there. Have a bath, come back. And we did it a few times and that was – my aunt started to think, this would be a very good place to try to escape from, because we're going to be near the Christian area. There is a chance maybe of somehow escaping, crossing the road. **[00:26:01]** And that's all it actually needed. It needed to cross the road to be on the Christian side. However, other people tried it. They were noticed and shot, we were told. Some managed to do it. And my aunt said to me, and I remember that, I don't know whether I was absolutely, completely clear, because I was terrified. She said, 'We have to try and do it, because if we stay here, it might be a certain death. If we try and cross, it's a possible death. And you must be brave and we have to try.' And on one of the strips, so we've already done quite a few trips, and one of the strips, my

aunt said – her name was Lola – ‘We're going to try and do it today. So, just watch me, will you?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I'll do whatever you say.’ And she said, ‘When I give you the wink, when I say, this is the time, remember, we try to cross.’ What she did, she was watching two gendarmes walking and watching the rest of the Jews being closed up there. And they were – they lit a cigarette and they both started talking, and their backs were turned. And my aunt said, ‘Now, just come now, start walking.’ And I still had the Magen David, you know, on my arm. And she said, ‘Walk without running. Walk like you're going for a walk. When I tell you to take this off, then you start taking it off.’ And that's what happens, what happened. And it was like a dream, it wasn't like any reality. Like going through some kind of play, we managed to cross the road and we were now on the Christian side. [00:28:08] And we were now Irena Slabowska and Lola Rak, I think, Leonia Rak was her name. And she had a few addresses of people to contact. And you know, when I talk about it, it still seems like a kind of sort of bad dream, but it really happened. So, we found one of the persons and they took us in. They said, ‘Look, you can – it's still dangerous, because other people tried to do it and they were recognised by somebody.’ And he said, ‘We have to be very careful.’ And my aunt said, ‘Well, maybe it's better to leave Warsaw and go to the country. Just for a while, just to get used to the whole idea of changed identity.’ And that's what we did. She found a farm somewhere and she had a whole story. I mean, you know, I mean, I became an actress much later on in my life and here was the first script that I had to learn. And she wasn't my aunt, she was somebody who just looked after me, because she was going to marry my uncle or something, I can't remember exactly. And she said, my aunt said to me, it was a very small farm, very small room and the door that the farmer said we're going to be there, we're going to sleep there, was slightly opened. And my aunt said, ‘Now go on, you do it, what you have to do.’ And what I did was I knelt down and I went *"w imię Ojca i Syna, i Ducha Świętego"* [father and son and the Holy Spirit], like a good Catholic girl before going to sleep, so that he really was sure that we are safe. [00:30:13] And as I said, she had some sort of story why we were there.

And Ruth, did you understand the situation at that point? You understood, you were old enough to understand everything?

Yes, I understood, I understood that, yes.

*And just to go back to Radom, if you could just tell us, how did you manage from Radom?
You said your father arranged the false passport.*

I shall never know.

Through a friend or through someone?

Yes, must have done, I shall never know. Now –

And once you received the passport, what happened? What was the next step?

Well, the next step was that my aunt was hiding them, I think, in the sole of her shoe, until they became necessary. But as I said, my life is full of coincidences. We were quite nervous but we were okay. Walking in Warsaw, looking at places, seeing things we haven't seen for a long time, like restaurants and some a little bit better food. But things never go smoothly. And what happened was, there was 1942, I remember that date, Polish uprising. The ghetto was finished by that time. The ghetto was burned, there were no Jews, they were either killed or killed themselves. But this was the Polish uprising, where they thought the Russians might come and help. And my aunt got very busy, joining the – sort of the army and helped in any way she could. [00:32:02] You know, I wanted to take things like bombs and throw them, [laughs] but I wasn't allowed to. And we were there, under this mess of shooting and people dying and being killed. And I can't remember how long this lasted, but not very long. And of course, it was a complete fiasco, because the Russians did not come to help. And this was just done by Polish resistance. So, it was – you know, many people got killed on both sides, but many more so Poles. And it came to an end, fiasco finished. And what happens then? We get arrested by the Germans, my aunt and I. Said, 'We haven't done anything', but we were afraid because, you know, she was trying to help. And we were taken on a bus, I think, and taken as prisoners of war. And taken to Germany, to a place called Detmold. And it was absolutely unbelievable, we were very frightened. But the prison was a prison, but it wasn't Auschwitz. And there were a lot of other foreigners that the Germans arrested and put in that prison. So, I – that was my schooling. I had to go – I was given a job, which is brushing snow

off a railway, making it nice and clean. And my aunt was given a job in the kitchen, which was fine. And occasionally, she could get a little bit more bread than necessary. It wasn't Auschwitz, it was a prison.

And the other people were other prisoners of war?

[00:34:02] Yes, they were, they were.

Women?

And even – yes, women. And even there were some Italians there, I can't remember how they got there. So it was, well, there we are, we were just in prison and –

And nobody suspected that you were Jewish?

Oh God, no. And if they did, I wouldn't be here talking to you. No way. And again, you know, what happens is things I'll never understand because I don't know how. But the Germans decided after a while, and I can't remember how long after, that we're going to change location. And they said, 'You're coming with us, we're going with you, we are changing. We're going somewhere else, so come on the train now.' Okay, we do what we are told and the train is going through a station of a town called Essen. Essen was a very industrial, big town, German town. And the train is passing through Essen and we still don't know where we are going. But all of a sudden, we hear strange noises and there is almost like planes are flying over our heads. And then there is a terrible boom noise, like dropping bombs. And then, the Germans get terrified and they said, '*Heraus*, run away, leave the train, come on, we're all going.' And they were just as frightened as us. And what this has proven to be was American bombers going, flying over, seeing the crowd of people and the train standing there. [00:36:03] And they started, the war was just about to end, so it was like near to 1945. And all I remember is sheer panic and the Germans panicked as well. We ran out of the train. I threw myself on the grass. The planes came down and started shooting. So, I thought this was the end and they're going to kill us all. I actually remember a heavy weight on my back and I just didn't move at all. And then the planes flew away, finished. I don't

know how many people were killed. There were bodies lying around. How I survived, I don't know. For a while I didn't know where my aunt was, until it was over and I was panicking. I still remember that panic. It really still tightens my stomach when I talk about it. But then I hear a voice of my aunt saying, 'Irena, come on, come on, quick, quick.' I freed myself and she said, 'Let's run, let us run.' It was such a panic, the Germans panicking as well. So, we started running. God knows where we were running to. And then we saw a sort of small house, like a farmer's something and we stopped. My aunt spoke fluent German. And there was an older couple saying, 'Who are you?' And she said, 'Well, we are prisoners of war.' I mean, of course they didn't have any clue we were Jewish. But we said, 'We are Poles, we are prisoners of war. [00:38:02] You know, things are happening. Terrible stuff is going on. Could you be so kind to give us some water?' They said, 'Yes.' And my aunt started talking to them and I don't know again how that happened. But she said, my aunt said, 'If you want any help, you know, I can help, I can do something.' And the woman said, 'Yes, you can help me in the kitchen. And she can milk some cows, I'll show her how.' I learned how to milk cows. We stayed with the German farmers. It's unbelievable.

Near Essen?

Sorry?

Near Essen? The city was Essen, near there?

Oh, near? I don't know. By that time, it wasn't Essen, because –

Ah, you walked a bit?

Yeah, because we ran. But yes, it was. It wasn't a city, we were not in the city. Because the train, I don't know how, I can't remember all the details. I just remember the factors and how it felt. And it was unbelievable, we stayed there until the Allies came. But again, you know, when I'm telling you the story and I remember the salient facts, but I can't remember how this happened, how the other happened. It happened, this is where we were now.

Yeah, yeah. So, what happened?

So, what happened was the aliens were there. So, okay, we didn't speak a word of English, but I think there must have been some Germans spoken or they understood some German. And the first thing, of course, my aunt says, 'We're not Germans, we're not Germans, we're Poles.' And by the way, they were very nice to us.

[00:40:02] *And who were these farmers? Who were the family?*

Farmers, ordinary farmers, but decent people. So, we said, 'But we don't belong here', but they were nice to us. And they said, 'Okay, you come with us now. There is – very, very nearby, there is a compound with English, mainly English but some Americans as well. So, you come with us.' And we said goodbye to the German farmers. And my aunt and the woman were both crying and embracing each other. Yes, I always feel very strongly, don't generalise about every German, but that will come again in the story. And we left. They took us by car, then we went to the compound. I – my aunt again, was asked to help in the kitchen. I remember discovering peanut butter on the table. I was asked to lay the tables and I remember peanut butter I've never tasted before. I tasted it by spoon and nearly ate the whole jar. And so –

You liked it?

