

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	189

Interviewee Surname:	Kammerling
Forename:	Herta
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	9 Februar 1926
Interviewee POB:	Baden bei Wien, Austria

Date of Interview:	12 September 2016
Location of Interview:	Bournemouth
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 46 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV189
NAME: Herta Kammerling
DATE: 12th September 2016
LOCATION: Bournemouth, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 12th of September 2016, we are doing an interview with Mrs. Herta Kammerling and we are in Bournemouth, UK.

What is your name please?

My name is Herta Kammerling

And what was your name at birth?

I was born as Herta Plaschkes.

And where were you born?

I was born in Baden bei Wien.

And when?

On the 9th of February 1926.

Mrs Kammerling, thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices project. Can you please tell us a little bit about your family background?

My family background was a wonderful family background. We were a very loving family. I think I was father's favourite girlfriend. My mother was a lovely woman and cooked well and baked well. And I was their only child until my brother was born- till my brother Otto was born. And twelve years later my brother Erik of course. But that was a different time altogether. So, we lived happily together. My father was in business. And... mother took me to school, picked me up. And made the ten o'clock sandwiches that we took to school in a little basket in front of us. And a little apple in there, or a little half paprika. Very crunchy and very juicy for ten o'clock break at school. I liked school very much... when I was a child. And I would say I led a very, very contented, happy and... peaceful... there were no fights in our family or battles for whatever reason. Very happy childhood. When my brother Otto was born, there was great excitement. And... I remember well my mother always saying, "Herta, spiel' mit dem Otto." "Herta, play with Otto." I was that much older so we didn't always agree in what game to play. So that is about my home life.

[0:02:44]

And where did you live, Herta- where did you live?

We lived in the 3rd District. But no, I'm sorry, we lived in the 6th District first, where my brother and I got up to mischief and put ourselves between the two panes of glass... on the street side of the window. And the people in the road said- tried to push out back, you know: "Go back, go back, go back!" And we didn't understand what they were saying; we were having a whale of a time until somebody found out which flat it might be, and told my mother that her children are standing between two window panes. But we were totally oblivious of that- the danger we were in, yeah?

And what was the address? Do you remember the address?

That was, yes, Mariahilfer Straße... No, I don't. I remember the bay window.

Aha...

I remember going to school and back. And I felt very independent when I was allowed to go back on my own.

And were there other Jewish children in the school? Or what sort of...?

There were. And I had one girlfriend called Franzi Auerhahn. And we met up in England again. She was also a refugee, and also came with a Kindertransport. So, she was saved, but she's not alive anymore. But that was best bosom friend, so to say...

Yes...

But I was the only one. But I had my cousin Susi that came up who was nine months older than myself. So, when Susi came, we also played, we went for walks. But we were a great family for going on little rambles on Sunday. So, we were always out in the fresh air.

[0:04:33]

Where did you go on Sunday?

Well, Vienna Woods. And one of the woods were, was very special because... Mum used to walk there when she was a child, with her parents. So... And we always met one of the aunties. Yes, there were four girls in their family. And ...it was a very happy time. A bit of potato salad on holiday and... Once a year we went on a little holiday, darling Papa only came down Friday night or Saturday for the weekends. So, we were *allein [alone]*. We went for walks there. Wherever we went, there were woods. And we swam. Otto learnt to swim in his early days. He never liked it very much, but he swam.

Where did you go on holidays? Where?

Vöslau, Baden. And in my early- younger days we went to see... *Omama*, my *Omama* - mother's mother - in Mödling. And they had a lovely house with a little balcony, where the children stepped from cross-bar to cross-bar, yes, and back again.

Where was Mödling? Where is Mödling?

Where is Mödling?

Where is Mödling? Is it north...?

On the southern railway line from Vienna, yeah? Vöslau, Baden, Mödling... All on the southern railway...

Do you remember the street? You did remember the street...

Domstraße, I think. Domstraße. Again, I could find it and we have found it. And my son found it. And... And my brother found it as well. They had a little garden and they grew rhubarb in the garden! That was a very nice time.

And did you have any particular hobbies, or did you like anything in particular?

As a child I don't remember having hobbies. I loved to read. That was one. And...

What did you read? Do you remember anything you read.

Oh, Grimm's fairy stories of course. And Hans Andersen's fairy stories. And I'm sure I came to England with one of the books. But it was lost in transit, or how does one say that? But it's lost and so is my diary.

[0:06:59]

Did you keep a diary?

Yes- yeah. Before my auntie - Mum's sister - left for Czechoslovakia after Hitler's occupation of, of Austria... and Czechoslovakia. And she had given birth to a little boy called Peter, via caesarean. So, she was very poorly, but, well. And that was the only time I ever met my cousin Peter, in Prague, on a dark winter's weekend when we went to Prague on the coach to see Auntie Litzi and little Peter. Uncle had already left... hoping to get... Tante Litzi

and the baby out. Not possible. They ended up in Theresienstadt. And we find out this when friends took us to Theresienstadt, that little Peter was on the list, and he died when he was eight. And I would like to say something about my Tante Litzi. She was an educationalist. And she was employed as an educationalist to a family called Eisler. And she looked after the boy... until he was twelve, thirteen. And ... [phone rings]

One moment... [Audio break]

Litzi, what was her name?

Tante Litzi? 'Alice'.

Alice...

It was one of the Grosz girls, yes?

Alice Grosz, yes? And she was an educator- when?

Before Hitler. She was the youngest of the Grosses, yes. And... I heard from someone else that she was gathering the children together in Terezin. And games. And I think that the Germans allowed them for a little while to have pencil and paper. So they must have been... 'helpful'... to the Germans.

And what happened to her?

Yes, until she was herself even there, yes, helping, no - not helping. Organising the children and playing. Story-telling probably. Lovely person.

Yes... But tell me also about your mother who was your aunt.

Never considered her to be my aunt.

Yes...

Never, you know? Even now.

She is your mother.

She is still my mother.

[0:09:40]

Yes. But what happened to your birth mother?

My birth mother died. She had a haemorrhage. That's all I know. And when Mama – Mama came to see her in hospital, the bed was empty. And... horrible isn't it, really, to think back what that must have meant to her? And eventually Mama and Papa... married, so I was only a baby.

And was she younger than your mother? She was younger?

Yes, she was the youngest of the girls. Mum was in the middle. 'Mum' – difficult. Because I've never called my mum, 'Mum'. I'm very sorry about that. Don't get me on to that.

Yes...

She never had the pleasure of being called 'Mum'.

Yeah.

It's not 'my other mother'; it's 'my mother'.

Your mother, yes. Yes. So, she had how many siblings?

She? Aunty, four. Tante Wally, my mother, Gertrud- Tante Trude... and Margaret, my mother- my physical mother, and Tante Litzi. That might not be in the right order.

Doesn't matter.

Yeah, but they all four – All lovely aunties and we always met up and... it was nice.

What other things do you remember of growing up in Vienna?

Well, the rambles and the outings. I remember those were the Sundays of the family... in good weather. And the holidays in Baden, or Vöslau, with a swimming pool. That's where I learnt to swim. And if you think, my mother waited at the end of the... slide. Can you imagine how we come down with force? She was all red afterwards, poor woman. She dived with us, and brought us up again. Wasn't that nice? Yeah... Nice memories... Of all the family, and certainly of Mama and Papa.

[0:12:00]

Yes, and what was your father's business please?

He was in the sausage casing business. Which meant that he bought the guts of the animals – sheep, pork, beef. And cleaned them before they went and sorted them. And then they went in parcels packed up tight with much salt, to keep them fresh, to the butchers. And they were filled with sausage meat... and sold to all and sundry?

And what was it called in German?

'Darmhändler' – that's the guts-handling person. And we watched him do it. To clean the sausage skins.

How did he do it?

Very cold water. He had to have running water, which he fed into the... guts. So, it was just a nozzle. But much of it had to be done by mouth, so he had to open the guts up and blow it through, or help the water- push the water along the guts to clean it out before it was used for human consumption. Yes? We often watched the cleaning process –

Yes...

