

IMPORTANT

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AJR

Winston House, 2 Dollis Park

London N3 1HF

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Freddy
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	24 November 1928
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

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**REFUGEE VOICES**

Interview No. RV183
NAME: Freddy Kosten
DATE: 6 July 2016
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]**[0:00:11]**

Today is the 6th of July 2016. We are conducting an interview with Mr Freddy Kosten. My name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.

What is your name please?

Freddy Kosten.

And what was your name at birth?

Manfred Kösten.

And where were you born?

In Vienna, Austria.

And when were you born?

When? ...24th November 1928.

Mr Kosten thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. Can you please tell me about your family background?

Family background... My mother was born in Krakow to a large family, most of whom did not survive the Holocaust years, and the war years. She married my father, who was born in the Ukraine but had lived most of his subsequent life in Vienna. So, they married in Vienna. Set up their home there, and my sister and I were born in Vienna. You could say we were a respectable middle-class family. Known for- my sister and myself were well dressed. It seemed to be a great thing, at all times: neat and tidy, et cetera, et cetera. And reasonably intelligent, inherited from our parents. And then

uprooted after the *Anschluss* and German takeover of Austria. So, life in Vienna for me was relatively brief, and I came to England at the age of ten.

[0:02:06]

OK. Let's just go- before we come on to your arrival in England, let's go back a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit how- how did your parents meet? Did they meet in Vienna? Did your mother come already herself, or what do you know?

As far as I know, they did not meet in Vienna, no. I think... my father must have met somebody who decided to introduce him to this Cracow family. How he got to Cracow, I don't know, at that stage. The war intervened. The Great War - First World War. So, they were already... more or less... betrothed at the outbreak of war. Though the chances of my father surviving I would think were fairly low. But he did survive. He fought on the Russian and Italian fronts on behalf of the Austrian Army. He... was actually an official war photographer, as part of his duties. I still have the receipt for the camera that he bought, and the permit that he was given to... record the war on the Russian front. And lots of his war photographs, including some of them reproduced in magazines at the time. So ...he survived the war and married my mother I think shortly afterwards, maybe around 1920, that sort of time.

In Cracow, or...?

...I don't know, but my guess might be they married in Vienna. I would think so. And we only visited Cracow ...not every year. Every few years. I remember a visit in 1936, is one of my early memories. ...Maybe even one in 1932, something like that. But not frequently. And the last one I think would have been '36, yes.

And were there grandparents and aunts and uncles, or...?

Well, my mother's mother died in childbirth. And ...her father married again. And that's what I knew as my grandmother. I have a feeling there are all sorts of family rumours that he was married three or four times, or maybe more, I don't know. But... I have a picture of him with my grandmother whom I barely knew, really. So...my mother's siblings were then half-siblings. And they were not all children of the same mother.

Right...

So that puts it at least at three marriages, I think. Complicated.

[0:05:13]

Yeah...

And we never got to the bottom of all of it. It was- just a background. And the siblings were- all loved my mother very much. She was a bit of a pet. She was the last one born to her – to her father. And I think they were, yes, one of them managed to emigrate to Israel. One of them came to visit us in England in 1939. Decided to go back, and died as a consequence. And the others either died earlier or died during the war years.

And when your parents married, what- did your father have a profession already or was he...?

Yes, he was already working... probably in the medical instrument supply business. He worked for two fairly famous Austrian firms... I think Reichert and... the other name escapes me but anyway, that was right until the outbreak of war he was engaged in that, and found eventually occupation in England, on the same lines.

What got him into- did he ever talk about what got him into that particular profession into medical instruments...?

He wrote a little story which I've got. He typed out several pages of how he came... to England, i. e. what he did earlier. It doesn't seem to have been particularly planned; he met people and soon was introduced, and started working. He was clearly an autodidact. He educated himself as far as I can tell completely, 'cause he had to leave the little village near Kiev... after his father became incapacitated after a fight with a drunken peasant, or... words to that effect. So, he moved to Vienna to be- to gain a better education and started learning languages and worked... utilising that.

So which languages did he speak?

Well, he started with Russian, and then Czechoslovak. He taught himself French and English. He always knew Polish as well. ...Hungarian I guess, yes. So, as I said, I used to tease him a bit about speaking all these languages badly. But some of them of course he spoke – he spoke well.

And what languages did he speak- what language did he speak with your mother?

[0:07:58]

...If he got cross, he used to curse in Polish, that I know. They could speak Polish of course. She was a wonderful - apparently ...Polish language ...speaker. He spoke Polish. But in, I guess in Vienna they spoke German. But rarely did - did we hear Polish words. I think my sister learnt a little Polish. I never did.

And where did they settle in...in Vienna?

Well, straightaway I think in this Karl-Meißl-Straße where- from where my sister was born, I think. I don't know of any other address in Vienna.

Which Bezirk?

Twentieth Bezirk. It was a... pleasant place. A couple of minutes' walk from this Augarten which my sister and I played in quite a lot and skated in, in the winter, I remember. But it was a fairly- I mean, when one thinks about the standard of living, of course, it was as high- I sometimes compare it to our- the standard of living here, to the standard of living our American relatives have. So...it was a fairly low standard of living in those days.

In which way?

Well... Bathrooms were relatively infrequent, I think. I had a school friend... And I remember my not exactly surprise, but... admiration for the fact that they had a bathroom. And I thought it was rather odd that they had a toilet in the bathroom as well... instead of in a separate room. So, I- we didn't have a bathroom, as I remember it. I would guess we were moderately poor rather than otherwise.

So, was the toilet probably outside?

No, no, no. No, no, no it was in - in the flat. It wasn't that bad. These were... Apartment houses... with a concierge of sorts. All much the same sort of... level.

Which floor, where did you live on? What?

We lived on the second floor I would guess. There was a basement floor, and then level one and two. Mezzanine. ...I don't have a- well, I - I should have memories of that. I have some, but... we had to move, actually. We were thrown out of the flat. Some Nazi sympathiser wanted ours, which was rather nice. But we moved into another apartment in the same apartment house, briefly, before I- my sister and I got... on the Kindertransport to England.

[0:11:00]

Yeah... So, as you said, you were young. What other memories do you have from- what are your earliest memories from Vienna?

Well, the Prater of course, which was at the fairground. And particularly ghost railways on that. And some remarkable... I've forgotten what they would be called. They were sort of dioramas - that's right, I think is the word - which were activated. I remember one was the Lisbon earthquake, where the town disintegrated before your eyes. It was beautifully done. So, there was the Prater, there was the Augarten... We went on holiday... I think twice at least to Gmunden, one of the resorts. Wolfgangsee... was "Weißes Rössl". We went to Poland... I do remember. One of them, I fell into a crevasse. We climbed some mountain or other in Zakopane, which was a ski resort, with Polish relatives. And I ran ahead... and found what looked like a lake covered in ice, a small one. And decided to walk on it, and fell through. [half laughs] And... When they- I remember them coming after me. Not searching for me but thinking I was ahead and finding me- I wasn't ahead, until my head popped up through the ice. [laughs] And they decided to pull me out. So, it was a bit a lucky escape, I think. That was near Zakopane. So, it was a happy childhood I think, yes... Gmunden, Salzburg... That's about it.

And what about...

Wolfgangsee yes, I remember. Wolfgangsee.

Wolfgangsee.

Yeah.

What sort of circles did your parents mix with? Do you- what...?

Mnn... Well, it was mainly Jewish circles in Vienna. Not orthodox at all and fairly lax about observance. I don't have many memories of this. The memories are confined really to more or less our last year, when we had some fairly tragic things. People turning up weeping and saying, "Our father has been taken away," or... that sort of thing. My sister and I were given great freedom, I think. Maybe we were rather innocent. To leave the flat and to go to the Augarten and go to visit our friends... when it was actually quite dangerous to do so. One memory I have very clearly. I was in the Augarten, and had the bad luck to run into thirty or forty little boys of my own age. A gang out to... find and beat up Jewish children if they could. I didn't realise that for a while. ...And they certainly found me. And I was rescued by my sister's then boyfriend... who was running away at the time, from some SS type on a horse. Who was trying to impress his girlfriend, or girlfriends, by showing off with a horse and what they could do to Jewish teenagers. Now this... friend was together with two others. They were both sort of fifteen, sixteen I should think. And they had run away from this guy on a horse, and suddenly appeared and realised that I was about to get some sort of unpleasant treatment, at which they threatened the thirty-odd boys who all ran away fast. And I ran in the other direction, and they also disappeared. This was a guy called [Eric] Pleskow who went on to become I think Vice President of United Artists, and has five Oscars of which I have a picture of him in his Connecticut home.

[0:15:51]

And when was that incident? When was that?

When was that? That would have been in 1938, possibly '39. ...I would think... No, it wasn't winter that I remember it. Something like that, yes. Well during the year of occupation of Austria before the war started.

Yes, so tell us a bit about your own schooling and when things changed for you as a...