[Laughs] Yes. And we were there now in this completely different environment, still as Poles, not the Jews. And then, what happens? Another coincidence. There is a man sitting at the table, a squadron leader, in a British RAF uniform. And my aunt is serving breakfast. And she brings him a plate and puts it on the table by him. And it's eggs and bacon. And he says to her, 'Tell the chef that this is food for squadron leader Scott. **[00:42:06]** He knows I don't eat bacon.' And she went sort of funny, something must have shown in her face. And he said to her, 'Can I have a word with you afterwards?' After he had eaten a different breakfast without bacon. And he said to her, 'Look, I am, as you see, I am squadron leader. That's what I am. But I also have another mission, I am Jewish and my job is here to find remaining Jews. Do you know any?' And she nearly fell and said, 'You're speaking to one and she's my

niece.' This man helped me to come to England, another coincidence. He was happy to help my aunt. But she discovered that she had some surviving relatives in Brussels and she spoke also French, but not a word of English. And she thought, I think Ruth needs to go back to school. But I come and visit, but I want to go to Brussels. So, he helped her to go to Brussels, he helped me to come to England.

And what happened to her own children, Ruth?

Now, something very sad and very... When I think that this is the greatest stain on humanity, then I think of that story. So, the children were very happy with the farmers. I will never know exact details, but I have a premonition that maybe the woman, the farmer, had a quarrel with the next neighbour. [00:44:10] And the next neighbour knew that the children were Jewish parents. But of course, it was made to be quiet. And because of the quarrel they must have had, and this is what I can imagine, she denounced them. And six-year-old and eight-year-old, and a Gestapo man came and shot them. And that's what I mean by the greatest brutality of humanity.

So, how did your aunt find out what had happened to her children?

I'll never know, I'll never know. Much later.

So, they were shot, you also found out much later?

Much later and yeah, I'll never know.

So, at liberation she must have still hoped that her children were alive?

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

Somebody who knew about it. I really don't know, so I don't want to make it up.

Sure. Ruth, before talking about the end of the war, I just want to come back to the moment your parents told you to go with your aunt. How did – what did they tell you? How did you feel?

Yes, well, you know, I realised only years later that my father thought the most important thing is to save my life. What he told me is, 'Look, you have an opportunity. We found out that there is a place that takes slave labours, labourers, and Lola is really dying to go with you. [00:46:09] You know that Mum, your mum and I, Mum will not let me go. Mum doesn't want to leave me, but our plan is that we're going to follow. But the first thing is you must go. You have the opportunity now, the possibility is there. You must do it now and we'll do whatever we can to follow.' But inside his heart, I think now, after all these years, his main thing was to save me. He didn't think there's a possibility to be saved as well. Maybe, maybe, but I think he never put it in his mind. His priority was there's a possibility, you must go.

Because it was – they were looking for women slave labourers?

Yes, yes. And that, again, what makes me feel what my parents were like and the love they have.

So, you accepted that decision of your father?

I accepted the decision. I mean, he was a very – you know, the way he explained this must have been very convincing. But years and years later, I realised what it was. And I realised in my psychology classes that the love of my father for me was so great.

And when you left, were you able to take any of your personal belongings? Anything you could take?

Not really, not really, no. No, what we had, we had.

[00:48:01] *And how far was it to come from Radom to that factory? Was it far or how did...?*

Well, we were taken there, or we went by bus, I can't remember exactly. So, I can't remember how far it was. It wasn't terribly, terribly far.

And was your aunt familiar to you? Did you know her well, or was it more...?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. No, we were very, very close.

Yeah, so it's –

Oh, absolutely.

It helped you to go with somebody?

Yes, yes, yes. But it's a bit of an unbelievable story.

Yeah.

Completely coincidental.

And you mentioned the Warsaw, the ghetto before. So, did you come – was the factory near? Were there people working from the ghetto as well, from Warsaw ghetto? No? The factory you went to.

Must have been near. I can't actually express this with great certainty, because I don't remember. You know, what I have in my head are the facts. This happened and then this happened.

I understand.

And it's very difficult for me to remember exactly the connections or how.

Yeah, that's fine, that's fine.

Yes.

So, maybe another question is, when you were working in the factory, did you – were you able to correspond with your parents? Did they send any messages? Were you still in touch with them?

No, no, I wasn't. I wasn't.

No, so the minute –

No, and this I discovered, again, apropos of the theme I have, never generalise. So, years later, and not such a long time ago, I went to the Vienna [sic] Library because Vienna [sic] Library had a lot of, I thought, information about what happened. [00:50:13] And I wanted to ask, find out what happened to my parents, exactly, which I didn't know.

In London?

Yes, yes.

The Wiener Library in London?

Yes, yes, Wiener Library. And I went and Michael was away, my husband was away for the – at that time. And there were two German women, not Jewish, young German women, sort of in their maybe thirties, late thirties. I explained the situation of what I wanted and they said, 'We are so terribly, terribly sorry, but we haven't got much information about Warsaw. I mean, we have Berlin, we have lots of other information. I don't think we have enough to be able to be of any help.' And I said, 'Okay, you know, I lived with it for a long time, fine.' But they said, 'Look, have you got time? Have a cup of tea, cup of coffee, sit down. Okay, it will take time but sit down.' I said, 'Yes, sure, yes.' And they called Yad Vashem and they looked

through many different places, because they said, 'We're going to find something.' And Yad Vashem had the information, and they had the papers with my father's and my mother's name, and the details that they were separated for two months in different places, and both of them killed in Treblinka. And I will never forget that incident, not only to discover what happened to my parents, but how those two German people reacted. And they grabbed me, they cried. [00:22:00] They were like we were sisters, like we knew each other and they wouldn't let me go.

So, on the same day when you went there, you managed to find this for you?

Yes, yes, I was there for a long time.

And you went there by yourself?

Yes. I will never, never forget. There is another example, if I may. When I became an actress, I met a woman, Julia Pascal, who was a writer and director, and she was very interested in my story. And she's written a play, not exactly with my story, but relating to that period. Gosh, that was quite extraordinary. Wait a minute, my mind went for a minute.

About coincidences we were talking.

[Pause] Mm, yes. Oh, my head is so full of stuff that some of it stays and is glued, and some of it evaporates.

We talked about the Wiener Library and how you found out about your parents.

Oh, yes, yes, yes, sorry. So, I was in a play which was invited to be performed in Germany. And people said to me, 'So, you're going to Germany?' I said, 'Yes, I've got something', you know. And they said, 'I don't know how you can go to Germany.' And I said, 'Well, look, now so many years have passed, things have changed, people have different ideas. Of course, I'm going to Germany.' And it was the most incredible experience I've had and I'm glad I did not forget, because we were invited to Kassel University, which is a very big university,

because in the local paper there was a little bit about me. [00:24:13] And the fact also, that my son was an actor who was played by a German [laughs], who actually had a Nazi father, but he left him. So, it's a whole different story and –

So, Julia's play?

Yes, Julia's play, that's right.

Was performed?

So, we go to Kassel University, and a man comes in and he's looking very Teutonic. And he's the Chancellor of the university, and he comes to me and opens his arms and says, 'You don't know what this means to me, the fact that you are here. I was a *Hitlerjugend*. I was wearing Hitler's swastika, I was very proud of being in the Hitler's Youth, but I was nine years old. You are here, we have to change the world.' And started crying and tears pouring down his face. And people standing around who heard the story started to cry and it was an experience I'll never forget as long as I live. However, many years I still have to live, I shall never forget this. And if I didn't go to Germany, I would have missed it.

The human connection?

Yes, yes. And I thought it was incredible. [00:26:00] So, I also had another friend I met who was a professor of English literature, teaching at a German university. He used to travel to China to give lectures on the Holocaust, became a very good friend of ours. How can you be – how can you generalise? Because it's the same thing as saying all Jews are like that.

So, your discovery of what happened to your parents then led eventually to this play? The play is called "Who Do You Think You Are", correct? Is that the play?

Yes.

And it was performed also in London?

Oh, it was performed in lots of different places.

Okay. So, tell us, Ruth, so actually what did you find out? Your parents, so they stayed in Radom and then were taken to Treblinka from Radom? Or did they go to Warsaw?

That I don't know. That I shall never know. But they died in Treblinka and they were, as I said, separated. But that definitely was the place.

So, until then, you didn't know exactly what had happened to your parents?

No, no.

So, towards the end of the war, you hoped that they were alive?

Yes. Well, I didn't know. I just didn't know.

Yeah, because was there...? Because my question to you is then, did you not want to go first to Poland before going elsewhere?

Look, I was – first of all, I was quite young. I was ignorant. I was in a situation which was very difficult to summarise and know what to do. So, I was in a situation where I did what I was told to do. I was still a kid. I didn't know anybody, I was – I accepted whatever comes, because I didn't know what else to do.

[00:28:05] *So, when your aunt basically said you could go, there's an opportunity to go to England, that you accepted that?*

Absolutely, absolutely. And she said, 'Really, you want to go back to school? You want to finish something you never even started? You must, you must. I will come whenever I can. You know, I'm here. It's wonderful that we met Sidney Scott. I mean, he's like an angel. It's unbelievable that we came upon him.'

What was his name again? Sidney?

Sidney. Sidney Scott.

Sidney Scott?

Yeah. Squadron leader, Sidney Scott. He's not alive anymore, but we kept in touch.

Did he find any other Jewish – any other Jews?