...not the filling of the sausage meat!

No...

But the cleaning process.

And did your mother help in the business as well or was she...?

No, it was not a woman's job.

No.

Definitely.

It was considered a...

Ice cold water. Father's hands were always red. No, not at all. I think Mama was a housewife... Chief cook and bottle washer.

Yeah.

... and whatever mothers do as normal, and looked after us.

Did she have help? Was there anyone else helping in the...?

No, never.

[0:13:54]

And what about your change from Volksschule to Hauptschule?

Yes, that was quite nice because my friend Franzi Auerhahn yes, came also to the same school. We all went to the Loquaipplatz to the Hauptschule. And it was... not in a park but it

was a *Platz*, and the *Platz* was green and the benches and a sandpit. And the school was very pleasant and nice. And we had a German teacher that was... very nice as a teacher but when Hitler came into power, she had a eulogy for Hitler. And... also for Schuschnigg, the previous governor of Vienna. And... she was sacked, 'cause she didn't agree with all Hitler did. And supported Schuschnigg, the ex-Chancellor. So, we didn't have her for very long. And then the Jewish children were herded off to other schools...

Yes...

And I was only twelve, so was in the middle of learning.

Did you go to another school?

Yes, but we never turned up, darling. The Jewish children ran wild, because we had no home... to go to. We had a home to go to. What I mean is during daytime...

Yeah...

...Yeah? We were dropped off at school and we went to school. And certain people, children at school said, "Let's go out, the teachers can't manage with us anyway." But there was one girl in school who was a little bit more culturally educated, and she told us film stories and we listened to film stories in school. But learning, I would say, very little. I- my schooling really finished at twelve.

Yeah. And do you remember the Anschluss?

The Anschluss itself I don't remember. I remember the change... that took place...

Tell us about that change...

Yes.

What happened?

People did not speak to us. You couldn't go shopping. My mother had to go after dark to go across to the *Greisler*. What would the *Greisler* be called? To the little shop opposite. And to get some meat or some bread. Some butter. I really do not know how all the mums and dads and families worked afterwards, unless they had families in the country, and they could go out into the country and buy things there, provided they were given to Jews. So... And then apparently the next big, big thing was that my father apparently owed 120 *Schilling* in tax. So, they came and took all our furniture away. And I'm sure I wasn't supposed to come home on that day at that time, but I still saw the lorry with my doll in her bed as the last item tied down. And that was my memory of... Then we moved into another flat which was diabolical. It was in the 3rd District from which Otto and I left. And... mother was pregnant by that time and... two-foot-six bed, you know those? That is what she slept in – on, and we slept.

[0:17:45]

You had to leave your flat?

We had to leave the flat.

All furniture was taken?

Well, we had no back- back-up. My father tried illegally to go over the Czech border... with a little suitcase, trying to get us out. At that time Czechoslovakia wasn't overrun yet.

Yes...

It was still a free country. And he came back very depressed. He couldn't get across. I think some money was spent to get this guide with a group of people. But my father alone, I don't think... So, we were all together but... practically impossible to live. I don't think we had many chairs. I remember boxes... and lids open of these big wooden boxes which were obviously ready for us to go away. .

And where was this...? Where was this?

This was in the 3rd District.

Yes. Do you remember the street?

Pfeff- Pfefferhofgasse.

Pfefferhofgasse?

Mnn. I never went to school because my school was somewhere else and... there was no school...for us.

So, did you stay at home? What did you do?

I think we all met up somewhere, you know, as children would when they're twelve. But I don't think I knew Vienna very well, I mean. Perhaps- I think it was the last part of... 1938 that that took place. And there were Jewish school- Jewish clubs around, and I think I went to one. Then I think my mother didn't let me go out in the evening any more. So. Well I didn't go out at twelve in any case, but at that time, you know, not any more. So yes, a bit of Jewish youth clubs and you met other people, but that was all. Nothing. Nothing left at all until we went on the Kindertransport.

[0:19:49]

And what happened on Kristallnacht? Do you remember Kristallnacht?

No, I only know, and saw... the glass on the road, the splinters. And we- my Mum was good. She didn't look very Jewish, so she managed to get- because she was pregnant perhaps also – that we went walking in the streets, yes? Carefully. I only remember chards of glass on the ground always. And shops looted, or people being... hounded. Walter tells the story that if you hear noises behind you, you didn't turn around again. We went to a park and I had a ball, and the ball was taken away by somebody else. You had no recourse. You couldn't say, "So-and-so took my ball!" It was theirs in the end. And you remember a game called Diabolo? Yes? It's two sticks with a string in the middle and you throw it up in the air and you caught it again. That was taken away. So...

By whom? Who took them?

Yeah! Just by children in the park.

[0:21:10]

And you couldn't complain about them...

You couldn't complain.

But were you scared, or did your mother- What was your feeling at the time? Did you feel safe because you were with your mother?

Yeah... ..I really don't know. We just walked away from it. I assume. We walked away.

Yeah...

And I don't know whether one blocks it out or half blocks it out.

Yeah... And what about discussions at home between your father and your mother? Did they...?

Not while we were awake.

Mn.

Never took place. We didn't know what the Kindertransport was. ...Nor was it very much explained to us or what would happen.

What were you told?

We were going away, and...be very nice for us. 'Till we arrived in England. My father's sister waited in Liverpool Street Station as well. And ...then she took us up to Liverpool. So, Aunty took us up - to Liverpool. That was Tante Franka – Papa's sister.

[0:22:28]

*So, tell us when you were- When were you told that you were going on the Kindertransport?
How many days before...?*

No! Just going on a journey... to another land.

Yeah...?

“It will be very nice for you. There's nice people there...” So, we had guarantors. It wasn't a unknown journey. And they wrote to my mother... and my mother knew where they were. So, I think there was hope that if they would manage to get out, that they would- we would be together again.

How did they find the guarantors, do you know how...?

Advert. Tante Franka put an advert in *The Jewish Chronicle*, as did multiple other parents, aunties, uncles, “Anyone willing to guarantee for two children?”

So, she organised it?

She organised that. There was nobody else outside the country yet, so...

Yes, and did you go together with your brother?

Yes. Well, the twelve -year -old girls go separate... and the boys were separate. It was on the same train, but not sitting next to me, yeah?

Can you tell me about the journey and how you got to the train station?

Yes, but then our- the parents weren't allowed to get too close to the train. So, I remember my mother in her dark brown coat... with her big tummy. Not crying. I think that must have been a big feat. And then once we were in the carriages, we didn't see anybody anymore. You didn't stand by the window unless you were the last one in, and you could look.

Which train station?

Westbahnhof. That's where the trains left.

[0:24:30]

And were you worried about your mother because she was so pregnant?

My nightmare was that my poor mother would leave the station, and she would fall or trip and the Nazi taxis wouldn't pick her up- wouldn't take a Jewish person to hospital. And...I didn't think further, but I imagined bleeding to death or something, you know?

That was your picture...?

What does a twelve-year-old know? So that was my feeling. And my brother Otto in Liverpool... Can I go on and say something about Otto?

Sure!

He switched the lights on all the time while we were supposed to be sleeping, yes? It was a big bed, and the children slept in the bed. And he said, "I must switch the light on because Mama and Papa are wandering in the streets, and they don't know where we are. And they say to themselves, "When the light goes on next, that is where our children will be"." So, he kept on switching and not sleeping, putting the lights on, so Mama and Papa would find us.

But in fact, your mother gave birth and- the day after?

In Vienna. Yes, she gave birth. It was a normal birth. I don't know how she fed him. Whether she fed him. Mama and Papa lost each other on the train journey. Mama apparently went out

to the wash...room at one of the stations that the train stopped at, and tried to wash the nappies, or clean herself or wash the baby. And the train moved off with Papa, and without Mama and the baby. No. Sorry. She left the baby with Papa, so she must have then- because Papa and the baby – and Erik - arrived in London... by themselves. And how Papa managed- I mean continental men did not look after children necessarily when they were babies or change nappies. That was... mother's job. But we heard this later, darling. And Mama arrived later. Thank goodness Papa's brother, Uncle Oskar, was already in London on a domestic with his wife. And they came to the station and they heard the story, so they picked Mama up the day after. It was nightmarish if you think about it.