Well, they changed completely... on arrival in England. I mean... I was fairly bright. Yes, there's one nice instance that comes to mind. My father in Vienna had a... a set of bookshelves... protected by glass doors. And I used to lie on the floor sometimes, look at the bottom shelf and sometimes take out books from there and read them. I started reading rather fairly early. There's a point to this. When my mother met my first teacher. I suppose that would have been at the age of six, at the Volksschule, she unwisely said that I could read. In fact, she said, "*Er ist sehr belesen*", i.e., 'He reads a

lot.” And so, the teacher was taken aback, because I think they were looking forward to teaching me read or something. And he turned to me and he said, “Well, what are you reading now?” And I said, “*Also sprach Zarathustra*” [Thus spoke Zarathustra], by Nietzsche, which happened to be one of my father’s little books. And I had taken it out, and I had remembered the title. And I had turned the pages. And I think the teacher laughed fairly heartily and he never let me forget that story. But it was a true story. Anyway, so I learned to read fairly early on. ...And did quite well in school. I still have the - the *Zeugnisse* [reports] in the family album. And... But then came the great break. I... was told to learn English. I didn’t I think do so. And for a while after I arrived in England, I refused to learn English, my sister tells me.

But even before England, you had to change schools in Austria?

Yes. Briefly. We had to- both my sister and I went to this Jewish *Gymnasium* called the Chajes Gymnasium. There was no other option. I don’t remember much of my time there. I think I took some exam and didn’t do at all well. That I do remember. And... it was mystery to everybody why I didn’t do well, but I didn’t do well.

Well, it was a time of turmoil, so...

I suppose.

Do you personally remember the Anschluss?

[0:19:08]

Yes, I remember the- I had the visual memory of a newspaper the day after the Anschluss... which came out with a monster headline “*Umschwung!*” [“Turnaround”] or something. It was not a Nazi sympathising newspaper, and I think they disappeared from view very rapidly. I remember people marching in the streets. I remember Jewish women being made to scrub pavements which was a- One could see from our window. I don’t honestly think... I was bright enough to be affected deeply by it all. I just sort of accepted this is what was happening and... eventually got on a train and got out of it.

What about your neighbourhood? Were there many Jews in the twentieth Bezirk?

Oh yes, yes. The bottom, the basement was occupied by a Nazi sympathiser of many, many years’ standing. So, he became a big noise as soon as the ...the Anschluss happened. My father got away with a lot, because he looked like Hitler. He had this little moustache and he could walk the streets without being accosted for looking Jewish. So, I think it took him a long time, longer than others, to make up his mind that we had to leave. And by some incredible – unbelievable - stroke of luck, when he made up his mind that we had to leave, he managed to sort that out. But that’s a story I’ll get to if you wish.

OK. So, he could- he looked sort of not Jewish, so he...

He looked not Jewish and I guess, I suppose as a family we didn't look... not the "Stürmer"- type Jewish caricature of course, but very few people did. But... I could say we could 'pass' without being accosted.

Yeah. But what about in your friends for example? Your own friends? What friends did you have and did that change after the Anschluss?

I think it was more Jewish friends than otherwise. There was always a group sitting not together necessarily in the school because we weren't- I think we were allocated places but... I think I remember more contacts with Jewish children than others. But ...it wasn't on the religious grounds. We didn't attend synagogue or anything like that.

[0:21:57]

You didn't go to any synagogue?

Very rarely. You know the standard days, maybe Yom Kippur or something, but...

And which synagogue did you go to?

No idea. I have no idea. ...No. Didn't leave much impression... except I once climbed on some sort of a lectern when I shouldn't have done, and was told to get down. And certainly... Well, we can get on to religion afterwards if you wish, because I - I changed completely in my own mind. But I was never, and... neither were my parents, in any sense observant. We were not kosher or anything like that. It was very much assimilated type...but still Jewish, and known that we were Jewish.

And how did your father's professional life change after the Anschluss?

[Takes big breath] He was kept on. ...I think he says so in somewhere... he recorded this. He was kept on certainly for a while, sort of undercover, by his employer. ...I think he was still gainfully employed at the time of our Kindertransport. I'm not sure that he'd actually been formally dismissed, or if he had been formally dismissed, he was... somehow kept working. So again, we were extremely lucky.

But you said in the house there was the sort of Nazi...

Oh yes, yes, yes.

So how did that...have any consequence?

Well, he came and shouted at us once. That's one of my memories; he definitely did.

Saying?

Sorry?

What was he saying?

[0:23:57]

Well, something like, “We are the masters now.” That type of approach. He didn’t get violent not physically violent. I’m not too sure if anybody in our house was actually forcibly removed to a concentration camp. I don’t remember any tragedy in the house. There were other houses where we knew people had jumped to their deaths from the windows, and nearby, and so on. It was all pretty fraught. And I think I was a fairly stupid ten-year-old - ten-year-old by then. It didn’t hit me at all.

But you were protected also by your parents. And by your older sister...

Yes of course. But we had to move schools; that was quite clear. The first week after the Anschluss, when I went back to school... I immediately assumed my role as prefect next to the teacher. Ignoring signs and whispers from Jewish children in the front row, “Come down. Come down.” I was that stupid. And I waited until the teacher actually said, “Well, I think you can’t be prefect any more. Why don’t you sit there...” or something. So, in retrospect, I was astonishingly either innocent or stupid or both – about the whole... Nazi business.

Well- or protected, by your parents.

Perhaps yes, and I got away without any real trauma. But the Augarten incident and so on. There were other... near misses. Put it that way. Cause we were there for a whole year.

Yeah...yeah. And when was the first time, when was emigration discussed? You said people who came to your house, who said- or who started leaving. I mean...

Oh, I knew other people were emigrating. My father said very little. I think he hoped it would all pass off... [ironic half laugh] ...and return to normal, for much longer than other people did. But... for about after about six months I would guess, of the Anschluss, he realised that things were serious. And then came the extraordinary story of how he - he managed to get us to England.

[0:26:39]

Please.

Can I take a break for a glass of water?

Yes, we can take a break.

This goes back to the year 1907, to be precise... when he'd not long arrived in Vienna, ...but already was making himself known as somebody who could speak English and French. And his employer at that time- I think he was in a clerical sort of position, making use of his auto-education. And particularly languages. And in 1907 this employer said to him, "We have a colleague coming from England - an Englishman - who doesn't know any German. I want you to take him on, and teach him some German and show him around Vienna." And so on, which my father then did. And this Englishman had a very unusual name. Kingheart. I would spell it out for you but I don't think it matters now that that's what his name was. But it was unusual, and it stayed in my father's memory. And... thirty years plus later, when he said he was getting desperate ...to emigrate, he remembered this name! He found some sort of address, whether an international directory, whatever. And he wrote to this Mr Kingheart in London- I think was near London. I don't know. And quite extraordinarily he got a letter back, some weeks later, from a Mr Kingheart who said, "I'm not the Kingheart that- but the one you addressed the letter to," ...sorry. He said, "I'm not the Kingheart to whom you addressed your letter, but he forwarded it to me, because he already had Jewish children staying with him from, fleeing Hitler's Austria..." and so on. And... curiously enough, "...but he also discovered my name, because it was the same name - an unusual name - and he thinks I might be the one, so he wrote to me. And yes, indeed, I am the one. But regrettably I also have children already looking after a family of refugees. But I've made enquiries, and I've found somebody who'd be willing to take on your two children." Now, I don't quite know how this... correct Kingheart finally came up with Benn Levy and Constance Cummings in - in Chelsea. But he did, via some other family of his called Gentilian whom I met in England later on. But he came up with two people willing to take us on, my sister and myself. And then my mother. They made strenuous efforts to get her out. And Benn Levy was actually travelling in Germany and Austria I think, organising... emigrations. And also, I think then through his efforts, my father, in 1939, still before the outbreak of war. So... through a 1907 connection, which proved [half laughs] to be the wrong one and so on, we managed to come to a rather fortunate move to England.

[0:30:50]

So just to get it right. The- The Mr - the original one, got the letter, or not? He got the letter?

My father sent the letter to not the original one; the address he found was not correct.

Right.

Same name, wrong address. And that guy was kind enough to search for somebody else with the same name, sent the letter on, saying, "You might be the one." And he was the one, but he was already 'fully booked' so to speak, so...

Extraordinary.

Yes.

Extraordinary.

I think my life in particular – I'm not sure about all our lives - seems to have been punctuated by tragedies that turned into... good luck in a variety of ways. And that was maybe the first, because we were certainly very, very lucky in the people who looked after us.

And they guaranteed for you?

They were the guarantors, yes. And...

And what were their names please?