No, not really. Not really, no. But he was so unlikely. I mean, he spoke with a frightfully, frightfully, you know, posh English accent.

Yeah?

And he wasn't, I mean, yes, he was quite religious, I think.

So, he was Jewish.

Yeah, absolutely.

That's why he didn't eat the bacon?

Absolutely, yes, yes. But he, you know, he discovered the hostel in Reading where they took me. A hostel which was run by two Jewish German women. Very – but very Germanic in some ways, even though I say it now [laughs]. You know, that side, very *punktlich* [sic]. And yes, and I spent quite some time there. I mean, they found school for me in Reading and I went to school. I was incredibly conscious of the fact my English was appalling. It wasn't very good and I couldn't communicate. [01:00:00] And the only person I could communicate with was – actually, was the German teacher.

So, he arranged for you to come over?

Yes, yes, yes.

So then, you had a few weeks of...? So, by the time, how did it practically work from Germany?

Well, he found a hostel, which was in Reading and there was – they found the school. He didn't find the school.

And how did you travel, Ruth, from Germany to England?

Train.

By yourself?

Yes.

Not with other people?

Oh no, no, sorry, sorry, no. No, there were a few other Jewish young people who were there for all sorts of different reasons that I can't even remember.

In the hostel? Or in Germany?

No, no, no, in the journey. And they went separate ways, they were all organised.

Okay, so you went in a little group?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And you took –

Very small group.

The train? So, you arrived in where? Liverpool Street Station or...?

Oh, God, no. I can't remember [laughs].

You can't remember where?

It was a train on wheels [laughs].

I mean, you crossed – must have crossed some bit of Germany then? I mean, do you remember seeing...?

Yes, but would I know? I mean, don't forget I was that age where there was – I was frightened as well, but I was absolutely in a world which was unknown. I didn't know what the hell is going to happen from day-to-day. What is this person going to do for me? What is the other person going to do for me? I had nobody. I came here when I was sixteen years old. I didn't know a word of English. I didn't know a soul that I knew, that I really could speak to. And I think I picked up some German, so I spoke German.

[01:02:02] *You picked up German during your time in Germany?*

Yes.

As a prisoner of war?

Well, I – you know, the one thing I have is sort of, I had a thing for languages. I liked languages and so I picked it up.

And in this situation, what were your first impressions coming to England? In this situation, without the language, without knowing anyone?

Well, there was a basic – it was both. It was excitement because I'm free, because things are better than they were, so it was excitement. But it was bound up with fear because of the unknown quality. What's going to happen tomorrow? How am I going to respond to everything which is so new? Not a word I can speak with, except this woman who taught German, German teacher. How are people going to react to me? So, there was a lot of fear, a lot of the unknown qualities. But at the same time, I am alive, which comes with a little bit of guilt. Look, everybody's gone, I'm here. But at the same time, I am here and I must make the best I can. So, it's a mixture of things.

And when you managed to get to this hostel, did you find there was some understanding of where you had come from, of your own experiences?

No. No, there were people there from – for different reasons. You know, all kinds of different – and I didn't feel there was any connection of experience, which was similar to mine.
[01:04:04] But it wasn't a very big hostel. I think there were only about six people or something like that.

In Reading?

Yeah.

But you said there was also – you went through South Hampstead, there was a doctor. What was that story, Ruth? You said there was a doctor in South Hampstead- in Southampton.

Can't remember.

Do you remember when we talked about it before? You said...

No, I don't remember now.

Yeah. The name you gave was Professor Schneider.

Ah, yeah. No, Professor Schneider was actually, I'm glad you mentioned that, because Professor Schneider was a friend of the two women, two German women who were running the hostel.

Yeah.

Yes. I didn't know very much about Professor Schneider.

But why is it important to you? Why is he relevant?

I don't know, because I can't remember how this came about. I remember the name and I remember the fact that he spoke quite good English, so we could communicate with him. Don't forget, there was no communication because of language barrier.

But your German must have helped you to speak to the two refugees?

Yes, yes.

Yeah. But it wasn't a very warm environment, it was just...?

It was an environment which centred on, let's get on with it, we've got a lot to do. You've got a huge task. First of all, language. Second of all, learning things that you missed out on. So, it's all very well – I mean, Sophie Friedländer, that's her name I remember, was a very, very good... She was a teacher, basically. Her profession was a teacher. [01:06:01] And you know, she taught maths and she taught literature and she helped a bit with homework. So, that was the aim and there was nothing much, because there was no room for anything else.

Yeah. So, what sort of school were you sent to in Reading? Just a normal...?

A very well-known school, it was Kendrick School. I remember the name, the Kendrick School, which had a very good name. Secondary school, with a good reputation and quite tough.

And how did you manage to get there?

Well, I remember writing to my aunt, who by that time was in Poland. And when we started doing things like Shakespeare, you know, Macbeth, I remember, I said, 'Help, help, help. I don't know how to cope with it. Can you send me this book in Polish?' And so, I could read it in Polish and then go back to English. So, it wasn't, again, that wasn't easy. I wasn't very good at any scientific subject, because I missed out on it and you can't start at that age. So, things like even maths, geometry, I did a little bit, but I had a struggle. The struggle was mainly to do... I couldn't, I wouldn't be able to go to university because I couldn't do science and I couldn't go and do maths. But the first subject which I really wanted was the language and the history, and those things which are necessary to survive. I mean, remember, not a word of English.

Yeah. So, was the first English lesson you had with these two refugee ladies? Or did you go to classes?

Well, it started – yes, yes. [01:08:00] It's a wonder I don't speak with a German accent, because they had a German accent [laughs], but they spoke very good English.

Yes, yes. And then, they sent you to a dance school?

Yes.

So, when after – so after how long?

I was in the hostel for about two years or three years, yeah. Because they realised that I was quite good at that sort of thing and they must have found out. And again, you know, I don't know how I got there, who paid for it and...

Or the circumstances?

I know there were circumstances, chances.

You were told that you were going now to...?

Yes, yes.

And what was the name of the school, the dance school?

London College of Dance and Drama. London College of Dance and Drama and that's where I met my husband [laughs].

And was it a boarding school at the time?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, it was incredibly posh. It was, you know, we had a swimming pool and tennis courts and it was in Bray, in the country. And I've heard for the first time about cricket, because there were girls whose boyfriends were playing cricket. I didn't even know what cricket was. You know, 'Ruth, don't be like that, you must learn.' [Laughs]

And again, you don't know whether you had a scholarship or somebody sponsored you or...?

Well, I knew somebody sponsored me, yes, of course. I didn't quite know exactly the details. But don't forget that when you are in a state like this, you don't think logically through things. You accept every moment as it comes, and you grab it and you make the best you can of that moment, because there is so much unknown. [01:10:09] So I was kind of, I was trying to digest every day which brought something new to me. And yes, I made a very good friend, I remember. Alas, she's not alive anymore. Hungarian girl who was brilliant in maths, just brilliant. And we both spoke German, bad German, it was our connection. And I remember she went to the same hostel and after some time, a few weeks maybe, I woke up and I said, 'Edith, Edith, I dreamt in English.' [Laughs] Because I couldn't speak... Oh yes, she taught

me some poems in Hungarian, I remember that. We were like two sisters and she was an incredibly clever girl.

So, she was in the hostel?

She was in the hostel.

In the hostel?

Yes.

So, you made a friend?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. And how, Ruth, at that point did you cope with the fact that your parents were not there? I mean –

Well, I knew about my parents, I knew what happened. So, I just had to accept it, because I knew it. I had two pieces of paper given to me with names.

At that point, at that time as well? At that time?

No, no, no, no, I told you.

Much later?

Oh, I see, because it was later. Yes, yes.

When you arrived in England and you started...?

No, no, I still didn't know until the Wiener Library. I didn't know that, but I knew that something must have happened, that I had absolutely no... [01:12:06] I think I just remember now that there was some news that somebody brought, because they saw a dress my mother had which wasn't worn. So, there was some indication, but nothing absolutely certain. I didn't know.

And what about the relatives of your father in Palestine? Did you manage to get in touch post-war?

Well, we were not in touch, we were not in touch. I mean, there was much later, much later, my... Actually, it's interesting you mention this, because my uncle apparently has written to the head of the hostel saying, 'You have Ruth there. I am her uncle and I would love her to come here and stay with us, and adopt her into the family.' Now, she never told me that, but years later, actually years later here I discovered that she said to them, 'Look, I don't think it's a good idea. Ruth has gone through many, many things. She's now getting over some things. She's working very hard on learning the language. She's working very hard on doing her school cert, which I hoped she was going to do. To make a change now in her life would be very unwise.' And I only heard it not so long ago.

And who made this decision? Who made that decision?

The head of the hostel.

The German? The refugee –

Yes, yes. And thank God she did, because she was absolutely right. [01:14:00] I was just, you know, just going into this whole thing, into life that had some sort of meaning and congealed. And to break all this and start anew right then, would have been disastrous.

So, you think she made the right decision?

Absolutely. Absolutely. I can't imagine what I would do.

And do you think if you had been given the choice then, you would have made the same?