And how did they come? Did they have a domestic visa? How did they manage...?

They had a domestic- and they came by themselves. And Tante Franka came on the domestic permit.

Already earlier?

[0:27:09]

Yes.

And your parents, when did they come to you?

They came in August... of... war broke out then. So, we were sent away, so to speak, wasn't sent away- was sent away with a happy heart, to safety. But one child- there's a famous story that one child cried so much that her father couldn't leave her on the train. Couldn't get her on another transport and both of them died. And it's not a family member but... a story of what happens when the parents break their hearts with a child crying, and take her off the train and... not nice.

Yes. But your journey was not traumatic? You... you...

I mean, nobody spoke to us. It became 'un-traumatised' when we went through Belgium, and somebody, when we opened the window... Someone opened the *kammer*- the train window.

And somebody smiled at us, and gave us a cup of cocoa. And that was in Belgium. That's a long way from Vienna to Belgium. But that was the one nice memory on the transport.

And the crossing? Do you remember the boat, or...

Yes. I remember being ill, but I didn't know why. I don't think we knew we were on a boat. When I see- I see photographs now of people going up the ladder to the boat. Yes? I don't remember that. Obviously adult people, caring people, took us up there. No, I just remember being lonely, and not knowing why.

But then your aunt...

...I didn't see Otto, on- on the boat there. The age difference- was different, so... And I saw Otto in Liverpool again when we both went to the people who paid for us to come.

But you saw your aunt when you arrived and...

Yes.

[0:29:19]

And you recognised her?

No. It was somebody I didn't know at all. Somewhere I have a letter from them. And I've kept it. And I think it's darling in the kitchen behind the...behind your vitamin pills. And they were very kind. But it wasn't Mum or Dad. It was strangers that didn't speak our language.

The people who fostered you?

That fostered us- paid for us! Who saved us!

Yes, but I meant your aunt... First you were met by...

First my aunt- we knew that aunt.

You knew your aunt.

Yes.

But in the end, you were taken to a family...

Yes, I have no idea why our aunty was there!

Yeah. And she couldn't take you because she was a domestic.

She was in domestic service already. Yes. And believe it or not, the people that she was going to be a domestic to, asked her to bake an apple strudel the minute she came in. She hadn't put her suitcase down yet. ...Oh, yes, she had guests around the table, and she expected Aunty to serve apple strudel. She had bought the ingredients. Aunty Liebermann. Anyway. She survived and managed to get to Israel... and had a daughter. That's my cousin Rosie...

Who were the people who fostered you, please?

Yes, Mr and Mrs Moorshak. You've got them down in writing.

Yes.

That's important. And they were doing this out of... the Jewish need to save Jewish children, yes? They had just come from Riga. He came first, Mr Moorshak, founded the dressmaking business... in Liverpool, and then got his wife over, who was a tiny little woman. And they lived a very happy- they had a house.

And did they have children?

No, and we had no toys to play with. We didn't know what to do with ourselves. ...So the first time in Liverpool was very lonely. But then we went to the Jewish school, and at least there were other continental children at the Jewish school. And they had a car, and we were driven to school. That was very exciting to have a car.

[0:31:49]

And what were your first impressions arriving in England? How different was it from- from Vienna?

I think I was unconscious, really. No conscious thing I think, at all. Not even cold. I mean...

Just...

Yeah. We went to a home so the home was warm in the end, after the train journeys and everything. But... we couldn't communicate. They tried in Yiddish, but we didn't speak Yiddish. ...No, I think I was just lost. Otto was easier. Mr Moorshak got on well with Otto, yes? He sat on his lap and... as an eight -year-old, you know?

Yes.

And there was a little bit of contact between them. But between me and the lady... I wanted mother, and no one else. And I couldn't manage a substitute - beyond comprehension even now. I- I caught scarlet fever. I must have caught that in Vienna already. So, when they knew I had scarlet fever, we went to the hospital. Again, totally alone. Nobody to speak to. The children teased me- the other children on the children's ward. And then somebody said something about 'mother would come' to the hospital. And who came? Mrs Moorshak of course. So, the poor woman, how she must have been hurt. I turned around and burst into tears. It wasn't mother. But she still wrote to me, darling... and afterwards, yes. ...Yes, and then we were evacuated to Chester. Again, a different thing. Yes, a different family, an English family this time. And we went to a school who accepted the refugees from Liverpool. And... The family was nice. They were called Mrs Davis. And... I was there with somebody called... Helen Jacoby. There was a Jacoby family about, but she came from Berlin, so... No, Chester was cold, windy...and a long way to school. ...And you didn't hear what the teacher said, as they had to manage with us in the main hall, in the assembly hall. And the voices didn't carry all the way. So really, as I said, school is ended.

Did you not go then, or...?

No, I didn't have the right shoes for England either.

[0:34:50]

And what happened to Otto?

And Otto was with- near us where I was - 'stationed' I nearly said. Where I was living, he was near there. So, we met up occasionally as I said. But he was not happy, but I could not help him. I couldn't take him home and I couldn't- he couldn't help me. So, we just walked occasionally a little bit together. But he was in a different school. And the people he said, now, were not particularly nice to him. I mean people were very kind to take the... evacuees in.

Yes.

Yes? But then to actually manage...

Yes...

...and work with them.

But were you happy to have left the first family or...?

No, I- I, I had thought they would pick us up and we would be able to go back to Liverpool. But obviously that wasn't possible, darling. And also then- in February I was fourteen...

Yeah...

... and all I really wanted was to be with Mama and Papa. By that time, they were in London but not together, so... And I knocked on their door when I arrived. I had the address. And they said, "What are you doing here?" They found a room, and then they went into a hostel in London which was near them. And Mama worked as a dressmaker. Also, in a Jewish shop that obviously took in refugees. And then at least they were earning a little bit of money.

So, they had come with a baby... with your brother?

They had come with a baby...

[0:36:30]

So, your father came...

But they couldn't keep the baby of course, so the baby...

What happened to...?

Woburn House had a children's home. And that's every Sunday we went to see Erik.

He was in a home?

He was – yes – a toddler.

What was the name of that home? Do you remember it?

In Highgate somewhere.

And they took the children...?

They took the children; Sunday was visiting time.

And how long was he in that home? For how long?

I can't tell you exactly.

A year, two years, or...? At the end...

Well there was a gap between Mama working in London, and Papa finding a job in Bedford. And they went to Bedford. And that's when she took Erik with her, to Bedford. She had Erik to her- herself. Until they finally got a flat in Salisbury... and father had a job to go to. And... Otto went to school- school in Salisbury. Bishop Wordsworth's School. And Erik went to kindergarten. And I went there for holidays when I wasn't working. For two weeks' holiday that we had, at that time, by law, was spent in Salisbury. So Salisbury's still a - a home town for us, in a way. Also, for my brother.

[0:38:00]

So, when you came to London, did you- did the refugee organisat- did anyone know, or were you just left to yourself?

No- yes, you had to register at Woburn House.

Yes, you did.

So, we did register, or my parents...

Yes...

...with me, registered.

And they put you in for a hostel- Woburn House?

Yes, and theoretically I was supposed to have a lunch and supper at the hostel. But when I got there, lunchtime- lunchtime at the dressmaking shop, yes?

Yes...

And went to the hostel. Fitzroy Square. There was nothing there, no one was there. So, all right- no lunch. I bought the biscuits on the way back to the shop. The day after the biscuits were sold, you got them for a penny.

What was the name of the hostel where you stayed?

Fitzroy Square.

In Fitzroy Square.

I don't think- There was a boys' hostel, and there was a girls' hostel.

And the- where did you start working? In a...?

At the Green and Grosses?

Yes...

Yes? And...

And were you an apprentice, or... what...?

I think they just accepted the refugees. They had two refugees working there. One was Polish who was much older than I was- was a young lady... compared to me. But it was company.