The- It was a married couple. Benn Levy - B E double- N - Levy. He was a playwright, quite famous at the time. He was also a scriptwriter for films. And visited Hollywood and so on, where he met... his wife-to-be, who was an actress called Constance Cummings. And she was also – she was never a great... name. But they still show one of her films on TV now. "Blithe Spirit" is- And I actually visited Denham to see it made, in part. Anyway, so there they were. They lived in a house. Now, the house is, is listed and it's quite famous in the right circles, so to speak. It's called "The Levy House" - or was called "The Levy House". And next door to it was "The Cohen House". It is known as the Cohen House. And the reason for this is that... an architect called Walter Gropius came to England at that time, and this was the only house, number 66 Old Church Street where we lived, that he had actually designed for private residence – ever. He did this ...in the architectural practice of Fry - yes. Maxwell Fry, I think. So, it was a Gropius and Fry design of 66 Old Church Street.

In which year?

Oh, designed in '36 I should think – '36, '37. And we arrived in '39. Next door to it - 64 Old Church Street - is The Cohen House designed by Mendelsohn and Chermayeff, two other rather famous architects. We shared the same garden. Now... 64 Old Church street was even grander I think than 66. It had its own squash court, where Benn Levy taught me to play squash.

[0:34:15]

And where was this? In which part of London?

Chelsea.

Chelsea.

It's in Old Church Street, Chelsea. And as I said I saw on some website or other the...the sales history of houses in Old Church Street, and 66 seemed to be up for sale for 45 million pounds. I can't quite believe that it ever would achieve that, anyway, but still – there it was. And I slept there through the Blitz and other times. And....I think I was in fact... I came

back for the holidays but my sister was evacuated already with her school - Kensington High School - to Oxford. And she didn't come back; she stayed there. Not every holiday anyway. But I- There's one vivid memory of the Blitz. Because... I slept next to a curved bit of glass which was a - a feature of this design of that house. And I'd got up. There was a lot of noise. Looked out through another window at searchlights. And then went to visit the lavatory, at which time a landmine exploded not very far away, and it blew in that window, that curved window. And I came back and there it was on my pillow. And... that was I think probably my only near-miss of the Bli- of the Blitz. We had a shelter in the bottom of the house which nobody ever used. But most of the time I was in boarding school by then.

Yeah. Let's just go back a little bit about your leaving Vienna...

Yeah.

And what- So, once arrangements were made... At what point were you told what's happening? And how was- What transport- How did you get out?

I have only one or two brief memories of the actual day of leaving. I don't remember being told. I think it was just sort of... just sort of happened. But nobody officially sort of said- Well if they did, I've forgotten it. I remember getting into a taxi on the night of the Kindertransport. And I- for some reason I remember two young girls - it was dark - walking along the pavement. And one of them said to the other, "*Glückliche Leute*". That I remember - 'happy people'. We got into this taxi 'cause it was clear we were travelling with suitcases, I presume. The only other thing I remember is being in the train and waving to my parents as we... as the train moved out, with my sister Claire next to me. I remember being given some drinks to drink before we got on to a boat. And the rumour was that there were sedatives in this to stop us from getting seasick or something like that, or...stop making a noise. And the only other memory I have is the boat arriving at the...from Hoek of Holland at Harwich... Watching the dockers load, unload something. And the boy next to me, a teenager, exclaiming with great glee. He heard one of the dockers say, "OK", so he knew he was in England, sort of thing. That's about all... the memory I have until... actually the reception room in London.

[0:38:05]

And was it, do you remember your mood? Was, is- was there a feeling that you would see your parents soon, or was it- or were you scared? You were with your sister so...

I was with my sister. Although I don't remember much of her on the journey. I take it we must have been possibly sleeping in the same compartment or whatever. ...As I said, I think my... I have this feeling I had a lack of feeling. I did not get involved. I wasn't scared, I wasn't particularly pleased. I know I said- apparently, I said to my sister, "I bet the people who are going to receive us, I bet they have a car." Yes, they had a Rolls Bentley, and I was very pleased with that. [laughs] It was a make- A joint make of car, a Rolls-Bentley, and it disappeared long ago. Anyway. So, I took it, I think the answer would be calmly, but not because I was a calm particularly person, but I didn't really understand all the ins and outs.

And how many children were on that train? Were there lots of children? Was there anyone you know, on it?

No. I don't think there was anybody else I knew. There must have been 100 or so. A transport of I don't know how many, exactly. My guess it was something of the order of 100.

But not all the kids knew where they were going. You were- So you were in a slightly different situation, because you had a destination...

No, no, no. I think they all... Oh, knew that they were expected by somebody because that was the rule, I think.

Yeah...

So, do you want me to tell - say something about our arrival?

Yes.

[0:39:57]

OK. Well, this was... whatever it was, at some station, we were all taken to a large room. That's my memory. Very large. And I suppose there were rows and rows of children, and rows and rows of people waiting. And... for a reason that became apparent later, that arrival time, my sister and I were probably the last to be collected. The reason for that was, that the organiser of all this particular reception arrangement, was Katie Cohen, who lived at 64 Old Church Street. Now she was a remarkable woman. She was a model, ...a ballet dancer, I think a champion swimmer or something. I remember a photo of her at Cap Ferrat, diving off. All very high society stuff. But she became- She married Dennis Cohen, who was a publisher of some... elite press. ...And settled down to life ...not utilising any of those skills. In her forties, she decided to become a surgeon. And I remember being asked to teach her Algebra, because she had to pass some school certificate examination first, before she could go on to... learning how to be... She became a surgeon, and sadly died rather young. However, Katie Cohen had organised all this arrival. And... as a result, she came to collect us, because Constance was busy acting in a play on the London stage at the time. So, as my sister said to me, "This elegant lady is coming. She must be the one." But, she, no- She introduced herself as a friend who lived next door, and she'd come to collect us. So, she collected us in a beautiful car. I don't remember the car, but I think it was special, and took us to 66... where we fell into bed and... I think slept probably for two days. I'm not sure. I remember Benn Levy coming in... at the time, with an electric razor, which I'd never seen before in my life. And my sister said - she did know a bit of German - of English -said, "Are you Mr Levy?" And he laughed very loudly and said, "Yes, I am. Welcome." So...

So, it was rather a grandiose...I mean.

It was- Oh, put it mildly...yes, put it mildly.

Coming from Vienna, or coming from your...

Oh absolutely. Yes, yes, yes. I took it as if it was meant to be. [laughs]

But how come...you said, did they commission Gropius to build those houses for them?

Oh, yes. Oh yes.

So, he was- must have been very successful. Where did he get...?

[0:43:17]

Oh, Benn Levy?

Yeah...

Oh, extremely.

Right.

Well, he became known. He was- some of his plays are still being performed, mainly by amateur societies and so on. They, they lasted, but he was never a name. He became an MP actually in 1945, which turned me into being, into looking at Labour politically anyway. He was a Labour MP for four years.

And what was his background?

For Slough and Eton. Sorry?

What was his background, this Benn Levy?

Right. He came from an Australian family of wool merchants... who were very rich. So, I don't think he had to worry about Gropius. But by that time, he had ...written half a dozen plays, which would have been regularly performed. Some of them were poor, or badly received, others were not. And he married Constance who... who was employed. OK...

And was he Jewish, Benn Levy?

Oh, yes! Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes...

OK, you didn't mention it so...

Well, I did. [both laugh] Well, Benn - B E N N. Yes, very much a Jewish family. They...they decided it was their business to see that we didn't lose sight of our Jewishness. My sister told a story often of her... We were invited to a Pesach evening at some Jewish relations of the Levy-s or... yes, really, I think they were distant relations. And, yeah- Very formal affair. But my sister didn't know what to wear. And Constance... said, "Come and look at some of my dresses. We'll have a look." And my sister was very taken with some glittering thing, and Constance said, "No, no, no, no, no. You're going in a dirndl, and Austrian dirndl." My sister was very upset. And when we got to this place, there were a lot of young ladies there in furs, and god knows what - very grand indeed. The upshot of it was, they all clustered round and admired the dirndl. So, it remained in my sister's memory as a great triumph. And she said Constance knew what she was doing. But... Yes, well I had had Hebrew lessons in Vienna. So, I could read Hebrew, but that's as far as it went. In England, I was at boarding school. I was a boy soprano. Quite a good one. And great demand at weddings and church services and so on. I- So I attended church quite normally with all the children, and that was taken as for granted at boarding school. But in the holidays, I also had tutoring up to my Bar Mitzvah. Because I was at boarding school, I was allowed to learn rather less than normal for Bar Mitzvah, but I did learn. So up to the age of thirteen, I think I can say I had some contact with Jewish religion formally.

And which synagogue- Where did they go to? Did they belong to a synagogue?

In London? No. They- The Levys did not, certainly not, no. My- we, look- we belonged- my father found a synagogue in Chelsea not far from where we lived. I think somewhere off Kings Road... there was something, which is where I was Bar Mitzvahed. So. But I think my links to Jewishness unfortunately ended soon after that.

Right. Just to come back to your arrival. So, they - they sponsored you. And you said they managed to get your mother out?