Well, I would be very confused. You know, how can you make lifetime decisions when you are sixteen or fifteen? It's very hard and you're just starting something new. You're just getting into a sort of world which is unknown to you, but you're coping. And then, to give it all up and start again would be disastrous. Yes, I mean, I knew he was my uncle, but I still didn't know him.

Yeah. And you had already settled here to some extent?

And there would be other problems. How would I get on with the children? You know, this new person who is now part of the family. You would open a whole bag of tricks. Here in the hostel. I had Edith, the Hungarian friend, and we were like two sisters. There wasn't much warmth of heart, but there was a good intention from – coming from everybody. Do you know what I mean?

Yeah. And you probably received some help from what's called the Central British Fund?

Yes.

Does that name ring a bell? The Central British Fund?

British Fund?

Central British Fund. They helped refugees before the war and after the war.

[01:16:00] Well, I don't know the name. I don't know whether they did or not. They probably did.

We can find out. That's where the archives are.

Yes, yes.

It's called World Jewish Relief today.

Well, I would be very interested because I would... I mean, look, I never get a chance, I never had a chance to write to somebody to say, 'Thank you so much. You saved my life, you opened up doors.' I never did, because I didn't know who to.

Yeah, yeah. So, Ruth –

And also, I think – sorry, I think it was partly that I had some kind of... What do you call it? The – where I didn't have to pay.

A grant or scholarship?

Yeah, yeah, a scholarship.

And at that point, was it...? Did you feel...? What drew you to the dance? Or did they think, oh, because you're less scientific, it's a good opportunity? Or did you show an interest at that point?

I didn't think – I wasn't showing anything. I was just, I was also quite shy. You know, I was – I'm a much bigger show-off now than I was then [laughs]. But I think maybe at school, any kind of physicalities, I was quite good at. I was also ashamed to be good at that, believe it or not. I wanted to be an actress for very, very many, many years ago. And I was ashamed to say it. I was actually ashamed to say it, because for me, that meant something very frivolous. You want to be an actor. After all the things that happened to you, you want to be an actor? What about living? Acting is not living, it's pretending life. [01:18:02] And there was a certain degree of reluctance to admit that, until much later on in my life that I tried to...

Interesting.

And also, the making... I mean, for a long time, I did choreography when I was in the college, using poetry and movement rather than music and movement, because I love language and I like words. And I thought it wasn't bad, actually. I did T.S. Eliot's poem and choreographed it for dances, for movement. So...

And when you came to the school, to the dance school, did you experience any anti-foreigners? I mean, you came there as, I guess – they saw you as a –

Well, I must say, I must say, my feeling... You mean when I was in the dance school?

Yeah.

No, as I said to you before, it was all incredibly positive. But maybe because they didn't know my background and as I said to you before, they thought I was some sort of, you know, I don't know, great-granddaughter to the tsar or something.

Yeah, so you were exotic in some way?

Yeah, I was exotic, I was the only one who was different. And there was an excitement one week, I remember. A police came looking for Ruth Weisberg. And everyone said, 'Hey, there's a policeman looking for you. What did you do? What did you do? It's exciting! Come on, come on!' [Laughs] And I said, 'What are they – what do they want from me?'

And what did they want?

'A policeman wants to talk to you.' And what it was, that according to the rules, if you're a foreigner, once a month or once every two months, you have to register. [01:20:07] And just register and put your name, and I forgot about it. So, I think three, four, five months went by and that's all they wanted, my name [laughs]. And I shall never forget. 'Oh, oh, there's somebody looking for a policeman, looking for Ruth.' [Laughs] So, ...

Yes, so you were – did they know you were Jewish, these girls, or...?

Nobody ever asked me that. Nobody never talked about it. Nobody knew about why I came, my background. But don't forget, there wasn't – they were upper-class English. It wasn't the right thing. You know what I learned? I shall never forget this. I made a group, I had a group of friends. There were three or four friends and we were going out somewhere for tea. And one of them opens a parcel and said, 'Look, I bought a blouse. I bought a – do you like it?' And she asked me, 'Do you like this blouse?' And I said, 'Yes, it's very nice, but I think it's not really your colour, is it?' 'Oh, is that what you think? Okay.' And I was taken aside afterwards and told by one of the girls, 'Ruth, we don't do this here.' I said, 'What? What have I done?' 'Well, she asked you and you hurt her feelings.' I said, 'But she's asking me, so I like this blouse for her? And I told her the truth, you don't believe in the truth?' 'Yes, we don't do this here.'

So next time, you didn't say anything? [Laughs]

[01:22:04] Keep your mouth shut, or say something which is positive. Might not be true, but it's positive and that's very English upper class.

So, you had access to all – suddenly to friends and to a whole other world?

Yes, absolutely. And I think I told you I've been invited to ride ponies for weekends. I've never been on a pony before in my life.

So, on the holidays, Ruth, where – did you go back to the hostel, or where did you go?

No, Sydney, Sydney Scott, lived with a woman called Susan Scott, and they invited – they always wanted me to come for holidays. So, I... They wanted to adopt me, but I didn't want to be adopted. But they very much – they didn't have children. And they actually, I think they really meant it from the bottom of their hearts, but I didn't feel right.

Why? What didn't feel right for you?

My parents were in my heart all the time. And I would probably – I probably would have felt this is kind of rejection of my parents. I couldn't do it. I didn't have the logistic answers, it's just that I didn't feel I could do it. But they invited me for all the holidays, to stay with them.

And you went there?

Yeah, yeah.

Where did they live?

And you know, you had such snobs. When I met Michael, okay, I can't remember how – oh, I told you how I met him. [01:24:03] And then I said to Sydney Scott, 'I met a very nice young man.' He said, 'What's his name?' 'Michael.' 'What's his surname?' 'Posner.' 'Oh, Ashkenazi.' [Laughs] Such a snob.

Why, they were Sephardim? They were not Ashkenazi?

No, they were Sephardi.

Oh, you didn't say so.

Yeah, well, very much Sephardi.

Oh, I see.

Ashkenazi, I didn't know what it meant. Until later, I discovered that they were a terrible snob.

So, they belonged to Lauderdale Road Synagogue then?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah?

Ashkenazis, well... [Laughs]

So, they had come from Spanish-Portuguese? They were part of Spanish-Portugal?

Well, Ashkenazis came from Eastern Europe, Poland, you know, and they were not regarded...

And where did they live?

Wembley, I think.

Oh, so you visited them in Wembley?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. They had a house. He was not – it wasn't a very happy family. She was very pretty, she was very good-looking. And he was, as I said, religious and wanting to be a proper Jew, devoted to scholastic attitudes as well. You know, and wasn't interested in business. She liked money more than he did. It wasn't a very happy household. I wasn't aware of it until much later.

Yeah. And speaking of Judaism, did you have any other contact with anything Jewish in England when you came to England?

No, no, I didn't.

The hostel or the...? No?

[01:26:00] No, it was never really discussed. I mean, they never denied the fact that they were Jewish, but...

Nothing else?

No.

Yeah, so tell us, how did you meet Michael? Because you didn't tell us yet on camera. It was through the school, you said?

Yes. Do I have to repeat it?

Yes, please, because I think the camera wasn't rolling.

Okay, the students who were organising a monthly or – I think it was a monthly or term, or every term, dance, tea dance, usually were inviting boys from Sandhurst, who had a very, very posh background. And I said to you, they were very nice to me and they really always wanted to make me feel very much at home, because I was the only one who was different. [Laughs] I think maybe if there were more, there would be a different attitude. And they said to me, 'Why don't you organise the dance?' And I said, 'You must be joking, I can't organise Pussycat. I can't do it.' 'But if you try, Ruth, it'll be different, it'll be quite exciting.' 'I'll try.' And I called a woman I knew, not a great friend, but somebody I knew. And said, 'Listen, I'm in a very strange position. That's what I was asked to do, how do I do it? I don't know anybody. Do you, please?' And she said, 'Not really, but I knew two guys and they might know others, so I can give you the phone number.' And so, one of them was Michael and a friend. [01:28:05] So, that's how I met him. And his story is, we were asked by somebody, 'Do you want to go to a college dance?' And Michael said his response was immediately, 'Oh no, oh, God, no, no. That's not a way to... I don't want to spend – a girls' college? Not really.' But it was pissing with rain and he had nowhere to go. 'Oh, well, okay, let's go.' And that's what happened. And I thought he was interesting, because he talked to me about, is it – 'Do you like films? And do you read?' And I said, 'Yes, I want to learn a lot more than I know.' He said, 'Well, then here is a book that you can read and it's Jean-Paul Sartre on existentialism.' [Laughs] I said, 'Oh, really? I'll learn, okay.' And then he said, 'And there is a very good cinema in Oxford Street called The Academy and they show foreign films. Currently they're doing, actually, a French film. Would you be interested to see it?' 'Yes!' And that's how it started. And he was so different from the other boys that I used to meet,

who were just flirts, you know. And one of them said to me once, 'You don't seem to be... What are your main interests? What is it?' And I said, 'The meaning of life.' [Laughs] And he went, 'God, what is the nearest exit? This is a mad woman.' And so that was not for me. Whereas Michael was the only person who actually introduced me to lots of other things. [1:30:00] And then, and then, you know how we got married?