Yes? How much did you get paid? Do you remember?

Yeah, yes, I remember very well. [laughs] Two and six. And that's why I bought the biscuits for a penny... the following day.

So, you had to stand on your own feet, basically.

Yes, and then when I joined Young Austria, that was much easier because they were all the same people trying to stand. But they were war- war-working and I was well paid. Well... I wasn't well paid, but obviously that's... how it was. And then eventually I earned twelve and six at the end of time. Then I decided that I really wanted to work with children. And I took a course in nursery nurse. And that was nice too, and I passed with flying colours. And I

worked in the Austrian Kindergarten, which was famous in London at the time. And met up with other people.

[0:40:36]

Where did you do your course in nursery...?

Yes, it was an afternoon course, only I don't remember. It was a house with lots of people. And there was coffee smell at tea-time coming up. Very strong coffee smell. ...I was really too young to be alone. It is just not- I looked at our children when they were twelve and I thought if I had to send them away now. I mean... if you think that, I mean we didn't have a bath in the flat, darling. That was quite high up in Vienna if you had a bath room.

Yes...

I really didn't know how to wash myself. My parents washed me! Mum washed me! Yes? I mean the change is so that nobody realises what change actually was. Nowadays a twelve-year-old is really sophisticated. No sophistication on... either Otto or me, darling. But Otto learnt and studied. ...And did well.

Well, he was a bit younger.

Yes, he was.

So, what happened? While you came to your parents, what did- Otto stayed ...where?

He stayed in a British... school which took him in long before- this is before university. Before grammar school... that lived in Elstree Terrace in Swiss Cottage. There was a school – boys' school. But we lived in Fellowes Road.

Did you?

Yes. So, I came home from work to Fellowes Road while Otto was at school nearby. But I don't think we saw each other often. I don't know whether visiting time was there, or whether the school took them in as... boarders.

There was a school called Regent's College in Maresfield Gardens. Was it that one?

No.

No...?

No. Again, I could take you there, well, the road... yeah?

[0:42:52]

Yeah. ...And you said you started to work at the Austrian Nursery?

Yes.

Which one was that? Was that the one with Anna Freud or not that...?

Yes, Anna Freud was the guiding light.

Was that the...?

And Hannah Fischer was still in Vienna. Professor...

Yes?

Professor *Doktor* Hannah Fischer was my guiding light there.

So, tell us about their- the nursery. Also, their approach: what was different? I mean...

I wouldn't have known from A to B - yes? - what was different.

Yes...

I just loved children and... that's where I worked. And I did whatever was asked. And then, darling, I joined the wartime day nursery- British, yes? And then the Blitz started... and the men went into the Army. The women started to work, and they needed help with the children. So nurseries were opened all over London, and I worked in one of those nurseries.

And where was it?

Mine was in... I know... [to Walter] You came to see me, darling, in your Army uniform!

Which part of London?

I would say North.

North London.

And the doodlebugs flew overhead. And when they stopped you were alright, because they were going down somewhere else when you saw them. They didn't come down near us, I'm glad to say. And then in the evening we went to Young Austria if there was a... *Heimabend*, yes? And we discussed things, and we did things. So... But really, I don't remember eating very much. I'm just thinking of that now.

[0:44:40]

What you ate in that time...

Yeah! The money that I had really only bought biscuits and... perhaps a bun- a bun sometimes. Yes. In the hostel I had the evening meal - if they had one.

And did you stay throughout that time in the hostel?

Yes, even during the time of- of Young Austria, yes.

And which hostel? Where was it?

Yes.

In Fellowes Road?

Fitzroy Square.

Fitzroy Square.

Yeah.

So, who was in Fellowes Road?

[00:45:11]

My parents found a room together.

Aha...

And that's my happiest time, that I went to work... and came back in the evening. And Mama, who was also at work at the dress-making, cooked a little bit of supper. There was a little niche in the room. And there was a little cooker. I don't think it had a baking part. It was just a flame. And Mother cooked something. But it was home.

Yeah...

And I was told to sit down and read a book. That I remember - resting in the evening.

And do you remember any other Fellowes Road, Swiss Cottage- That was- A lot of refugees?

Yes.

Do you remember any other institutions or café shops- Kaffeehäuser there? Did they go...?

We wouldn't have had the money for cafes, no. We didn't go out to eat. What we cooked, was cooked.

Yeah...

No... I don't remember. And, I mean the Austrian Centre cooked, but we couldn't afford the money. [To Walter] We never ate at the Austrian Centre, did we, darling? Couldn't afford...

Too expensive.

But at that time I learnt to cook potatoes and... And you pick up as you go along.

And did you meet Anna Freud?

I met her, but didn't know what kind of personality she was, or why I should meet Anna Freud. She was just part of the working part at the nursery.

Yes, did meet... And was it in Maresfield Gardens, the nursery? Where was the nursery? The first one, the Austrian one you worked in?

[00:46:47]

It can't have been very far, because I walked there. Is that possible from Fitzroy Square? Not quite sure...

Mn-hnn. And what children came to...?

But then when I went to the war-time day nursery, darling, I had to catch a bus, the six o'clock bus, in pitch dark. Had to light the fires so when the children came in there was a fire in the rooms. You held the newspaper... across the fire so it would catch.

Yeah... And what sort of children came to that Austrian nursery? Who...?

Yes, and one of the parents came: “My child now talks with an Austrian accent!” [laughs]

So, did they speak German in the Austrian Nursery?

No, but they spoke English with an Austrian accent. Ah, I think that’s the funniest story ever. That was a Chinese boy; I think his father must have worked at an embassy. But, I think it had a good reputation. So...

But you were not aware of a different educational approach or anything...then...they didn’t...?

No... I was not aware, but I did learn about it as I took the course. Yes? I did learn about it. It was quite famous and is still... famous.

Yes! That’s what I mean- What was different? Was it more...? Was it different from other nursery approaches at the time?

I think it was cleaner, and a nicer, and brighter.

Right...

And a nice atmosphere. That’s the best I remember.

I mean, what I’m trying to find out. You know, was it more continental the nursery itself, you know, so...?

Yes, because I first became interested in children and nurseries when Otto – yes? - in Vienna, went to kindergarten. And I was helping. Do you remember the coloured pencils stuck in what was called “the hedgehog”?

Yes.

“The hedgehog”, right? And I was allowed to do the hedgehogs with the coloured pencils, yes? But that must have been a very special tradition that I was able to go there at all. But that’s where I fell in love with the children, and then carried on in England because I was-

Mn-hnn.

I’m sure I can think of many other things later on, but...

[00:49:22]

You liked- You enjoyed it?

I enjoyed the children, yes. Very much. And the nurseries were then well-organised. A: The food came lunchtime, yes? I had food then. And ...Yes, I had Young Austria then, and food, and the nursery and then... when I met Walter... comes another story in our life. And I heard he was back on leave. What? And he hasn’t come to see me yet? [laughs] And then he waited outside, after work. I was there. Yeah, that was the start of something... that has lasted.

Yes... yes...

So

But it sounds as if for both of you Young Austria was very important.

Very important, I think to all of us. It was like a family that you didn’t have. I had friends there. Yes? Close friends. And again, Sundays if we could, we went out for rambles, yes? On the bus. Epping Forest. Is that still around?

I think so. Yes.

Forest would be around. And then we married and the children came, which was wonderful.

But we talked about- before Walter. So, there were some - more political - refugees in the...?

Mixed up with that, yes. Yes. They were the organisers really. But we didn't realise it was very political. To us it was more like... a social life.

Yes. Do you remember some of the songs you sang? Anything?

[00:51:17]

I'm sure I'll remember if Walter starts singing them in the car... In the car!

I should ask Walter, maybe he'll remember!

He'll- he will remember. The usual Austrian youth club songs that we sang in Vienna which then took over here. I tried not to do it in German, necessarily, with other people listening. And...I think I grew up in London, really. Yes?

Yeah.