[0:47:45]

Yes.

What did they get her- Do you know how- did they get a domestic visa for her or how...?

There was no talk of a domestic visa.

Aha.

None at all. She came and moved in with us. And there was room. So, for a while we were together in Chelsea. My father was interned...

Sorry to interrupt you, but before then, did they... financially, did they support you? That's what I mean.

Yes, yes, totally. They presumably paid, they certainly paid, for my boarding school. ...They made my mother an allowance 'cause she was left alone in this house, with my sister evacuated with Kensington High School to Oxford, I think. And me not living there- And me at boarding school, they made her an allowance. And the story goes that six months later the bank manager contacted Benn Levy and said, "This lady comes, but she only takes a pound a week." Or something like, 'And what is going on?' – you know. And Benn was extremely upset. And my mother said, "Well, I...I knew how to be frugal", or words to this effect. And she didn't want to take his money. I don't know what happened after that, but Benn read her the riot act, "And you have to spend money" and to do this and do that, and...and so on.

And she wasn't expected to do any work? So, it was really them supporting you, taking you in...

Totally. Totally. ...As I said, for a while my father also lived with us in Chelsea. But then two men arrived one morning. I remember that. And said, "Come with us", so to speak. And that – that was him gone for a couple of years.

But just again, before that, he came - you said before - on an agricultural... Maybe tell us a little bit.

Yes. I don't know how that – that was organised.

Where did he go to when he came?

He went straight to this camp near Sandwich in Kent. The word Sandwich comes to mind. I think there must be a place there.

And it was an agricultural...

It was...

... farm or...

[0:50:13]

... something of that nature, because we visited him once there with either Benn or... some friend of Benn's, I don't know, took us there. And my mother was mortified, because we saw some of the refugees dressed in suits with ties. And they sent for my father and he came with a shovel and gumboots. And that's the sort of thing he liked to do. And my mother was mortified evermore. She never let him forget that story, that here she was wanting to introduce him to these posh friends or whatever, and he came with a shovel and gumboots.

And how long did he stay there? Just a few weeks, or...?

I think it must have been no more than a month... because.... Well now, let's... if you want the story then. In... August of that year ...Benn and Constance said, "You should go on holiday." So, my father must still be- was in that farm, yes. So,

my mother and my sister and I went on holiday in Eastbourne. ...Some kind of a pension. ...I think it was my first experience of a sort of bed and breakfast place. I remember being allowed to take all the cereal, because I liked cereal. So, my sister kindly donated her portion that was doled out in the morning. Anyway, there we were in Eastbourne, and it was – it was quite fun. But the war broke out whilst we were in Eastbourne, so we were still there. I remember listening to the wireless and telling my mother and sister, “There is war now.” ...And Benn and Constance decided that because London was due to be flattened any day now, I should not- I should not return to London. And they looked for a boarding school and found Aldro. And I moved in there.

And where was Aldro?

In Eastbourne.

So, you basically stayed in Eastbourne?

[0:52:33]

I actually stayed in Eastbourne. My mother was asked to provide the clothes, and it turned out I had more or less everything that was needed. And they- My sister and mother returned to - to Chelsea. So... I was asked whether I wanted to stay in Aldro during the holidays, ‘cause it was dangerous to go back to London. I said, “No, I want to go back to London.” So, I went back every holiday.

But you didn't mind to stay in...in Eastbourne? In the boarding school? You didn't mind?

I took to it I think like a duck takes to water, as they say. I have to say I was fairly successful. I... at Aldro, for two reasons perhaps. I was bright, good enough to learn things. But I was apparently an extraordinary boy, according to the head teacher. He said, “I’ve never met anybody who plays the piano and football - is good at football.” Apparently the two things were not linked in...in his mind. He was a very... traditional type. Very good head teacher but...that somebody could play the piano and was good at sports was unbelievable. And I was good at sports and... and... as I said I had a voice that was in demand fairly soon as well. And I played the piano which I certainly had learned...

In Vienna?

...in Vienna. Oh, yes. My sister and I both learnt. In fact, we rarely had any time free in Vienna, as I remember it. There was always some post-school class to go to of one sort or another. It was... typical of the middle class I think... attitude to their children.

But so...

And... we enjoyed it, on the whole.

And piano, you were...

Piano was standard, yes.

And singing as well? Or the singing was later?

I didn't discover any voice... until – until England, I think. Yes. So, in the end I got a scholarship, a music and choral scholarship, to public school.

From...from...?

I overstrained the voice, and the net result... is that it never settled down.

From those days?

From those days.

You were singing too much?

I think so, yes. Yes. It was some injury to the vocal chords which somebody discovered a year or two ago.

But you managed in the first school. So, you just had arrived. You had a few months maybe but you managed to- Your English was all right. You managed to...

Well...

...adapt.

[0:55:24]

Prior to the August I think – I think Benn had organised somebody to come and teach us English for a week - few weeks. My sister claims I refused to learn, but something must have stuck. By the time I got to Aldro... Well, I was at Gibbs School first of course in London. I was given a book that said, 'Teach Yourself English'... And left to my own devices. All I remember from that is a poem. It started:

*We'll begin with an ox, and the plural is oxen,
But the plural of box is boxes, not boxen.*

So... the crazy English language, which I imbibed. In my second term, I came top in English. That was the big thing there [laughs] and... and I think... Yeah, I think I must have known how to get on in English all right by the time I got to Aldro. So- And I - I loved boarding school. That was no problem.

Were there any other Jewish boys or refugee boys in either school?

Well... not in my first term. In my... maybe second term in Aldro there was another boy. And we became friendly. He was a bit older than I was. And- And then my - my other boarding school, Magdalen College... there was one. A Wolfson, but not of the... family, and that also...

And did you ever feel any... either anti-Semitism or anti-German or Austrian sentiment?

No...no, curiously enough not. No, at neither school. I was excused joining the Cadet Force. That I do remember. [laughs] But so were one or two other boys who- for other reasons, or whatever. And instead of marching up and down, we went 'digging for victory' as they said, and worked on the allotment growing vegetables for the school. So... And earned some money as a result. Yes, working parties were paid for. It was good for going to the cinema in the holidays.

And you said for the holidays you went home. So was your mother and sister...

Yes.

Did they stay with...?

Yes, yes. But as soon as my father was... released, of course they looked for somewhere to stay, and found a place in - in Kensington. ...Near- Just off Kensington High Street. A nice flat... which they liked. Particularly my mother said, "It's got parquet floors so I'm having it." So, they could afford to rent it by then and so we moved there. And- But I was still at boarding school. So, I only came... during the holidays.

Tell us a little bit about your father's internment. You - you started it...I think...

[0:58:51]

Ah, well. He was interned on the Isle of Man. He luckily did not get sent on anywhere else. And that affected our family greatly, because it was on the Isle of Man that he met Ferdinand Rauter, who eventually, who we - who we asked to visit us because Rauter was released early. Earlier than he was. And so Rauter came and met my sister and mother and so on. And eventually, you know, some years later married my sister. So that's... was a further sort of musical link in the family.

And just tell us a little bit, for anyone, what was his- What is his musical - Ferdinand Rauter's - background?

Right, well... He...he was a concert pianist. But I don't think he ever had the technique to succeed at that. So, he didn't even try. But he did play some concerts. But he made his name as an accompanist. And he married – married [correcting himself]- He met ...an Icelandic singer of folk songs, who was certainly quite famous throughout the world, under the heading, 'Folksongs of Many Lands'. And... He was her ...arranger of – of the music, and accompanist. So, they toured, and during the war were basically in England.

The singer as well?

Yes. Still visiting places and a great success doing Jewish folk songs as well. But, about six or seven different languages; she was quite an expert. And...

And still performing? Did they perform in England as well?

Yes. Oh yes. Very much so. So...

Anyway, back to your...

Anyway, that was Rauter's background.

Yeah...

So, we were introduced really to musical circles. I remember visiting Myra Hess... giving a lunchtime concert which became quite famous at the... National Gallery, I think. And during one of her performances there, I think that's how I met her, a string broke in the grand piano. And I had this memory of Rau rushing up with a – some kind of a knife he had with a screwdriver there offering his help to undo something. But they – They had an attendant with a string, and they replaced the string in the piano and the concert carried on. And that was one of the lunchtime concerts. So... And of course, Rauter was famous to some extent, for being instrumental – that's pun not intended - in the... in the formation of the Amadeus Quartet. Because he met them... Brainin and Nissel, in...in, in the Isle of Man internment camp. And I think, he claims anyway, he claimed that it was his suggestion that they got together. And so...he, he, he rested on his laurels on that score quite a lot.

[1:02:33]

That he brought them – the Amadeus – together.

Yes. Yes.

And was he in the same camp? Was your father in the same with Rauter and with Brainin?

Yes, yes, he would have been.

Which camp? Do you remember which camp that was?

No. I just know it was the Isle of Man. There may be some reference somewhere, but..