No.

Well, because this is when I'm twenty years old now. Twenty, my God, old woman. And Michael comes along and I left the college. And he said, 'Listen, I've been offered a job.' 'Really?' 'Yes, yes, it's a very good job. It means going to Israel and it's about a food company. There is a very big food company', and Michael did organic chemistry. 'And what they want me to do is to extract protein from plants, which is a very tricky job and very special job. And yes, I can do it, but I will go if you want to go, if you want to get married.' I said, 'Yes, all right. I've got cousins there I hardly know.' [Laughs] So, that's how it happened.

And what did Michael's parents think of you as a refugee? Or did they...?

No, I don't know. Yeah, I think his mother was strange, but she was a bit of a sort of adolescent in some ways. She said, 'Well, the Queen, it's very nice of the Queen, that we take foreigners.' [Laughs] Oh, my God. Yeah, it's very strange because my cousins who were here, we were talking about this all the years, years, years ago. And my – this is the daughter of my cousin. And she said, 'Yes, you could have been my sister, my older sister', slightly older, because she's in her eighties now. [1:32:05] Very strange.

So, you got married quite young?

Yes, I told you I've been married seventy-four years.

Yeah.

Seventy-four, dear.

Yeah. [Laughs]

I told you, six countries, fourteen homes, not sitting on your bum and contemplating, contemplating your navel.

So, when you finished the dance school, what did you want to do? Did you have an idea what you wanted to do?

Well, I still wanted to go back to language. I liked, yes, what I was doing. I did quite a lot of choreography, teaching, performing. But I still was hankering for theatre. So, that happened when we went to New York and I think I told you what happened.

So, tell us. Not on camera yet.

Oh, well, yeah.

So first, before New York, so you went to Israel? Your first...

Oh, yes, first of all, I went to Israel. In Israel, I was very busy, because actually I had a little company. I joined a little company, an American dancer, a Yemenite dancer, a boy and us. And we used to go, we used to – we became quite well-known. And we used to get invited to kibbutzim, to give recitals, to give concerts. And they used to clean the *cheder ochel*, which is like a dining room, create a stage for us. And we had music with us and we used to perform.

The two of you?

No, the three of us.

Three?

Yeah, a boy who's Yemenite. I've got some photographs of this.

What was his name?

[01:34:00] Oh, gosh.

Okay.

It's a long time ago. Yemenite, you know, he was a very, very good dancer. So, we did it for quite some time.

So, for how long did you stay in Israel?

Five years.

And this is from 19...?

1948. This is just before the sort of times of the independence, the Israeli independence.

Yeah. So, when you arrived, was it already Israel, or was it just...?

Yes, it was just Israel. Yes, it was, just.

So, from 1948 –

It was a very exciting time. It was an incredibly exciting time.

And where did you live?

In Haifa. And yes, I remember it was a very exciting thing. I did – had to go to – we were performing in one of the kibbutz. And the kibbutz was very near Gaza, believe it or not. And

the tensions there were a little bit tricky, but it was okay, but a bit tricky. And you could see that on the other side there were Arabs walking, passing by, and on this side were Israelis. Anyway, we did have our performance and I wanted to go for a pee. So, I said, 'So, where is it?' And the woman says, 'Well, it's just, you have to walk there, but you can't go by yourself.' 'What do you mean you can't go by yourself?' 'No, no, no, we have somebody to take you.' And a man with a machine gun took me to the pee station and waited outside. And I said, 'Well, I've never done that. I've never had a pee with an escort [laughs], with a machine gun outside, just in case.' So, things like this were happening, but very seldom. [1:36:00] They were just very careful. But the atmosphere in the country was wonderful. Creative.

Oh, creative, that's what you're saying? For you it was?

Very, very creative. And interesting and there were a lot of – listen, I mean, there were Arabs in the Knesset. There were Arabs in the government. There was hope. There were people like Ben-Gurion, who said after the 1967 war, 'Give all the land you won by the war', and they were attacked by the Gazans then, 'Give it back.' They should have done, even though they were attacked. There was hope. There was hope and I mean, I can't stand Netanyahu, I'm sorry, I really can't. I know –

But then, it was an exciting time to be there?

Very exciting time and a time of hope.

Yes. And then, but then after five years, where was your – the next?

Well, Michael never really wanted to stay there permanently. We never thought of it as a place to live in. It was very exciting to have spent five years there. Both of us learned Hebrew. I can't read or write, but I can speak. I can speak reasonably. So, but it was never a place where I would say, 'This is my home.'

Yeah. So, did you come back to England or...?

Yes, of course. Michael was working for Unilever [ph] [1:37:51].

And came back and settled where? In London, I assume? When you came back from Israel.

Yes, yes, London. [01:38:00] Yes, we had a flat. But it was never our intention to stay in Israel, even though I had a family. It wasn't – I'll tell you what it is. I felt – it sounds very snobby and I don't know why it should, but I considered myself a European. And my cousins, of course, spoke English with a very heavy accent. But actually, they were Israelis. Do you know what I mean?

Yeah. You felt that Europe was your base or your...? Yeah.

Yes, yes. I can't help it. I can't, that's how I feel.

But then, you managed to get to America?

Well, that was Michael's job. Yes, he changed – he was offered by UNICEF and it sounded very exciting. So, off we go to America.

And there you went to college?

Yes, yes, yes.

And was that a career change?

Well, I think I told you that I wanted to go to college. And they said, 'What sort of qualifications do you have?' And I said, 'Zilch' [laughs]. They said, 'Well, it's a bit difficult, isn't it? Well, we'll take you on trial.'

But you'd finished your – the dance school?

Yes, they took me on trial and I passed. And then, I started studying. And it took me two years and I got an MA.

In theatre?

Theatre, yes. Theatre study, history, and so on. So, yeah, so it was by luck. And I remember a friend of mine who was a filmmaker helping me to write essays. [01:40:01] Because I didn't even, you know, I didn't trust myself. I wasn't very good in the layout and how do you do it and he helped me a lot. So, I worked, I worked very hard before I got in.

And was your plan at the time to really go into the theatre to...? What did you want?

Yeah, to change, to work in the theatre, yes. So then, I was offered a job at Juilliard. So, I taught at Juilliard, which was quite a good job.

And what did you teach?

Movement and drama. So, I combined the two things. I said movement, talk, speech, body. I worked very hard. I mean, I did.

And how did you manage? You also had a son by then?

Yes, yes.

And you managed to...?

Well, yeah, we managed. But he went crazy because... Partly because of the – he knew some top musicians, you know. Top-notch musicians, I can't remember all the names. But there was a very, very well-known man who played the saxophone, I can't remember his name. But he died from overdose. And then... And Jeremy, who wrote articles about drugs and what people should do and what nations should do with druggies and how it isn't a crime, but it's

an illness and what you should do. I mean, he was very bright. It hurts very much.

[01:41:59] Yeah.

And Ruth, when you had Jeremy, what sort of identity did you want to give to your son? You said you felt very European and you moved places. What was important to you to transmit?

He said, 'I am a British... I am an English-Kiwi.' No, English-Polish-Kiwi, that's what he used to say. English-Polish-Kiwi.

Polish-Kiwi? Why Kiwi? Because...?

He was born in New Zealand.

Ah, okay.

We lived in New Zealand for two years. Two or three years.

So, out of the fourteen different places, you had Israel, New Zealand, America?

Yeah, Holland, Denmark. Not enough [laughs].

Wow, wonderful.

Yeah, Denmark too. Denmark was my favourite. Denmark, and I worked everywhere we went. Denmark, I learned a lot about politics, if you like. I became a social democrat and I strongly believe in it even to today. But it's changed. Denmark was an incredible country. The response to foreigners, everything about the Danish really fascinated me. Except the language. I went to study Danish because I believe, you know, if you live somewhere, speak the bloody language. But this... I became friendly with my teacher and then I said to her, 'Look, now I'm an actress, this is going to hurt my larynx. [01:44:01] This language is going to kill my throat.'

[Laughs] *Yeah.*

[Impersonates Danish language] And she said, 'You know, I agree.' [Laughs]

And Ruth, how did you manage as an actress with accents and things like that?

Oh, no, no. In Denmark, there was a sort of international theatre company and they mixed languages and they were very interesting, actually. Very interesting. So, I worked there and I was doing a bit of teaching as well. But in this country, you know, I taught at RADA, LAMDA, and what is the other one? School of RADA, LAMDA and another one.

Central?

Central, yes. Not very far from here.

So, did you feel like – did you have – did you feel ever disadvantaged or...?

Disadvantaged in what way?

Yes. Well, let's say not being completely English. Did you feel disadvantaged?

Not at all, not at all. No, really, no. No, because here, what matters is the subject, how it's presented, what you actually do, the technique. And it's nothing to do with whether you are this, that or this.

And in terms of roles?

Oh, you mean, you know, acting roles for myself?

Yes.

Well, of course, you know, I couldn't do anything by Bernard Shaw or Oscar Wilde. You have to really speak without any accent or whatsoever. But I managed. I managed somehow with my own accent.