First the stages, but... London was the town. And the time I lived with Mama and Papa were the happiest because that was like family, with Otto in school, yes? But... More or less, when Erik was the baby, darling, we went to see him on Sundays when he was in the Jewish home. But we met one of the nurses that looked after the children in the home in Highgate, then retired to Bournemouth. And I'm sure it was her, yes?

Yes?

I never really met her to ask her, but... Helen Wolff – Wolfson...

By the time you met Otto were your parents in Salisbury, or where were they...?

Yes, when I saw him and I really... Yes, we never lived with Otto again, darling. Because they were then in Bedford and he- I was working in London. Not only disrupted lives, it disrupted whole families... multiplied by thousands, yes?

Yes. Yes.

And ours, also, of course. But Papa and Mama stayed steady. Yes? A focal point in Salisbury.

When did they move to Salisbury?

Pardon?

When did they move...?

They were evacuated to Salisbury.

Oh...OK.

Upstairs, third floor, toilet half a mile- half a mile downstairs.

[00:53:21]

And they stayed there?

And they stayed there... I think it was a council... building. Whenever Erik sat on the potty, he had to stay on the potty, because you had to carry it downstairs. Right...

So, when you met Walter, were your parents in Salisbury?

Yes, they were with us. And Walter's sister Erika, that is- you've seen today, came up from London to be with- with us. And Mama had put the meat in the oven, and it was burnt, because...[laughs] Oh, dear. Now little things like that come back.

And you got married- you were quite young?

I was eighteen, yes. And Walter was the ripe old age of twenty-one. [laughs] And then we went enthusiastically back to Vienna, thinking it would be a better place; we weren't welcome at all. But we managed, found a job, and Walter earned a living and we had

children. We had a little flat. We walked towards Walter who came home on the bicycle, and we walked towards him and we walked home together.

Just before Vienna, tell us a little bit about your wedding. Where did you get married?

We got married at Salisbury Registry Office... which isn't there anymore. And... It was a cold November day, and we didn't care tuppence. But Walter had to go back next day or two days after. Yeah.

[00:55:13]

And were your parents- were they supportive?

Yes.

Yes? They wanted you...

And... [to Walter] Darling, I think we went to the cinema in the evening. The rooms weren't very warm, darling, to invite you to stay there at the little hotel that Mama found. How did she find it? I have no idea.

Yes...

And it was by the river. And it was lovely. But we were cold. And... what did one do in England on Saturday nights? You went to the cinema! And that's what we did, and Mama came with us- or saw us there. And... there was a uniformed man outside at that time.

Yeah?

Yes, we were ordered to queues. And Mama said, "They just got married; can you let them in first?" And we were let in first. So, little things like that.

Yeah... And did you- And then how long was it from then until Walter came out from the Army?

Well... Walter will be able to tell you that exactly in years... But when we went to Vienna it was being repatriated by the British Army, yes, so... that was relatively easy. And at that time Jewish people were found flats for- so we did have a flat.

And did you want to go to Austria? Did you want to go?

Yes, yes, I was determined to go back. I think Mama and Papa thought that was a crazy idea. But we did still what we wanted to do.

Yeah...

Didn't make a break in the family, darling.

No...

No. Not at all.

And what were your impressions when you went back to Vienna? How was it for you?

It was bombed, darling. The rubble was still in the streets. But we had our flat so... we were safe. I don't even remember what money we had unless- until you went to earn some money darling, and you came home with a wage.

Did you have any friends? Did you have anyone from before?

Well, we knew lots of people there, darling, yes? And we did meet up, and they came to see us. And other people had children by that time. Yes? So met up with the children. Went we to the Prater to walk. And the children had greenery around them, and walked and played. Yes. Lots- lots of friends.

[00:57:47]

And did you think that you were going to stay in Vienna when you went back?

Can you repeat that?

Did you think that when you went back, that you were going to stay in Austria?

I think we went there for permanent...

Yeah....

Permanence, yes. Didn't think we would come back. And those that stayed behind probably thought that we were really... not very clever to go back, because Austria had a new life. Not that kind that we had before. I mean the protected life that one had as a child... wasn't there. Wasn't available. I felt that in the flat in England when we had just a room and- and a little annexe - yes? - that we were a family. And so, Otto there and Erik there, yes? And Otto we didn't see often because of school. It was only during holiday times. But it was a family feeling. And that's why we are most concerned that there's a family feeling in the family. With... all of us, yes?

Yes.

Next generation and some additives of humans.

Yes.

Girls and boys. Men and women.

Yeah, and did you have negative experiences in Austria, you personally, or...?

You were disappointed or... What...?

No... I mean that was your life. You went to the work in the morning, ...and children- I was with children...

Did you work in Austria?

...And cook...

Did you work in Austria?

For a very short time. Not after the second child arrived. Only with one child. Not with two. I had a nice job in a... publishing firm, which was very nice. And... it was no great shakes, the jobs I had but it was good. And I was happy doing it. Yes?

[01:00:00]

And did- Walter said that he didn't go and look for the old- for his old flat and the old areas. Did you try to find your old- your places, or was it...?

Yes, I had no funny feelings, because I wasn't aware that then we were without a home. Yes? That the furniture was gone. Yes? We had no furniture. And for Mama that must have been pretty awful, because I sure that they came from the home, whatever they could give us. Yes? And... I never- I had no such feelings. I think I shut that off. Completely.

Yeah...

And we've got next generations of our friends coming up. Did Walter tell you they're coming, after Christmas? Next generation. No, next two generations. So that will be nice. But there is a difference, yes? Between the old Austrians and young Austrians.

And then what made you decide to come back to Britain?

I think because one, Papa was ill and had heart trouble. And I thought, "Now we've come all this way. The children grew up here. We've been here. We've done what we wanted to do at the time. It's time to see... the parents." And we came ...gradually. I gave birth- I was just going to tell you the story about...

Yes...

... where I gave birth to Peter. I heard about the Semmelweis Clinic... and found out about Semmelweis. Semmelweis was a Hungarian Jew who worked in the hospital. And all the- many of the mothers who gave birth to children- gave birth to babies... died. And he had worked out because from the infectious room examining the women, they went straight to the healthy women. There was no separation between one and the other. So, they infected the healthy women. And the- and I thought, "Well, that is the clinic I want to give birth in". I mean it wasn't Semmelweis anymore, but the name was there. I wasn't so...what shall I say, conscious of what... the *Rudolfsheim* did, which is still working I'm quite sure as a- as a hospital. *Rudolfina* – *Rudolfina*, I think it was called. So, that's my story more or less. Except the children grew up... married.

What sort of identity did you want to give to your children when you raised them? What- what was important for you?

That's an interesting question, dear. ...I think just caring and good. I don't think any... that they were happy, and grew up and learnt ...And first of all learnt English properly. Yes?

[01:03:40]

Yes, because you came back here.

And there was Otto in the background with Oxford and Cambridge. Yes? Always coming to see us. We were very close- really once- Inge also close to the boys. ...Right, Walter can you help?

What about- I'll ask another question. What about Judaism? Was that important? Was that something you wanted to transmit to the children, or did you...?

Well, we did. I think that was natural. Yes? I think that was natural. And I don't think- and I don't offend Frank now, darling, I don't think I would have married a non-Jewish man. But who knows? Life is very different sometimes. And Walter was just my man!

And I asked Walter the same- Was it important that he had a similar background? Was that, you think, important for you?

It wasn't important, but as we gelled it didn't matter.

Yes.

Because we had the same background. I think it might have been more difficult if we hadn't. You'd have to get used to somebody. But he left home, missed mother and father. I was lucky when mine were at least saved in one way by domestic permits. Yes? ...So, we continued with our lives in Austria, and we continued back here. Sorry... He's more ambitious of course and he studied and- and supported us. I thought that was great.

When you came back you came to Bournemouth, to be close to your parents?

Yes, and that was lucky - wasn't it, darling - we managed to do that.

And did your children...

We sold the flat in Vienna...[coughs] and we had enough to pay down a deposit for the bungalow. So that was lovely. No furniture. Mama and Papa helped of course in the beginning. The children went to school.