Yeah, we can find out.

Douglas...

Douglas. Douglas?

I think it was Douglas...

There was definitely a camp in that- And what, you said that your father was interned for quite a long time...

Yes- Oh yes, I know what happened. He came back... I don't quite know at the moment when he came back. But he went down with TB. A mild case - he was never infectious. But he had to be- The only cure that was known, was to go to serve a rest cure to some... country retreat. And he was sent, presumably on the NHS. I don't think we could have afforded anything else.

I think there was no NHS at that point...

No... Presumably on some medical insurance thing; I don't know.

Yeah...

To a- For, for TB sufferers at Woburn Sands, not far from London. ...And I remember him coming back... unless we were still in Old Church Street, so it must have been still during the war. And they then looked – my mother and he then looked – for a place to stay. He found employment fairly quickly, with a company in Gray's Inn Road. Medical supplies association or something like that. Due to his knowledge of medical instruments.

[1:04:30]

And how old was he by then, your father, when he came out of internment?

Well, we can work out...It's '89 to... '41, something like that. Fifty-one, fifty-two, fifty-three, something like that.

So, in his fifties.

Yes, in his fifties.

And when he got TB, was he released from internment? He got it when he was in internment, or later?

No, no. I think it was diagnosed... He must have been diagnosed after he joined us.

Right...

I remember I... also had to be checked on for the next ten years or something, because I'd been in contact. But he was never shown to be infectious TB. It was just a spot on the lung or whatever it was.

And how did he talk about his internment? Was he bitter? Or how, how do you remember what your mother...?

Not particularly bitter about the internment itself. I think he accepted that it was policy, and had to be undergone. Well, it's not secret; eventually he was very bitter about having introduced Rauter to us, because they were very much against Rauter marrying my sister. So... Until the marriage he was cross. After that he became philosophical about it, so to speak, and less cross.

On what grounds? I mean, not to- I don't know what's public or not...

Well, Rauter was over twenty years older; that was the first.

Yeah...

And of course, he was not Jewish, was the other one. ...But my sister certainly wanted this very much so... She went off ...on the religion sort of thing, she became an anthroposophist following Rudolph Steiner. And eventually became an exceedingly famous, I would say, head teacher for about twenty years. So...

Did she run...she ran that...Was it the nursery school in Glenilla Road?

No, no, no. She became head teacher at Primrose Hill Infant School and had some rather famous attendees. The Miliband brothers and that sort of thing Like the school my sister taught at, the mixture of diplomats and council estate children... for the benefit of all. And they loved it like that. But anyway, she became rather well known, and after the head teacher stint of decades, then was an inspector of schools. And... There was a famous photograph of her with the children in the Evening Standard once, I think, under the heading, "As good as Eton" - E T O N.

Yes?

[1:07:40]

Because there was some... parent consultation write-in about the best schools and so on and so on. And Primrose Hill featured on the same level as Eton. So, they got hold of my sister and photographed her with some of her children under that heading.

For twenty years she was the head teacher there?

Yes – yes.

Which years, from when to when, or roughly...?

Roughly... That's a good question to which I have no immediate answer. Let me just think. ... '70s and '80s, something like 1970s and '80s must have been her time there. ...We have an obituary from Hampstead... the Ham and High...

OK.

...to which I contributed a letter following. ...So that would give you the dates. I don't know them off hand. But along that order.

And was she involved, you said she became an anthroposophist. Was she involved with the – with the Steiner community?

Yes...yes. ...I've no idea frankly whether she was officially baptised at any stage. I believe she was, although she denied it or didn't admit to it, or... It didn't become much of an issue, as far as I was concerned. But she was very much into- But she didn't teach a Steiner method or anything like that.

Right...

No. It was not a Steiner school. Her children Andrea and Peter went to a Steiner school, until they discovered that they – they wouldn't do school certificates till God knows when, sort of thing. They didn't teach to the exam of course.

Yeah...

So, they were taken out. And I think one of the children, Andrea, went to Camden Girls' School or something like that, and duly passed one of her exams [inaudible] and so on.

Yeah. OK, just to come back to you now.

Any time.

Shall we have a break now, and then continue? Is that...?

I can continue or have a break. I'm fine.

I think let's have...

Yes, we are continuing the interview. We were discussing your father's internment. But now just to go back to you and your time at Gibbs School. That's when you started school. Are there any other incidences you want to tell us about?

Well, there is the one, yes, where I ...became well known as 'the refugee who knows how to play cricket'. Totally undeserved. But what happened was, we were sent out to the playing fields which was a place reached by coach, I remember. I knew nothing about cricket. I didn't know there – there was a bat, let alone a ball. And somebody'd realised that, and I was posted to the boundary of the field, just to stand there. So, I was just watching what was going on. And the batsman, whoever he was, hit the ball very hard and it would have gone for six, as they say. But it came to me at about head height, and I put out one arm and I caught the ball. I thought that was the normal thing to do. I didn't know what else [laughs] one could do with a ball. But that was such a... a hard hit and such an unexpected saving of six runs, that it went all over the school. The boy from Austria knows how to play cricket. So, I became famous for that. Totally undeserved, as usual.

[1:11:31]

And did you start to playing cricket after that?

Yes, I did. Yes, I did. And at... my next schools... featured in the team, yes. OK, football, cricket... we played, and rugby. So, my next two schools really, yes. And I was good at sports.

So, you think that helped you to settle in the English private school?

It – It only mattered. It was the one thing that mattered. You could not be a success in those schools, well I exaggerate, but it – it certainly helped. Yes. And if you're also good at academic work, that made it a wunderkind of one sort or other. So, I felt, sometimes.

And that was quite different from Austria, where...

Well, I have one memory of a gymnasium in Austria. A gymnasium. About throwing a ball. I think about twenty metres away, they set up a light ball on a pedestal, and you were asked to throw a ball and try and hit it. Very difficult thing to do at that- But I managed one of them. So that stayed in my memory. So yes, I was good at throwing. I was a left-hander. That helps... for throwing. For cricket, right-handed bat. So, it was a crazy mixed-up kid.

Can I ask you, did the Benns, the family, did they officially foster you or anything? No, because you were with your parents or...

No. That's right. I think frankly if my parents had not survived, they would – they would have looked to – to fostering us. Well - adopting us, really. They had no children at that time. I'm not absolutely sure... about subsequent events. There was a tragic ...event, certainly. Constance had a miscarriage whilst we were there. She was acting in a play at the time... with a one... Ah, I've forgotten its name. Anyway, she was- And I went to see it, and she was meant to faint on the stage. But instead of slumping down, she carefully sat down and carefully keeled over. The audience thought that was how it was meant to be, but it wasn't. Because she knew that she was pregnant, and she didn't want to slump down as in a faint. Clutterbuck. Clutterbuck. It's one of his most famous plays. And- But not long after that, sadly she lost the child. But they had two children subsequently...whom I met.

When were they born? When were they born, their children?

[1:14:30]

Well... I suppose... They were there in the late 40s. I visited Chelsea, the house maybe for dinner or something. And I went to see both the children. And I said to them, "Oh, you're now sleeping in the double bed that my sister and I slept in... when we were guests here." And that was Jonathan and Jemima. He became a doctor, and I think she lives in Italy or lived in Italy. Married to a Count or something like that.

And what was your relationship to- to them? And your sister's? How was it? Did you see them a lot? Did they...?

To - to whom?

To the parents.

To Constance and Benn?

Yes.

No, I wouldn't say we saw them a lot. My sister probably became closer than I did because I was away, out of London most of the time, and she was in London. So, she took... Constance, who was quite old by then, to Wigmore Hall concerts. That they loved doing. Benn died long before that. I think he may have had diabetes, and he didn't survive a, an amputation operation. So ...that's as far as I know. But he died, oh, sometime before that. So... she was on her own.

But you stayed – you stayed in touch with them?

Oh, yes. Yes. Even when I was in Magdalen College. ...I occasionally I remember turned up at breakfast time and asked them for pocket money. That's...[laughs]... We were close enough for that sort of thing. I sent him once a short story that I had written, or I told him I'd written one and he asked for a copy. I said fine. I didn't realise he tried to get it published. And I've got a letter from him in the family album, that attaches the letter to him from... an agent, who said, "I have now tried to sell Manfred Kösten's story." And then he lists about six newspapers or something like that – or magazines. And

he said, “Sadly, none of them would accept it.” Benn had simply attached this and put on the letter, “Dear Freddy, what a lousy author you are.” Signed “Benn Levy”. [laughing] I treasure that and I’ve got it in the family album. That was my only time I think trying to get something published. Until, I jointly wrote a book on data protection. And that did go into a paperback and a second edition, and so...

But that’s much later.

[1:17:29]

Yeah, much, much later.

And how was your, what was your mother’s – your parents’ relationship with them?