Because many years ago we interviewed a lady who, she was an actor, and she told us a funny story. [02:16:06] She said she had locution lessons to get rid of her accent.

Yes.

But then, nevertheless, she then offered – found – she got roles as a foreigner, so she had to relearn her accent.

I know. Well, my last show, I think I told you, was Count Arthur Strong. Look it up.

Okay.

I am there and I had a scene with Rory Bremner. You know, a wonderful scene and I am a foreigner. I'm actually...

So, you had to put the accent on again?

Yes.

You had to? They wanted you...?

Yes, slightly stronger. I mean, they didn't ask for it, they just thought mine was enough, perhaps. But it was a fantastic role and I was in five episodes. It was the last thing I did, I loved it.

And what other roles did you get? What were your favourite or some of your highlights?

Well, this is one. The others, which I did here on telly, were bits and pieces. The main ones, I was in Nottingham Playhouse and I did... Oh, what's its name? I can't remember. A play by quite a well-known writer. The accent didn't matter, they took me anyway. I was with RSC and I did *The Book*. So, I was for a whole season with the RSC. So, yeah, I did quite a bit. It's all gone and out of my head, and I don't remember so many things. Oh, God, it's awful.

Well, it's fascinating, I mean, to be an actor where, in a way, accent, voice, your experience is important, in a way. [01:48:03] And whether your own experience did help you or shape you, your own war experience, to some extent. Do you think that helped you to become an actor?

My experience?

Yeah, your war experience, that you had to pretend to be somebody else.

Well, as I said, inside me, I always craved that anyway, I always pretended. I mean, even changing my whole, you know, not becoming Jewish, becoming Polish. I mean, it's part of acting, isn't it?

Yeah.

And also, there were bits in it I didn't enjoy because of the purpose of it, and it was full of fear in case one is found out. But in a way, it was an experience which didn't come all that difficult to me. Do you know what I mean?

Yeah. I mean, was it strange, for example, to change back to your name when...? At what point – to change back to your real name, from Irena to Ruth?

Oh, yes, back to Ruth?

Yeah.

[Laughs] No, it was a relief. No, because I knew that this is part of an act and I'd better do it well enough, and I'd better believe in it and make it as authentic as possible because it's important. But here, you know, I got away with murder. I got away sometimes with... They didn't even ask me what accent, bits and pieces. I mean, obviously, I wouldn't be asked to do a major role, you know, like a big... I wasn't a big star. I was an actress. Jobbing and still teaching.

[01:50:06] *Yeah. And you said you taught in all these major schools and...?*

Yeah, yeah. This is the first time in my life, really, where I am sort of dozing. Strange, it feels very strange.

Well, what do you like to be doing?

Well, God knows, in my head, maybe lots of things. But in reality, I know I don't have the energy. And yeah, this is the – whatever I had, I must say one thing, one talent I had was energy. [Laughs] I had plenty of energy, really. And in a way, this is a kind of talent.

Definitely, yeah.

Because I – and this is gone completely, completely.

And that energy also led you to do your work with the Holocaust Educational Trust?

Yes.

You went into Holocaust education?

Yes.

Tell us a little bit about it. And also, what I wanted to ask you, at what point did you start talking about your past?

Yes, that's interesting, I never thought about it. I think I met somebody. No, I met somebody who was a theatre director and I did a workshop with him, or a work with him. And he said, 'Listen, you must meet the woman who was then running HET, Holocaust Educational Trust.' I can't even remember the name now. It was many years ago, so it must have been like seven, eight years ago. And I met her, and that started my work for the HET, which I derived a lot of wonderful, wonderful learning from. [02:22:10] I mean, I really enjoyed it. And I think I mentioned it to you and the fact that people, the young people are not even Jewish and they're doing this work. Because, let's face it, I have to admit that the present situation with Israel has depressed me more than I can tell you. And I don't even want to talk about it, because of antisemitism. And I thought we've learned something, I looked at it positively. I knew so many young people who are doing this work without even being Jewish. And to come back now to this idea where people say... Even, look, I don't like Netanyahu, but sometimes they talk about the terrible things he does, forgetting who the fuck started it. Forgetting that Nova, the place where 360 people were killed, went there for music. They didn't know anything, they didn't want politics. They went there for music and they were killed. What would happen if the Israelis did that? You know, so even though I can't stand Netanyahu, there are certain things which are so unfair and brings back the hatred. It makes me sick, it really does. And the news, the way news is presented sometimes, is slightly, you know, it's slightly sort of eliminating this or not saying this too much, you know. And as I said, Netanyahu I don't like because he would go to jail if he wasn't the PM. [01:54:08] And he's trying to keep this going, because of himself and his own desire for power. He's a bit like Trump, so that's what I don't like. But politically, there are certain things he needs to do. Do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

And it's never regarded like that and Israel is hated. And because of Israel, the Jews, the Jews again.

And would you have expected this?

No, I mean, you know, my cousin says – my cousin is going on marches in the afternoon with his family against the government. Against the bloody government. But no, you hate all the Jews. And that really does make me feel I'm glad I'm old, because I can't take this anymore. That's awful. And because I really thought things are going to get better. Anyway, it's almost painful to talk about it.

So, just to go back to when you worked with the Holocaust Education Trust, what was the main message you had for the children when you...?

The things I told you, not to generalise. Not to say the Germans are like that, the Jews are like that. Although there is a certain element there which is true, because of education. But when it comes to meeting an individual person, throw it all out and treat that person as an individual. And that I find very important and something which is going to maybe change our nature. Or maybe not, which will be a shame and I feel very strongly about it. **[01:56:03]** And doing this and talking to young people about it helped me to come to this conclusion. And it's wonderful sitting and talking to people with black skin and brown skin and pink skin, you know, and all talking about this, that makes you feel human again.

So, that's what I want to ask you. So, did it have a good effect on you?

On me? Yes, very good effect. What unfortunately isn't is the other side, which I tried, the political side now, which is happening again.

Yeah, which makes the Holocaust –

Because I used to come home and chew Michael's ears off. You know, say 'Oh, my God, isn't that incredible? Isn't it incredible?' And sometimes – you know- people would come and meet here and there wasn't a single-blooded Jew among them, and they'd talk about the Holocaust. Isn't that incredible?

Yeah. So, you – it gave you a positive feeling?

Absolutely.

It keeps that interest in it?

Absolutely. But equally so, it gives me pain when I see that all this is now kind of going away, going back to the sheer hatred.

Yeah. Well, it's interesting we talk about it because just yesterday there was quite a big demonstration here at JW3, you know, anti-Israel and –

You mean who demonstrated?

It was a, I guess, you know, pro-Palestinian demonstration, but they chose as the venue JW3. You know, which is –

So, you mean they were going outside?

Outside, yeah.

Outside, JW3?

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, yeah. Well, that's what hurts me. **[01:58:05]** It really does hurt me very much, to the point where I feel, God, I'm glad I'm old. Which is selfish, because what about the young people? But it's because I put so much faith in the possibility of it being otherwise. You know, I was so excited. I used to come home after talking and I was elated. I said, 'Gosh, gosh, things are changing. This is fantastic.'

And Ruth, did you talk about the past with your son at all when he grew up?

No, I didn't. With my son?

Mmm.

He knew a little bit, but I didn't push it. And then, unfortunately, there was no time. And then, he was so busy with his music and... But, you know, he knew more than my grandson. My grandson is – he's also a musician. But that's another story, I'm not going – I'm not even going to go there.

Yeah. I also wanted to ask you what are your feelings about Poland today?

What do I think about Poland?

And also, whether you've been back to Radom.

No, I haven't. Well, Poland, it's a very mixed bag. I have to say something about Catholicism, I feel very bad about Catholicism. And I don't see how any thinking person can follow a faith that believes in immaculate conception. Immaculate conception, because you're born in sin. [02:00:03] They made a mistake about Jesus, the fact that he was killed by Jews, when in fact he wasn't. And after God knows how many thousands of years they've come to this conclusion. But in the meantime, as I said to you before, in my school, you killed our Lord and you must suffer for it. It's a terrible faith. I'm sorry, I shouldn't be judgemental, because if somebody chooses to believe in God, let them. I don't, but let them. But I think this particular faith is so dangerous and yet intelligent people are good Catholics. I mean, everything about it, there is nothing you can actually trust or believe in.

But so, you have not come to Warsaw?

Eh?

So, have you gone to Warsaw or Radom? Or have you? After the war, did you travel?

No, I haven't been.

No?

No, wait a minute. No, what am I talking about? It's not true. My aunt, I didn't tell you about that...

You said she –

My aunt became a Communist.

The aunt you survived with?

Yes.

Okay.

Why? She had good reasons. She said, well, there is no religion, there will be no better or worse. It's the faith that she believed was justice and she joined the Communist Party. And then she started, I don't know whether they lived together, but a man who was very high up in the Communist Party... And himself he was a lawyer, or more, a barrister, I think. And what killed him, and that was the beginning of change, he was demoted. [02:02:04] He was demoted because he was a Jew and it killed him. And then, my aunt started to rethink the whole thing. And when she was on her deathbed and we went there to see her, she said to us, 'You know, it didn't work. It didn't bloody work.' And I'll never forget it.