[01:06:00]

And were your children close to your parents? Did they...?

They lived one road, and we lived around the corner, so, very close. Walked over every day. Cause Robert was only- Max, who is now called Robert- Max. Max was in a pushchair so every day I walked over to Mama's and Papa, and we had a cup of coffee, and...

And how do you feel- Did your parents adapt to their immigration? Did they manage to get used to- to England?

Papa never learnt English, and yet he still managed to be a businessman. Also, with continentals probably. Germans or Czech.

He continued in the...?

In the gut business. Yes- when he was. ...Sorry...[coughs] I think they found it difficult but... again, they managed to get a little house, yes? And... Papa earnt some money over here. He had a little Morris Minor. Which was just wonderful. A car in the family. I don't think he ever thought he would own a car. And... Yeah. He bought a little business in Yeovil, and we used to travel every Friday up to Yeovil and... Walter about paid the wages. [coughs]

Shall we take a...?

...Managed their lives and they had friends but mostly continental. They met up on Sundays. And there was a club, darling, here for the elderly- not elderly. To me they seemed elderly....

One moment- one moment. [sound break]

There was a continental club, and there was a lady who... repaired duvets, there was a lady who ran a little coffee shop. And... Oh, a lot of people, darling.

[01:08:09]

So, they had little circle.

They had their circle of friends, which we were sort of... helping out with. I did the teas and coffees, then- Mama was able to sit and chat. Papa had difficulties with the telephone. Of course, Papa was deaf. And at that time, you had to carry a battery in your pocket, yes? It's not like nowadays when you can put them in your ear. [coughs] [sound break?]

But yes, it was going to be the old Vienna.

Walter Kammerling: And there was no...

And there was no old Vienna.

Yeah... You went to a different Vienna.

Walter: See, I kept them apart, the before and after.

Yeah.

Walter: And nowadays they go into each other. So, I find it harder and harder to go back to Vienna.

Yeah... But you managed to go back to Vienna.

Yes, and we- I mean it seems silly but we enjoyed our lives, darling. You went to work. When you were happy at work, it was fine.

Walter: Considering.

Considering. Well, with the various remarks that you've heard, it's 'considering'. And when you hear the same things now being said again! You wonder, what on earth, is happening to people?

Yeah...

Walter: It didn't change. It's always been the same.

Herta, what, what- How do you - I asked Walter - How do you identify today in terms of your own identity? How would you- What would you call yourself?

[01:09:50]

We've never talked about this, have we, darling? What would I call myself? ...Like- like a hybrid, darling, yes? You grew up and that was the home. Yes? And then you had to spread out- become a totally different life. Yes? And then together again another different life, and still together going on. Yeah! How do you call it? I call it a hybrid.

Walter: I always say, "Ethnically, 'White British'."

We felt at home here in the end.

Yes...

...Before we went back. But still we went back.

Walter: Yeah, and then when we went back, we started to feel home to be... sort of less and less like home.

Yeah... yeah.

Yeah, well- not here and not there.

Yeah...

Next generation.

Yes.

Totally different.

What is the next- how do they feel?

How do they feel? Well, they're British people now, darling, yes? And they work with British people. And... But you see, and then things come in. Max thought that we perhaps didn't have enough money, yeah, for taxis and things. So, he opened an account for us. And what's the code word? 'Vienna'. That's from Max, yes? You would think 'Bournemouth' or whatever, yes? It's little things like that. We've taken that over, darling. But that's not necessary. But what he thought at the time was nice. Yes? And...

Is there something from the from- from the 'old Vienna' which you miss? From Austria?

Only our nice family life. Yes? And being mollycoddled- or being loved, perhaps, is a better word. Mollycoddled, because you were the only one, yes?- at the time.

Yeah, because in a way despite the fact that your parents came, the family structure was...

Gone.

... gone.

Gone. Completely gone.

Yes, it changed.

It appeared in little bits. Fellowes Road. Yes? Or- then in Bournemouth back again. No, we had time together which... I never met up with Walter's family. They never had time together again. Multiplied by... millions.

Yeah.

[01:12:34]

And my little cousin from Prague, darling, to see him on the list with Tante Litzi, on the wall of Terezin. And one word hit me. It said, "Perished". Well... Horrible. How he survived eight years is another miracle, darling. But... [personally?] ...

Walter: You're right, it shouldn't be "Perished"; they were murdered.

Yeah... And how do you think your life would have been- would have been different if you hadn't been forced to emigrate?

How would it have been different? Well, we don't know whether Walter and I would have met up. That's one thing, darling. Walter once he said wisely, he said, "Yes, we would have met up." But I mean you can't guarantee that. I don't know whether I've been- I would have been so close to a youth club... as we were forcibly, but not forced by us, but forced by the

historic situation. ...But it happened. How would our life have been different? At twelve I wouldn't have known what I wanted to do. Yes? So, I really can't say "I always wanted to be..." something or another. No, I don't. And you didn't at fifteen either did you? Did you want to be somebody? An engineer? Always? Oh... Good... Well then, I wouldn't have been on the *Kindergärtnerin* [nursery teacher], yes? Chil- with children- That was not my idea at twelve. Although I visited Otto in *Kindergarten* and liked it. And it was continuation in a way, but not consciously, darling. It was just... happened.

Or the other question, how do you think did it shape your life, your experiences?

Well... You live through life. You don't really... think about it, unless either things are basically wrong, or you can't stand it.

Yeah...

That hasn't happened.

[01:15:06]

And did you talk for example... to your children, about- about your experiences, about the Kindertransport?

They know a lot, but... And they know that Walter's been interviewed and he goes to schools and they've listened to talks in schools. And there are records and records of it. So... they're not against it. They're not... But understand that they don't have to survive the way that we had to survive in some situations, or get over things.

Did they want to go to Vienna with you, for example, or the grandchildren?

Well, they- both boys went to Terezin, to Auschwitz with Walter. That was wonderful to know that they were with him. And friends and Peter came to Terezin now, 2000. Found Tante Litzi. I couldn't quite find her flat. It was a house, yes... But... we did. It was the right street and right area, yes? And I did find- but to go to Terezin is... mind-blowing. But very 'happy', 'happy' in inverted commas, to find both their names on the wall. So that they were

there. So many people got lost. Tante Wally, Tante Wally- we know she managed, they were non-status. They had no status. No nationality. And... they managed to get to Paris from Vienna Neustadt... and never arrived in Vichy France. So that your mind says, "What happened on the journey?" And you can hear the Germans say, "*Juden raus!*" Yeah? And being shot on the way. And my cousin Susi, who was a beautiful fourteen-year-old girl... So, all these things... It's part of your life. Probably has shaped us in some way we- whatever we've become. Life has made of us in a way. That's everybody. I can't put it any better than that. We adore our sons. We adore our grandchildren. One great-granddaughter. It is just lovely. Our nieces and nephews... That card is actually interesting. If you just take it out and look now- or just look at the front of the card. Pull hard, Frank. What the card says on the outside, yeah?

Maybe show it to us- to the camera.

This is our lovely grandson Alex, and his wife and his daughter. "There are two things you give your children. Roots and wings."

Can you show us the picture? If you turn it around? Aha...

Lovely. And I thought that was so moving... from a grandson, yes?

Yeah...

This card from the grandson also darling. He couldn't come to a meeting. Can I get up and get the card?

Not at the moment. Not at the moment.

It's also a beautiful card that just says, "I'm sorry I can't be there", yes? Nice. Yes...

[01:18:58]

But while Walter speaks in school, you- you don't speak in school. You don't like... public speaking?

No, because it takes an hour and something for Walter to speak, which is already over-long for the schools.

Yeah...

So, it's... not good. I did in the beginning I think once or twice I spoke as well. But it was better just to let- because Walter can do something of the political situation in Vienna before he starts, yes?

Yes...

And so do others. We now have met others who speak and know many people.

Yes.

But other people can say, "I was in concentration camp. I got out." Yes? It hits home. While our story is still a story, yes? But they have to identify with in little parts anyway. Yes? But nothing horrible except maybe your parents. And when we had one of the girls at school said she went home after the talk- did Walter tell you?