I think just... friendly. I mean after we moved out... Before we actually got our own flat in Lexham Gardens in Kensington, Benn and Constance decided to close the Chelsea house because Benn went and joined the Navy. And she did ENSA... You know E N S A, this was the organisation that sent artists abroad to... entertain the troops. They did all the rehearsals in the Chelsea house, so I met all the famous ...artists at that time.

Such as?

Well, Michael Redgrave sticks in my mind. There was Laurence Olivier. He didn’t do ENSA but he did a - a play with - with Constance. And every time Constance did a play we got invited and were sent free tickets. And met her afterwards and she introduced us to the co-stars and whatever. So. But... Michael Redgrave was – was one and there was... My memory is not what it was. But anyway, they - they rehearsed there, so I use to sit and watch them rehearsing, which was quite fun. But they closed the house down then. And, we had - oh yes, we hadn’t got our own flat by then, so we were actually- We went to live in Octave Levy’s flat... in Hyde Park Gate. I think if you at that time it maybe even now. If you want to - to designate an upper-class crust kind of address, it’s Hyde Park Gate. Churchill was a next-door neighbour. Winston Churchill. [laughs] So we lived there for a while - some months, and then moved out to Kensington.

Who was Octave Levy?

Octave Levy was Benn Levy’s father. And he, I think he was the tycoon of the wool merchants in Australia who made the family rich. It maybe even that he inherited something there. And I don’t know the details. But we met him. We knew him. And my mother and I once... or twice, I think, went to visit him at his invitation in London, to have lunch there. And as usual I made a faux pas. I was good at that, because the second time, when the pudding turned up, I said, “No, I want ice cream.” And he called the butler in, there was a butler and he said, “Have we got ice cream?” And the butler went away and came back and said, “No.” And Octave Levy was very upset, and I was very stupid. But still. [laughs] Mind you, I wasn’t particularly old at that. Mind you, I can tell you another story from the Gold Coast, where I was almost equally stupid.

[1:20:45]

OK.

Tell you now or later?

Tell us now.

Tell you now. My first day in the Gold Coast. I'd qualified in mining geology at Imperial College. And was told to go out to the colonies, and 'that's the way to repay all that we have done for you', sort of thing. So, the Gold Coast was a colony. And I joined the geological survey. And my first day there was invited to dinner, because I didn't have my set-up. Although I had a bungalow of my own, I wasn't set up properly. I was invited to dinner with the Director. And... the pudding was brought in... and put in front of me. And I took one look at this and sort of turned to the Director and said, "Do I take all of this or half of it?"

And it turned out it should have been half. And he called in the cook, and said, "The master has shamed me cause it's not big enough." I became known as the man who asked for half the pudding, or all the pudding. The story got around. But there's another good Gold Coast story I can tell you. All Gold Coast stories.

OK, go on.

The Gold Coast in the – in the early 1900s had a Governor who was a land surveyor, had been, in previous years. And he ensured that the colony had the best maps of perhaps all our colonies. 'One inch to the mile' they were called. And they covered the whole country, which was most unusual. So, when I did my work on the Volta dam site, I had these maps. And they were close contoured and you could tell very easily what was good country and not, for siting the dam and so on. And I remember going out one day and telling labourers to cut a line up this hill on this far bank. And the head man came back and said, "No hill." And I said, "Nonsense. I've drawn the line on the map. I've given you instructions." And he said, "No hill, Massa." So, I went to look and there was no hill where there was a hill shown in the contours. And I then realised that some draughtsman had realised that they'd missed out on an area and they put in a hill where there was no hill. But there was a sting to this, because the paths there were shown, obviously, and one or two of them were shown as 'fit for hammocking'. So, I called my field assistant in, and I said, "What does this mean?" He was a- my assistant who was- knew English and was my sort of contact between him and the labour force [correcting himself] - between me and the labour force. And he had a warped sense of humour, I think. Cause he said to me, he said, "Well they are big enough for you to be carried in a hammock from one place to another, to save you walking." Saving walking was quite a good idea, so I said, "Really?" And he said, "Yes, we still have hammocks. We have hammocks in the store in our headquarters in Saltpond." So, I wrote a letter to the headquarters in Saltpond. Took about three or four weeks before getting a reply, because it took about two weeks to post the letter. Got the reply back, and they said, "We note your requisition for hammocks. Yes, we still have hammocks in store, but we would advise you that the use of hammocks is frowned upon, and was discontinued in 1927. The best geologists are the ones that walk and see the most rocks." End of story. So, I got known very quickly as the man who asked for pudding, and the man who asked for hammocks. It stayed with me my six years in the Gold Coast.

[1:24:45]

Yeah... We will talk about your experience on the Gold Coast more, but again, let's just go - go back to the forties when you, in your schooling. So... your parents, they moved, they had their own flat.

Yes.

And at that time, you were still in school.

Yes.

And by when did you finish?

I finished school in 1945... I went to Imperial College from '45 to '49. It was very convenient because we were in Kensington and Imperial College was on a bicycle in five minutes or ten minutes anyway. But... the war was still on. And I used to cycle past the Natural History Museum on the Cromwell Road. And I remember there was a - a little sort of a... guardian's entrance...entrance cottage... before the actual building. And this was set at Cromwell Road, and the building was set back from Cromwell Road. One day I cycled past, and the next day the thing was gone because a doodlebug had fallen. If you remember, no you won't remember. But there were doodlebugs or flying bombs. And we experienced one or two of them rather closer than we cared to have them in - in our Lexham Gardens flat. But luckily none of them hit me. Anyway, I was at Imperial College from '45 to '49.

[1:26:24]

And how did the end of the war affect you, or your family?

I was in Magdalen College when it ended, certainly the war in Europe. There was still a war going on in Japan.

Yes...

With Japan. ...Celebrations. ...But I think ...in '45, yes, I joined Imperial I think just after the war. It didn't affect me particularly. The war was gone. The only thing that might have happened, was the call-up. And it so happened that when I finished Imperial work in '49, I remember mentioning that my father was naturalised, was getting naturalised, and that therefore I would be British. And the Professor turned to me and said, "Well that means you're likely to be called up. Don't you dare..." he said, "waste your four years at Imperial. Go out to one of our colonies!" Which is how I finished up applying to the Gold Coast, and... be accepted there.

Because- But did you have to become naturalised before?

No, no, no, no. But he made the point that if I'd worked in England, I would have been liable for call-up.

Yeah...

[1:28:00]

I would- I hadn't thought at the time of what I was going to do. I liked mining geology. It was one of- I just looked up a prospectus when I was at Magdalen College and saw this was what Imperial College did. There's a story there. We had a mathematics teacher, a refugee ...like me, from Austria as well. Austria and Germany. His name was Matthias Landau. Very famous family. His father was Professor at Göttingen and apparently the top scientist in the world on numbers theory. His grandfather was called Paul Ehrlich who got a Nobel Prize I think for seeing Salvarsan, the first cure for syphilis, that actually worked. So, he was quite a lineage. He never made a success of his life, and he earned the odd money whenever he wanted money. He was a bit of a... bohemian, really. And at that time, he was our mathematics teacher at Magdalen College. And I said to him, "When I finish, I'm going to do a correspondence course and to go and try to get a BSCE." And he said, "Correspondence course? You must be mad! Apply to Imperial." I said, "What is Imperial?" I didn't even know. So, I sent for a prospectus and there I found a course called 'Mining Geology' and I thought, that looked all right. I applied to two courses. One was called 'Oil Technology', one was 'Mining Geology'. And they wrote me a letter and said, "Get the qualifications and you're in. But you're too young. So, you will do one year of our Imperial Entry." They had a sort of an entry year. "Irrespective of qualifications," they said, "we won't let you take the full course until you're seventeen." So, I got the qualifications, and I started at age sixteen which was a bit of a mascot. Because all my other- All the other students on the same course - and it was quite small; there were about seven or eight of them - that was reserved for ex-servicemen. And they were 'Colonel this' and 'Major that' and so on, and wives with prams used to come and collect them from the - from the Royal School of Mines. And I was the mascot really. It was straight from school. It was- They couldn't quite believe it. One of them called me 'Siegfried' and the name stuck. So, for all my time [laughs] - this Jewish refugee was called 'Siegfried'. They had a sense of humour. They never referred, they never referred to their wartime activities. And certainly no, never in the sense of, 'he's German or Austrian' or whatever, and, 'we hate him very much'. No, they were very kind, very nice.

And what drew you to study mining? I mean it's an unusual choice.

I think... It just- Yes, chemistry or physics and let alone mathematics - I could have gone for any of those. But ...when I saw this I thought, well, you know, it's something practical put it that way. Oddly enough after college, I never went down a mine again. I turned to engineering geology which was part of it, really. And... for East Africa we did- Imperial courses were very, very good of course. We did a - a course in - in surveying; I was a qualified topographical and underground surveyor by the time I left Imperial. Particularly underground, which was horrendous stuff down a mine. Sometimes knee-deep in water sort of thing. You're still lugging around your theodolite and stuff. We had a- Imperial had a mine in Cornwall where we had to spend several months to do that. But we also did something called 'resistivity'. And when I joined Balfour Beattie that came in... stood me in good stead, in East Africa. I did a big survey of the - of the Rift Valley for its potential for geothermal energy. You know, there's smoke coming up from- steam coming up from

what they call fumaroles and things in volcanic areas. And it always seemed likely that you could drill for energy there. But so, that's later, later time...