About Communism?

Yes. She worked with the Polish miners.

So, she lived in Warsaw?

She went back to Warsaw. She went back to Warsaw, because that's what she wanted to do.

Yeah. So, you had some contact through her? Yes, yes.

Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely, absolutely, yes. No, Michael and I used to go there. Once a year we used to go to Poland to see her.

And today, do you still feel Polish somehow? Do you feel you have a connection?

Not really.

So, how would you define yourself in terms of your identity?

My identity? Non-identity [laughs].

Or non-identity [laughs].

A human being who keeps on flogging, keeps on trying to learn, trying to understand, and accepts variety, so long as there is something inside, in the heart or in the mind, by which you judge people. You don't judge them by anything else. So, I mean, you know, sometimes people say, 'I don't like him very much as a person, but I do admire him.' [02:04:06]
Richard Dawkins, who wrote *The God's Delusion*, I think he's a very – you know, he's a womaniser but that's none of my business, you know. But one good thing about him is that he will talk to a bishop and he will not compromise. He tells the bishop how it is. He doesn't strongly believe in God. And he said, 'But I respect your position. That's okay, so long as you don't try to convert me. If you accept my position, I have respect for yours.' And here I completely agree. And also, you know, the thing is, how many gods are there? You know, do you know Yuval Harari?

Yeah.

You've heard about Yuval Harari?

Yeah.

Well, Yuval Harari has written a book, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, and he has an explanation for antisemitism. Did we tell you?

No.

Did we talk about it?

No.

But it's kind of with a tongue in cheek. I like him very much. He can't stand what's going on in Israel now, but that's besides the point. Yuval Harari says, 'Well, the story is there was a mistake made. In the 6th century, 6th or 5th century, there was a belief in many gods. Like Romans and Greeks believed in the existence of many gods.' Yuval Harari says, 'Well, that was a good idea because they were not all very nice gods. [02:06:02] They didn't agree with one another, so there was a lot of', you know...

Fighting?

Yeah, fighting. 'But it was good. But it was Jews who declared monotheism.' It was the Jews or maybe partly the Jews who declared the value of monotheism. And Yuval Harari says, 'Oy, that's another big mistake', because now what he says is, there is a belief in one god. And then there is a prophet, Abraham, who now declares the Jews to be the greats because they declared monotheism. So, they're the chosen people. And Yuval Harari says, 'Oy, that was the biggest mistake.' So, they're now the chosen people, you see? I'm a chosen person. Or others say they think that they're chosen people and that's where antisemitism started. But he says it with a tongue in cheek, so it's not everywhere it's right. But he really, really makes a good point.

That's interesting. And do you find for you the meaning of being Jewish has changed over your lifetime for yourself?

Well, it never was. It never was. The home I come from, I have explained. So, it never was a sort of big problem for me. That's me, it's what I am. But I don't necessarily have such strong identity. [02:08:06] Yes, I'm Jewish. I mean, how could I not be? Look what happened to me in my life because I'm Jewish.

And Ruth, you've moved to so many different places. Where – do you feel a sense of home or belonging anywhere?

Well, strangely enough, because I've done so much studying and working here, London is my home. But I did love New York because, again, because I'd made some progress in my education and qualifications. So, I worked very hard. And there are a lot of things about – I mean, I don't know, if Trump was there, I probably wouldn't. But you know, we had a very good time in New York. But I also like London as well. I mean, my experience at college that I told you about, or the school, it's unforgettable. I was treated, for whatever reasons, I was treated extremely well and it was very positive, benefited from it. So, how could I not like it?

And you also said you were interested, you're interested in psychology aspects?

Well, I'm just, yeah, yeah. I'm not going to – I mean, I'm not going to become a psychologist at my old age. But I have a –

What drew you to it?

I have a – what?

What draws you to psychology? What do you think?

Well, it's trying to understand the human combination of mind and emotions. And what makes us and what influences us most. Why we become what we become. [02:10:00] I mean, I'm reading a book currently by John Cleese and his psychoanalysis. And it's about the family and how to – not how to avoid, how to put up with them.

Cameraman: How Survive it.

What?

Cameraman: How to Survive it.

How to survive? Do you know the book?

Cameraman: Yes.

You do?

Cameraman: Yes, yes.

Would you like it?

[Laughs] *Cameraman: I have it.*

Eh?

Cameraman: I have it.

You have it? Well, okay, so, you know, things like that, which are very interesting questions. And because I met this nice woman, she actually came to see a play I was in, The Yiddish Queen Lear. I was in a play called The Yiddish Queen Lear.

Wow. Oh, I saw it.

What?

Yeah, I saw it, The Yiddish Queen Lear.

I was Queen Lear.

Ahh.

And that was me!

Ahh [laughs].

Ah, honestly.

That was very good.

I was Queen Lear.

Yes, that was excellent.

Yes, Julia Pascal.

Yeah.

So, anyway, so Mickey Yudkin came to see it, and then we became sort of friends.

Mickey Yudkin?

Yeah.

Yeah, I knew him as well.

And then, she lectures at u3a. Yes, she gives the lectures.

Okay.

So, I went and we have a very good relationship, because I can also write to her privately and say, well, I didn't quite understand that, although I can say it in the class. But she and I just, I very much respect her. So, I do it because of that, not because of only the subject. Do you know what I mean?

Yes, yes, yes.

Because she's very interesting, in the way she delivers it.

Because I wanted to ask you, how do you think your life was shaped by your early experiences?

It's very difficult to answer that.

[02:12:01] *I know.*

Very difficult. How it was shaped?

Yeah, or what impact...

Yeah, well, I mean, sometimes when I think about it, I just find it so unbelievable because of the simple things, the coincidences. And being open to anything that can happen. And it did happen, as I told you. And I just find it so... And Mickey helped me to realise how lucky I was in my unluckiness, because for the first ten years of my life, I had the ideal childhood. Ideal. Not being spoiled, but being loved. And my father devoting his life to save me. I mean, that's what he did, basically. I was first on the list, never mind what else. 'We try our best, but you get out.' That has some effect on who I have become, because it's not many people are lucky enough. I know people who talk to me about their childhood and they never even experience the love of mother or father. What effect does that have on you? So, I was lucky in my unluckiness.

Yeah, you had a grounding?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And in my old age, I think about it a lot more because I have more time. I never gave it so much emphasis as I do now, because I realise now and I know a little bit more about the whole cycle.

[02:14:10] *Yeah, yeah.*

And it's not something you choose, it's something you just get, so you don't get... I mean, I know people, creative people, who are so badly affected by their childhood they're still struggling with it in nearly old age.

Yeah. And do you think it affected also your own parenting?

Oh, I don't know. I can't answer that, I don't know. I didn't have sort of philosophy of parenting. I think with Jeremy, our son, we could talk. Michael maybe had a little bit more of a problem, because you know, he had a very good brain and he didn't fully materialise it and that hurts him. But we could talk about a lot of things. And with Jeremy, because I told you he has even written articles, what society should do with drugs. Saying pure heroin can actually never kill you, but what kills you is the money that people make. So, they mix heroin with other things and that's deadly. Nobody talks about it. So, he examined the whole thing. He had a very investigating mind. **[02:16:02]** And that is something which, you know, I have to say it hurts. But it's unavoidable. Well, you know, you've got kids, so you know.

Yeah. Probably something one can never get over.

And he was right, he was right. I mean, I didn't – you know, we had quarrels sometimes and I used to say, 'Well, using that, because it makes it easier for you to accept what you're doing. But think about it objectively.' And we discussed this and sometimes he agreed with me and said, 'Look, Mum, it's not something I want to do for the rest of my life. I don't. But I don't believe in the way the drug addicts are treated.' And he's right. And I used to say, 'Well, you use it a bit of an excuse maybe' and now I can find that he was right. Yes, sometimes you

have the two relationships, the mother, the motherly relationship, and then also the relationship that you know from your mind working and understanding more. Do you know what I mean?

Yeah, yeah.

But you have no problems with your kids, thank God.

Well, they are still [laughs]... They're just at the beginning of their adult journey. Let's see what they will do. It's not easy, I think. It's interesting what you learn about –

No, it's not easy. It's not easy bringing kids up now, because I told you I went to this course about the generation gap and how the development, the technological development affects relationship between older and younger generation. [02:18:17] Where do they get the information from? It's very difficult to be a young person now, very difficult.

Yeah, I think the communication channels are also changing. You know, it's much more difficult to have attention of anyone, because yeah...

Yes, and where do you get your information from? Social media, social media. I mean, you look at the Israeli and Palestinian situation, it's the social media and you don't know all the facts. And I know somebody who runs an organisation called CAA.

Yeah, Campaign Against Anti-Semitism.