No, go ahead...

And kissed her mother, and said she loved her.

Oh...!

That is the result- if you- if you want a result.

And did you ever go to the Kindertransport reunion, or to those meetings?

Oh yes!

Yes? You go...?

The '88 one. That was the big one.

Walter: I think we only went once...

We've got the book, yes. We've got the book of it, and so many...

But you went recently now to the plaque of the Austrian Centre? Did you go to the unveiling?

Yes, I- Liesl Grunberger and they came But they- did Liesl tell you this?

No, actually she didn't. I think was- when was it? I think it was after I did the interview.

Oh, it was long- Yes, it was... long ago. When we could still travel.

And what do you think of the plaque? Do you think it's important to put a plaque up?

No, I was impressed with the Liverpool... suitcase. With the figures with the suitcases is in their hands, and that's exactly how it- two vests, two shirts, two socks. It's all we came with.

Do you think it's important to have these monuments?

Very much so, darling. Whatever they do to it, darling. Well, people walk by and say dirty words. ...No, you can only say, when you speak to Otto Hutter who is also magnificent, darling, yes?- what he has achieved in his life. It's lovely to know that we contributed. What did I? I didn't contribute anything. But...

[01:21:47]

Yes, you did.

Peter once said- Peter once said that when visitors came to the school, his teacher always chose him to show the people around, because he was polite [laughs] and spoke nicely.

Mn-hnn.

And Peter says, “I think the teacher likes me.”

Yes... And Herta do you have a message for anyone who might watch this interview in years to come... based on your experiences?

I think whenever bad things happen to you in life, carry on, and make the best of it. And... And continue to live, whatever life you can. If you find a partner as well, that’s wonderful. Share children as well, grandchildren... Super-duper. But... Carry on. Carry on. Some good might come of it.

And I have to ask you – I didn’t ask this to Walter - what is the secret - and after seventy-two years - of marriage? [Herta laughs]

Walter: To get the right partner. And I hit the jackpot.

What do you think, Herta?

I didn’t hear what you said, darling.

Walter: I said, “Picking the right partner. And I hit the...”

[01:23:31]

Oh, I see. Well, that’s the begin- well I don’t think Walter stood a chance once I chose him. [laughs] But... the secret. I think tolerance is one of the things.

Walter: And bearing in mind that - even if you don’t agree - she’s the one I fell in love with.

Sort it out. Yeah... How- how can you put it in a nice saying?

Walter: Well- that’s it. It’s- you know, sometimes when I go to the Yiddish songs, they- was it last time? They had some songs. Azoy muss es seyn. It was the song of a young couple and

their parting and that's how it's got to be. And I disagree with it entirely. Cause they're still the same people they fell in love with, and if they have *seichel* [wisdom], they sit down, talk it over, sort it out and start being happy again!

Yes, tolerance, I think.

Tolerance. Herta, is there anything else you haven't- we haven't discussed you would like to add, which I haven't asked you? ...Anything else?

Walter: Yes, it's a good question. There are a thousand things one hasn't discussed but one thing about these about twenty-four hours later.

Yes, that might be possible but maybe think of something right now?

I don't really know what to say. Can you repeat that exactly?

Yes, any person you'd like to mention? Maybe tell us a little bit what happened to your siblings in England. And what careers- What did they do, your brothers?

Our siblings and all our friends... had jobs. The main things was that you worked. Otherwise, you had no money; you couldn't do anything!

[01:25:34]

Walter: No, the question is about your brothers...

What happened to your brothers? Yeah...

Walter: What happened to your brothers, Erik and Otto?

Now Erik, whom we saw the other day, and his wife and their three girls. There were four girls in the Gross family, and Erik and Sheila have the three girls and they're all lovely. ...I really don't know. My mind's gone blank, darling.

What did they do - just Otto?

Otto? Otto was the most wonderful brother to me, darling, really.

And he became?

I think we loved each other, yes? Not- not just as brothers and sisters.

And he became a filmmaker?

Yes, and I went upstairs. I thought I still had it by my bedside underneath the cupboards. But it's not there, so it must be with his things now.

And Erik, what happened to...? What did he...?

Erik became a businessman... and a good businessman, and a fair businessman. And he now had – if one can say that - a little bit of cancer. And he survived that with hospital treatment. And... he has a lovely wife and lovely three children who look after them, as well as reciprocally, and grandchildren...

So, you are now quite a big family.

Twenty-eight people sort of things. What with Otto -not now, darling. And Uncle Ludwig. Your uncle.

Walter: Well, cousin, basically. Very distant cousin on mother's- no, actually my father's side. He's father's second cousin.

We really haven't got anybody that's cross with the other and doesn't speak to them, you know? Some families are, "Oh, I don't speak to her" or, "to him."

That's nice.

We haven't got that. So even if we manage to keep that in this...

Walter: Not entirely. Luise....

Louise... She has- that's unusual, but she was never part of the family was she, darling? She refused to...

Walter: That was by- by her own choice.

Yes, I don't call... Her daughter is- Otto's- Otto's daughter. Otto has one daughter, named after one of the four girls of the Grosses.

Aha...

There was Tante Wally, yes? Tante Trude- Margaret. Tante Litzzi. And Otto's daughter was named after Tante Wally whom we were very fond of, yes? So, Peter, our Peter, is named after the Peter who perished in Theresienstadt. Max is named after Walter's father.

Yes...

Walter: Peter perished in Auschwitz.

Yes, I did say that.

So, you chose the names to commemorate.

To commemorate the family, yes.

[01:28:40]

Herta thank you very, very much for sharing your story, and talking to us about your...

Thank you for making me tell it! Bit disjointed I would think, at the end, darling, but...

No...

Or not at the end - altogether.

No, it's absolutely not disjointed and I hope you will like it when you- when you are going to watch it. Yes, thank you very, very much.

Thank you for coming and... doing Walter and me.

We are not quite finished, because we have to look at the photos. Just one moment...

Come closer.

Now I've asked you already about your secret of seventy-two years of marriage. Is there anything else you'd like to say about each other, about your sort of joint... refugee experience, so to speak?

Walter: Yeah. Why didn't I marry her earlier?

Earlier?!!

[everyone laughs]

A child bride, darling, already at eighteen!

That would have been difficult, yeah?

Walter: No, it's... I think...

Well, A, you've got to love the person irrespective of- of faults that you might find as you go on in life as you go on, yes? ...I'm sure you can find faults with me and I can find faults with you...

Walter: Please tell me! And I don't...

You mean on no uncertain terms? [laughs] No... No, again, it comes down to tolerance, darling, yes? That you have to...

Walter: It's- It's more than that. It's- it's...

But it's love that really counts.

Walter: You realise that this is the one you fell in love with. And as such, she hasn't changed.

Neither looks like it, not anything else.

[01:30:37]

Walter: Oh, don't be silly. She looks like an eighteen-year-old.

Oh, yeah...

Yeah...

Walter: Eighteen plus.

Yes? [Herta laughs]

Walter: Yeah...

I wonder what other people- what other people say. Why their marriage has lasted long.

Yes. I think tolerance. I think tolerance.

Is there nobody comparable? Anyone you've interviewed?

Well, often we don't- firstly we don't interview people together. You know, and...

Walter: And tolerance alone, this is- I don't think this sounds as if you have to. You just bear it because you're tolerant.

No, no, those people are not tolerant.

Walter: It's more. Oh, yes, it's more than tolerance. It's got to be love.

But to believe in the person, you've got to love- but people interpret love differently- when you love the person.

Walter: It's interesting. When Herta does something that annoys me and some this and that, and then I realise - she does it because she cares.

Aha...

Walter: And it makes a lot of difference.

[01:31:42]

But you also had a joint sort of vision.

Walter: Yes. Yeah.

Yes, indeed.

Walter: We wanted the same things.

Yes. Yes. That is also important. But sometimes people meet and see each other across the railway line and something and they... team up and they stay together.

Walter: Well, I saw you across - not the railway lines...