[1:32:40]

And what did your parents make of your choice of...?

Oh, they were, they were appalled of course. [half laughs] Not until I actually said, "I'm going out to the Gold Coast." My father thought – and he told me afterwards - that they would get my obituary within a week. I mean it was called 'The White Man's Grave, you may remember. Luckily within a few weeks I managed to send them a photograph of me with a pet python just to show I was still alive. I had this python that went to sleep under my camp bed. And we all lived in tents. Certainly, I lived in tents for a while. And it found this place under my bed, I think. I was told afterwards it must have been warm and it must have been well fed and so on. I remember my steward boy came in in the morning with the coffee or tea or whatever, and he dropped it. He screamed, and he said, "Massa! Don't move! Don't move!" And I kept on opening the mosquito net, wanting to put my leg out, and he said, "No! No!" In the end I got out, and there was this python curled up. So, I told the carpenter to make a box, and we put it in a box. And I kept it as a pet for some months. I had this picture of myself holding the python wound round me a bit. And I said to my parents, "I'm alive and well thank you." [Bea laughs] That's when they believed it for the first time.

What did they want you to do? What did they have in mind?

They never influenced me in any way. I think... I think they felt... perhaps they felt that their education was lacking in the sense of giving me advice. So, they just took on board Magdalen College, Aldro and so on. When it got to Imperial, well this was a – a degree so this was worth doing. The fact that it was mining and geology, well there were plenty of mines in England so maybe I might have stayed in England. But I didn't specialise in coal. In fact, I- whilst at Imperial I worked in three different mines. A coal mine, a tin mine in Cornwall– A coal mine in Wales, and then in Sweden in an iron mine. And it was all very interesting, but... I didn't apply for a mine anywhere. And I couldn't apply in England after getting the professor's comment, "Get out of England... before you waste your time in the – in the armed services." Very unpatriotic thing to say, but he said it. And I saw no reason not to follow it frankly so...

But by the time you left your parents were settled and they- how did they adapt? Did they have refugee friends?

What...did they...?

[1:35:29]

Yes. Yes, they had quite a lot of refugee friends who told them, "Why on earth settle in Kensington? You should come to Golders Green." I remember. We had a close friend in Golders Green who was very cross. When I retired from the Gold Coast, I was given quite a bit of money - what seemed like quite a bit of money in those days. Plus, a pension, at age twenty-five. And I've lived on that ever since, and I'm still bankrupting the Gold Coast. But with a – with a deposit on a house of £700-, I bought a bungalow for them in Wembley with a garden. My father wanted a garden badly so they

moved to Wembley Park. I've forgotten the exact dates, but certainly by the fifties they were, they were there. And another bit of good luck...somebody decided to develop that area of Wembley Park and bought half our garden for £4,000-, which was a princely sum in those days. And I used that as a deposit for 1 Lover's Walk. And then...they wanted to move eventually as well because then the house was part of a development area, and I bought a flat for them in Kilburn I think it was... a very nice flat. And that's where they stayed until they died. But... my father actually found the Wembley Park bungalow. That's right. He found it, and he wrote to me and said, "I think, you know, it's got an enormous garden." It was fantastic, because there were two roads ...coming - coming together at a 'V', and so the further away were you from the 'V' the longer the gardens were and they couldn't build on it. So, half the garden was worth a lot of money to the developers. The council bought things up piecemeal. And that gave me the deposit for our house here. So, another bit of luck.

But he - he was working by then.

He was working by then and he - he worked with Dawson's booksellers by then, as a translator... and... correspondent for all the- Dealing with all the correspondence from other countries. Whatever language- they said to him, one day, "Come on, get a dictionary. You're good at languages." Some obscure languages did turn up and- These people never wrote in English.

And they- how was their English by that time, your parents?

They could get along. My father got along. As I said to him, "English is one of the languages you speak badly, but you speak it." My mother was also quite... capable in English. Heavy accent. But... Oh, they were quite happy, I think. My sister was nearby... after her marriage.

Where did she live?

She lived in a very upmarket address. A place called Carlton Hill in - in St John's Wood. Just after the war you could move into these areas without being a millionaire. So... they moved to a top floor flat I remember, with two small children. Rauter and she and lived there for decades. Yes. In fact, until Rauter died. And Claire lived there until her death, so it must have been several decades, yes.

[1:39:25]

And... so that was- So your parents you said they - they moved three times. They moved from Kensington...

That's right. Kensington to Wembley Park, and then Wembley Park to Kilburn. I've forgotten the exact address, but it was a nice little block of flats. Sort of...Something like nine or ten flats. And... And they were quite pleased with that. Yeah.

What- Did they lose many relatives?

They lost almost all relatives. There was almost nothing left. I remember in Poland going back. We had a- One meal I do remember about twenty people. All blood relations, cousins, aunts, this that and the other. One of whom survived, and moved to Israel... with a small daughter. And ...yeah. And the daughter became a ballet dancer and then a ballet teacher and lived until about ten years ago in Israel and she died. But all the others, no trace. At all.

And was that something your parents talked about? I mean how did they- For them- I mean you left as a small boy, but they were adults.

They- they didn't talk about it. No. There was correspondence with -with people in America, but the Polish relations, I think they disappeared.

And did your parents go back to Vienna at all after the war?

No. No. I – I had no inclination either. They never went back, no, they wouldn't have... dreamt of going back. The only time I visited Vienna was on one of these Danube trips... with my wife. A day or two in Vienna. It was quite disappointing. We wanted to find a department store, and they showed one which they said was the best and we thought it was so poor compared... to London, that it was hardly worth visiting. But that's a very commercial aspect.

[01:41:48]

Did you ever go and see your flat or did you ever...?

No, I didn't, no I...

Did you have any desire or...?

No. My niece did. And I'm not sure if somebody else did as well, but... They even sent us photographs of the outside. But no, I didn't go...

But you were never invited in an official some sort of capacity to...?

Not at all. No.

And you're not interested...

I certainly wasn't interested in going back and saying, "Look at me, I'm a well-to-do survivor" or words to that effect. No... I think if- If my- If Helen had - had said, enthusiastically, "Let's go back and have a look", I might have done. But she had no more inclination than I did, so we never bothered. But we did Danube trips and Rhine trips and... all the, all

the river trips across just about but... in Vienna was... a disappointment. It certainly wasn't anything I particularly wanted to do to repeat, put it that way.

So how long did you stay in Africa? So, you left in 1949...?

Yes, '49, and the Gold Coast was till 1955. Independence was on the horizon. This was the point when all our colonies of course they were one of the first, after India. As a result, anybody, any civil servant, was offered terms of ...leaving the civil service. You got- You were paid off with a pension and even, whatever age you were, and a 'lump sum' as it was called. Or staying on, becoming Ghanaian, eventually. And... probably at enhanced terms, or whatever. And I decided it was time to quit - seek fresh pastures new. I'd come across all sorts of people who'd offered me jobs... elsewhere, and so on. And my Professor at Imperial said, "Come and see me. I - I", you know, "I know where to place you", so to speak. And one of them was from the construction company Balfour Beattie. So, I decided to get a pension and a lump sum, and use this lump sum to buy a bungalow in Wembley. And I had this inter - I had one or two interviews in London. And I liked the Balfour Beattie one; they offered me a job. But again, in Africa, which was fine. In East Africa... as well, where they had lots of works going on. But to start with, it seemed, only to start with... in Nigeria. So... I went out... first of all to East Africa, no I beg your pardon first to East Africa, and then, after... after a year or two there, the Nigeria thing became very urgent and... I went to Nigeria. All to do with either dams ...or water supply. But principally dam sites. And in Nigeria the job that was rather peculiar was: find a site. We've got seventeen options from the maps it looked like seventeen options. We started in a place where the famous... English explorer got massacred in the rapids of the Niger River. It was called Mungo Park. It was quite a story. They tried to shoot the... rabbits - the rabbits - the rapids, and didn't make it. So, we had to start there, and I went through these rapids several times. It was all right if you knew how. We had these enormous canoes, fifty foot long, with outboard motors on. And we also had some rubber boats as well. It was great fun. Well anyway out of the seventeen, I eventually selected one and said we should try and investigate this one. That took five years. So that was a - a team of myself and I had another geologist and we had civil engineers and land surveyors. We had a couple of entomologists, because on that river there was a thing called the river blindness, which was a nasty disease you got from being bitten by something called the *simulium* fly. And... the cure was protracted and... not particularly nice. Nowadays they have a single pill for one year, and it cures it - or prevents it. But anyway, in those days it was a real risk. I eventually wrote a little booklet about it, to give out to all the people who came to work there on the construction site. But anyway, we... found this site, and then it took five years to thoroughly investigate, which was a drill- drilling programme. We had drillers from Canada, I think a group. It was quite an expensive thing. And the end of the five years, the fifth year... I was married and Helen and I went out together. Then we were, I think - it's my story - I can get her out with a promise to make films. She was a film addict and had done a course on making films. So, I said, "We'll buy a camera, a cine camera and we'll make films." And we did! They're in a museum in Cardiff, the British Commonwealth and Empire Museum, eventually located from Kensington to... is it Bristol, not Cardiff. Bristol. And they took on twelve of our films.