Yes, yes. And he's wonderful, what he has devised, what he has learned. Oh yes, he was involved in the march, there was a march. And there was a very funny, I thought it was very funny, a young man is approaching a young woman who is marching for Palestinians. I don't know if you saw it. And he said, 'Look, can I just have a word with you, yes? I mean, look at me.' He's got long hair. He wears a sort of funny dress and he said, 'Look at me, I am gay. Yeah, it shows. I dress in a certain way, I am gay. So now, do you realise that in Palestine or any Arab countries, I will be killed or thrown out of the window or just not allowed to live?

[02:20:03] But in Israel, because it's a democratic state, I can still do the – there are rabbis who are gay, there are rabbis who are lesbian. They even have their own synagogues. Did you know that?' And she says, 'No.' He said, 'I just want you to know that, because it's a fact, I'm not making it up.' And you know, this is what I mean, that people have ideologies. They don't investigate properly, but they have an attitude and that's very dangerous.

Yeah. Ruth, is there anything I haven't asked you we haven't covered about your career?

You've squeezed my life [laughs].

I'm sorry, that's what I'm here for.

No, don't be silly [laughs].

I don't know, also regarding your career as a dancer and as an actor. And maybe what are you –

Well, this is all gone. This is all gone.

What are you most proud of, maybe, in terms of your own career?

I'm not proud of anything, actually. It's just something I did and enjoyed. I'm not proud. Pride is another concept [laughs].

Okay. What you enjoyed most?

Yes, yes, well, I enjoyed lots of things. I really did and I was very lucky that I was given the opportunity to do quite a lot of things. And sort of, yes, maybe regrets that now I'm sort of housebound, but that's nature. And then, I meet people like you who are actually showing some interest. That's incredible, too.

Even neighbours, so.

Yes, well, use it. Did you hear what I said?

[Laughs] *Yeah.*

[02:22:00] No, I really mean it.

So, you said before, because we haven't had it on camera, you're married now for seventy-four years.

Yes.

What is the secret?

No, it's not a secret.

Oh, not a secret? Okay.

No, I advertise it.

Okay, so what is it? I don't think we have it on camera, I think you should say it.

What?

What is it? What should one do? You said to move a lot.

[Laughs] Well, it's a joke. I said, yes, move around, yeah, and change places, work, and move around. Get new experiences so you don't get stuck. But, I mean, look, this is only a saying. I don't know. I don't know whether it's the only answer. It certainly – I really mean it. It sort of helped us, because we're so busy adjusting to new places, learning from new places, that I never realised that actually Michael had a much easier life than I did, because he went to the job.

Yes, you –

And I went to nothingness and I had to create the jobs or whatever I wanted to. So, sometimes it was difficult. But there was also a bit of excitement about it.

And you managed to do it.

Yes, I managed to do it, yes. But I was also lucky. So, you know, the only terrible, unlucky thing was our son. That was very bloody unlucky. But it's unlucky because, you know, he was bright. He was intelligent, you could talk with him. I mean –

And particularly with your history, it's so sad.

Yeah, I didn't sort of pile my history on him.

No.

[02:24:00] I didn't really want to.

No, but I meant for yourself.

He knew a bit and he didn't like to ask too many questions either, for different reasons maybe. Yeah, that was – I think that was our sort of greatest lack of luck, because I'm not saying it because it sounds good, but he was very special. Whereas Zak, I'm not minimising him, but he's a different kettle of fish. He's just a different person.

Yes, so that's your grandson?

Yeah. He's got a Polish girlfriend now, who's a singer, because they just had a gig. They had a gig in, was it? I can't remember the place, very well-known place for gigs. And there was

this Polish singer, I was told. Because I have an adopted grandmother, granddaughter, you know?

Yes.

She's my really adopted granddaughter. We like each other very much, she's... [laughs] We met because of HET and she went to the gig.

[02:26:01] Okay.

And she liked the gig and she met him, but he was very busy tidying things up and...

He's a singer, yeah? A singer?

No, he's a drummer.

Drummer, okay.

And he's quite good. He takes after his father. I don't know where from. I mean, he might have been drumming in my tummy when I was pregnant. He was going boom, boom, boom, boom. [Laughs] I don't know where it comes from.

Okay, well, thank you so much. If there is anything, any other topic I haven't asked you, I think we...

No, you've asked me a lot of things and I hope I haven't bored you.

No, not at all. Is there any message you have for anyone who might watch this interview in the future?

Well, I just hope they don't find it too boring. Look, and I'm very conscious of the fact I'm only one in six million people. It's nothing unusual. It's only unusual because there were

different incidents, like the coordination, the coincidences and things like that. But other than that, it wasn't as bad as being in Auschwitz. And all the terrible things that I survived were still not sort of as some people did, and there were six million of them. So, who the fuck am I to say anything, except that I lost my dear parents? But I'm not alone and I'm very conscious of it. And lucky in many things, seventy-four years of marriage.

[02:28:00] *That's quite something.*

Hey?

I can hear him. I think your husband is waiting for us to finish. So, Ruth, I'll say thank you so much for talking to us.

You're welcome, you're welcome.

And I don't know whether you have any photos or anything?

I'll have to. I'll have to search and look.

Okay, we can have a look. Just one second and we'll finish.

Yes, what?

Just let's sit a little bit in silence for one second and...

What's he doing?

One moment.

I have one favour.

Yes, please.

1945, you said?

Michel Posner: '45.

Yeah.

This is when the war came to an end.

Yeah.

1945 in...?

Southampton.

Southampton, okay.

Yes, please, Ruth. What do we see here?

So, this is in 1945 in Southampton. I'm sitting on the right and in the middle, the older gentleman, is Dr. Schneider.

What do we see on this picture, please?

We see Sophie Friedländer, who was a pedagogue and lived in a hostel and used to give English lessons. I am in the middle and by my side is my very dear friend, and she was Hungarian, she's not with us anymore, doing an English lesson.

[02:30:04] *And this is where?*

This is in the hostel in Reading, in the refugee hostel.

'46?

Michael Posner: Yeah.

This is the London College of Dance and Drama, and the teachers are there, and a lot of the pupils. And I am the third one from – on the top, the top row, the third one from the right.

Michael Posner: 1948.

1948.

Michael Posner: '49, '49.

'49, sorry, 1949.

It says it.

Yes.

What do we see here, please?

We see a photo of our wedding, which was in 1950.

And where? Where did it take place? In London?

In London, yes.

Okay. Yes, Ruth, what do we see on this wonderful photograph?

We see myself, and I can't believe it is me, so many years ago, on Haifa Beach.

Thank you. Yes, please. Ruth, yeah, what do we see here, please?

We see my colleague, Rina Shaham, who had her own company, and a Yemenite boy, whose name I can't remember, and myself.

And where are you?

Sorry?

Where are you in the photo?

On the right-hand side.

Thank you. Yes?

Well, this is a piece of dance, which was done for London Contemporary Dance Theatre. And I can't remember the name of my colleagues on either side, and I'm the one in the middle.

[02:32:04] *When was this? When did you perform, roughly?*

I have no idea, I can't remember.

The sixties maybe?

Michael Posner: Yes.

Probably, yes.

Okay, thank you. Yes, please. When is this?

Michael Posner: 1983.

So, this is Copenhagen?

Yes.

Michael Posner: Copenhagen.

1983, and tell us about it, please. A performance of Robinson Crusoe?

It was called Robinson Crusoe, yes. I can't remember it very well, to be absolutely honest, except—

Michael Posner: English-Speaking Theatre.

Yes, it was — the company was the English-Speaking Theatre Company.

Okay, and you were in the middle?

Yes.

With the outstretched arms.

That's right.

Thank you. I love this, tell us about this photo, please. About this photo. Who is this from? Teresa?

This is from Teresa. I played Teresa and it was taken during a tour, where we went to different countries. I can't remember every place we went to, but this was in Vienna.

And it's a play by?

It's a play by Julia Pascal.

Thank you. Yes, please, Ruth. What is this on top of the tower?

This on top of the tower is taken at the Dome. The celebration was the Celebrating 2000 Years and it was a very special piece that somebody choreographed. And it presents myself, and I can't remember his name, who played my husband, on top of the tower, on top of a thirty-feet high tower, where we were sort of gesticulating, throwing things, all sorts of stuff.

So, in 2000?

Yes.

Thank you.

Okay?

Yes, please.

So, this is The Yiddish Queen Lear, a play written by Julia Pascal, and we performed it in many different places. I'm not sure where this was taken from, but as I said, it was a play which was toured in many, many theatres and was very successful.

Thank you. Yes, Ruth.

Right, this is an extract from Count Arthur Strong, which was with Rory Kinnear, and myself as this old woman. And it was a very interesting play. And that's all I can say about it, I don't remember it very well.

But this is a television?

This is a television production, yes.

Okay, thank you. Yes.

This is taken from – in Buckingham Palace. I was lucky enough to receive the BEM and invited to Buckingham Palace with my husband. And it was a very special occasion and that's all I can say. The Queen, unfortunately, was very ill, so she wasn't there. But it was a very, very big party. And the weather was great and the place was beautiful.

Ruth, thank you so much again for sharing your story and your photographs with us. Thank you so much.

Thank you. Thank you for your interest and your help and I really appreciate it. I sort of feel like I've been immortalised [laughs].

[02:36:07]

[End of transcript]