But it happened. It happens...

Walter: Yes, I was very lucky.

...In films. Romantic films, yes?

Walter: Yes, I married when I was twenty-one and I always wonder, what kept me? No, she's-

[Bea laughs] Yes. But there are...

And I say- and the people laugh, darling, obviously - I say, "He's only on trial." [laughs]

Aha... Still on trial. And were there other people in Young Austria, in fact? Were there people getting married? I mean, was it a place to meet?

[01:32:38]

Walter: Yes...

Yes. Stayed together...

Walter: Liesl and Richard Grunberger, they got married. But, who else... that really lasted this- that lasted long and they stayed together? I don't know.

And what a horrible way to wake up to find Richard... dead next to her. I'd be traumatised I think by that vision. The poor girl. I went to see her when I was in London. Yes? They had a...

Walter: I was singing Yiddish songs and she went to see Liesl.

Aha! So, do you want to sing us something? Ah- Maybe you remember one of the songs from the Heimabende? Do you remember anything?

Walter: Yes, well there are a few songs. They're all political, you know- They're all...

[01:33:23]

Anything that you remember?

Walter: Yes.

Go on, then...

[Walter sings]

Wie gehts dem Ritter von zu enden? [inaudible] *And what's the other one? What was that? Yeah, that. If somebody dies, there's "Unsterbliche Opfer"* Walter sings:

*Unsterbliche Opfer
ihr sanket dahin.
Wir stehen und trauern,
voll Herz, Schmerz und Sinn.
Einst aber, wenn Freiheit den Menschen erstand
und aller Euer Sehnen Erfüllung fand,
dann werden wir singen
wie ihr einst gelebt.
Zum Höchsten der Menschheit empor nur gestrebt!*

[Translation: Immortal victims, you fell down. We stand and mourn full of heart, pain and sense. One day, when freedom arises for mankind and all your yearning will be fulfilled, then we will sing the way you once lived. Let's aspire to the highest (principles) of mankind!]

Walter: That's one of them.

Thank you!

Walter: I've had this for about forty, fifty years!

Well, you remember it!

Walter has a lovely voice.

Walter: Do you know what you just said?

Walter has a lovely voice.

Walter: No, you said, “Walter had a lovely voice.”

[Everyone laughs]

Ok. Herta and Walter, thank you very much, again, for allowing us to interview you.

Thank you for bearing with us. Thank you for bearing with us, no?

Walter: Tell me, you said your father lives in Munich...

[End of interview]

[01:35:04]

[01:35:11]

[Start of photographs]

Photo 1

This is a lovely photograph of the happy times that we had when we were children. I think Otto must have been about a year old, and I was probably ten, eleven...twelve. I remember the sitting well with the photographer and my mother trying to place us in the right area and everybody smiling on the happy occasion of taking the children's photograph.

Photo 2

This photograph always makes me very happy. They're all smiling. My father, my mother and Erik- was six months old. On the Donaukanal in Vienna. We never saw the baby until they- all three of them came to England on a hazardous journey...via Vienna and the continent. But it meant that my mother survived the birth, and was happy and smiling. And my father very proud of his latest, youngest son. So, we were already in England when this photograph was taken. And we didn't meet up with Erik when [until] he was older.

Photo 3

This photograph reminds me of happy holidays that we all spent together. And usually in the forest, or near the forest or within walking distance of a forest. This was taken in Vöslau and we rented a room in which everything took place. The cooking and the bathing and the washing. But our bathwater for the evening was warmed by the sunshine out in the garden. And it was wonderfully tepid to get into it at night. My father could only come at the weekends, so this is my mother and my brother Otto and myself. On holiday. Walking... and looking forward to the weekend when Papa would be with us. ...I would think... Otto was about four or five, so he was born in '29 so, so early [19]30s would be about right.

Photo 4

This is a photograph that was the very first one that was taken in England in the garden of our guardians who saved our lives and guaranteed for us. It was the garden of the house of Mr and Mrs Moorshak who originally came from Riga. And he... worked in a dress shop. I think he owned it. And in order to bring his wife over as well. They were lovely people, but- and this is a happy photograph. Although we really expected in our house to see our parents again and we would be living with our parents. But this did not happen. But we were happy there... until I was fourteen, and they were the most kind people possible.

[01:38:46]

Photo 5

When my parents came over with baby Erik, there was of course no accommodation for them to live a life together with a child. And Woburn House, the Jewish organisation in London, had organised a children's home for Jewish children who came over. And the parents could not live with them because it wasn't possible. So, this is Erik in the children's home. And the parents were allowed to visit once a week, on Sundays. And I dread to think how tough it must have been for my mother every week to go there and then go away again. And we all shed a tear. Not in his presence of course. But I remember when Mama once got hold of a banana when they came in from America, and thought that would be the best treat for Erik. And of course, he had never tasted anything like that before, and spat it out. But nice memories of playing with Erik and us playing together for an hour. Perhaps it was two hours. But of course, many children then started crying. And it must have been tough for the nurses to look after the children afterwards who were all very tearful, if they understood what it all meant.

Photo 6

Another photograph of the children's home with Erik on the Sundays. And this is Otto, Erik, myself, cuddling up together for the photograph which... I think my mother took with our one and only camera. A box camera. Roughly... Erik came over in September, say, two years later. '41? Yes.

Photo 7

These are my lovely parents, Trude and Heinrich Plaschkas. Happily walking in Bournemouth. Saved by England. Not by the Kindertransport, but safely came to England with Erik, the child, the youngest one. Walking happily together as always. Only happy memories of seeing my parents like this together. In unison, chatting to each other whilst walking. Thank you.

Photo 8

This is a photograph of the choir that was formed by Young Austria. And Young Austria was an organisation where many of the refugee children gathered together and found comfort with other friends. And my friend is also on the photograph as part of the choir. And we went to youth – English youth clubs - even in the Blitz to sing songs and... make Austria popular and think of a resistance that might be taking place in Austria. To help the war effort win much quicker over here, the war much quicker, over here. But it was lovely. We learnt new songs that we didn't know before. And we had a wonderful choir master called Erwin Weiss who held us all in check before we were too enthusiastic. But it was lovely evenings with the choir which Young Austria provided for us in a way, and kept us together and made us meet up with each other.

[Herta and Walter speak very briefly]

[01:43:05]

Photo 9

This is our wedding photograph, and it makes me smile every time I look at it. Here was a young eighteen-year-old girl marrying her husband of twenty-one! Fully matured and lovely.

And of course, on the 11th of November 1944 it was raining, which we didn't care about at all. It was a very happy occasion. My mother worked on a little dress for me, which in war time, material was not very special. But it was special for me. And flowers. And although the meat burnt, because that little piece of meat that was the weekly ration was left in the oven while we got married and burnt. Nevertheless- still happy memories. And Erika and Walter's sister came up from London to be with us. And little Erik was still in the Kindergarten, so wasn't on the picture. Lovely- again, lovely memories.

Photo 10

This is a photograph of us, surrounding- and our student! We took in students in order to have some money. And... Walter found this car... second hand, for fifteen pounds. And if I remember rightly, he was more under the car than in the car. But it worked. You had to hit the side of the car for the indicators to come out... and back again. But we were the proud owners of a car! This was also in Bournemouth. Our very first home. When we sold our - were able to sell our flat in Vienna - we were able to put down a deposit very near to where my parents lived. In fact, around the corner. So, we were always very close together.

Photo 11

This is our sixtieth wedding anniversary, under the *chuppa* of Bournemouth Reform Synagogue. There were many, many friends seating- seated, and being with us. This photograph always reminds me of two little children coming to England... and then multiplying in some ways with nieces and nephews... that were saved- that were born later. With my brother Otto and brother Erik on the photographs and their wives... and the children that were born around the time. Grandchildren and nieces and nephews. A lovely, lovely souvenir of our sixtieth, with all the family that there was at the time. Together.

Herta, thank you very much for sharing your photos and your story with the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. Thank you.

It's a pleasure.

[End of photographs]

[01:46:26]