[01:48:18]

What films were they?

I – I got some shots of Kwame Nkrumah the President of... of the Gold Coast as it was, and also Jomo Kenyatta in East Africa, where they came and opened a... construction of a dam that I'd investigated there. Plus- I warned the director who came to collect these films. I said, "They are family films." They show... to some extent how civil servants lived. How they... One of them was our honeymoon trip on a boat out to - to Nigeria. So, it showed all the boat activities. And this was very much a – a civil service filmed boat and so on. So anyway, and there were others, and they were made just for showing the climate at various times of year and so on. Anyway, interested them enough. They said, "Oh, we want to archive these." So, OK, they're there somewhere. Eventually they closed down and have only been recently resurrected. I think the funds ran out... for all sorts of things. Anyway, that's...

Were you the first- you were first a civil servant.

I was certainly first a colonial civil servant.

But so, were you British by then?

Yes.

When were you naturalised?

My father was naturalised, and I was naturalised on the same piece of paper- so to speak. In 1948 or '9; I'm not absolutely sure which. At the end of my work at Imperial.

Yeah. Hence you could become a British civil servant.

Yes.

But then subsequently you worked for a private – that was a private company.

Yes, after the Gold Coast, it was all private sector.

And how did you meet Helen? How did you meet our wife?

[01:50:05]

She was a qualified primary school teacher, who went to work in a school where my sister worked. My sister was a teacher at George Eliot in St John's Wood. And Helen likes to tell the story about when she went for an interview... which schools she should be assigned. They took one look at her and said, "I think we'll send you to St John's Wood." Not to – whatever it was – [laughing] Bethnal Green or something. And she went for an interview in County Hall... where I also went for interviews many years later. Anyway, so she worked with my sister. And the story is that my sister said to her, "My brother is home from Africa. He had a dinner date with a - his girlfriend, and she's let him down. And

it's a dinner for..." - I think it was the Association of Jewish Graduates. Something like that. And I was a member. And she said, "His girlfriend has let him down..." - and I'd met Helen once by then at Claire's place - "Would you like to go along?" And Helen was [laughs] very taken aback by this peculiar offer, but then she said she - she agreed. And during dinner she decided that she wanted to get married. So, she said afterwards. I didn't at that time, but very soon afterwards. Yes. And also, at that time she had no idea I wanted to go back to Africa. I actually went back for a few months. I had something urgent on there. I think that was in East Africa. And... wrote and said, "I'm coming back. I'm coming back." And we got engaged when I came back. And then I said, "Well I now have to go out to Nigeria. What about coming?" [laughs] And she told her mother and her mother said, 'Are you getting married?' And Helen said, "Oh, I suppose so." That's- But we had to get married, otherwise she wouldn't have been let in, I think. Strict regulations for unaccompanied females entering those...yeah.

Yeah. And when did you get married?

In September 1962.

And where, where did you get married?

Ah... In a Registry Office in - not Wood Green - yes, Wood Green I think it was, along the Edgware Road. With just ten people attending, as far as I remember. And on the day, we got the train to get to Liverpool to get the ship to go to... to Lagos. So, her parents were not too keen on the Nigeria thing, because she had an aunt who'd died in Nigeria, I think. Or had a stroke initially. So, there was a bit of a tragic background story, but... we survived. But I wasn't keen to go back. That was at the end of the fifth year of investigation of this site. And I didn't want to go back for the construction, which took another five years. And... Luckily, I suppose, Balfour Beattie said, "We've got some work coming up in East Africa." And we had some three delightful... spells of several months each in the highlands of Kenya and Tanzania. And they, they were rather nice.

And were you and Helen together?

[01:54:04]

Yes, together and with... one child to start with, and then two children.

So, were the children born in Africa or.?

No, they were both born in... Barnet here. It worked out. I think I - Helen became pregnant as soon as we got back from Nigeria. We decided we wanted a child, and then we moved into here. And then we... went out for a few months with, with Naomi, as a toddler. Or even less than a toddler I think, yes. That was to Tanzania, or Tanganyika as it then was; that was pre-independence. And- For a dam site investigation. And came back here, and then went out again '62, '65 and '67. And the last one was in East Africa in the Rift Valley which was really... I used to call them 'paid holidays'. It was very nice to... live and work there. It's all turned rather sour since then. Even the tourist situation...

In...?

East Africa, yes, it's... become... everybody says so... you know, for tourists even, they have to be so careful not to be robbed and all the rest of it. It was... safer when we were there.

So totally you spent quite a few years in Africa, from '49.

Yes. Oh, yes.

And what was your highlight or what, in that time for yourself - living in Africa, working in Africa?

Can I tell you the two most stupid things I did ever, because they stick in my memory.

Go on.

It's part of the highlights- They are perhaps *the* highlights. I was working... yes, in Nigeria. And by that time the dam in the Gold Coast had reached a certain level of construction that meant they were going to start filling the reservoir. So, there was a big day planned of...of... sort of a feast.

Celebration?

[01:56:23]

Celebration is the word. Thank you. And... I was advised of this. And I was actually invited to take part, because I'd been there for five, six years even, at the beginning, to select the site of that. So OK, I agreed. And... went - went back there. And did some work for them as well over the two weeks. And then the day came when this was the official celebration. And I had my camera with me, and I decided to film this. And of course, it was being filmed by publicity people and all sorts of- the press from overseas and so on.

Yes...

And I decided to go and film it from the other side of the river, which was, I could see ...a platform had been constructed. And Nkrumah was going to come and press a button to, to lower the shutters on some tunnel, and the reservoir would then start filling and so on. And there was a speech and whatever. So, there I was, with a camera and a telephoto lens, on the other side of the river. And I sort of flattened myself, and got a good place. Classic... sniper's attitude. And Nkrumah came, and there were people in front of him sweeping for mines to detect – he was not a popular person everywhere. And there were security people everywhere down there, but not a soul came to the other side of the river. And if only one security man with a gun, had come the other side, in finding me he might have shot first and asked questions afterwards. Cause there was I lying, a long band of stuff, and there was Nkrumah at the other side. If that stayed in my mind it was a

highlight of one of the most stupid things I did. The other one involved Jomo Kenyatta, believe it or not. The other President. Because we were in East Africa then. And... I was doing a resistivity investigation of potential for geothermal energy. Which I have to say eventually... finished up with power stations in Kenya. Not by any means due to me, but this was part of the build-up. Balfour Beattie said to me, "We want to maintain... interest in this area." Because we'd already done one deep borehole there, and it showed possible geothermal energy potential. How do you keep interest if you want the interest of the World Bank - and so on. So, I devised a scheme which would take about six months. And there we were, in East Africa, in Nakuru in the highland. Lovely, and I heard from local papers and the radio that Kenyatta was going to come through, visiting something in the north of the country. And I had this machine where you cranked a handle to generate electricity. And it involved all sorts of cables spread out, and things hammered into the ground to pass electricity through the ground. And I said, "Well I want to see this motorcade with Kenyatta in front..." and maybe wave or something. Stupid is it? And there came this motorcade... with people with guns front and back, and there was me, treading a handle, on a box, with cable stretched... Again, if they'd had any security idea, they'd have shot first. But I didn't blow him up so everything went well. That also stays in my mind. But that was a highlight actually of my time in Africa. That time in Nakuru with... Naomi was a toddler by then, yes. That would have been... '65. Sixty-seven we went to visit one of the dams that I'd investigated. That had been built by then. Nice reservoir full of elephants every day, and... mainly shouting at monkeys. Baboons who used to come and ...inspect our washing hung up on the line.

Yeah... so you had...

Nice. We have- we have good memories. Naomi nearly trod on a... very nasty snake. She was walking ahead of us on a path, jumped and then she said, "Look!" And there was- She jumped over this snake. And we said, "Stop! Stop!" And she said, "What? What?" - and was coming towards us, and... ooh. However, yes... nothing untoward happened.

[02:01:16]

And was it clear that when the children would go to - to school that you're coming back or did you plan- What was the plan at that time?

The plan at that time was to get out of... out of geological work in Africa, to settle down in England. Which was not an easy task. But... I saw an advert, and I was offered a post at the Natural Environment Research Council – NERC - which had its head office in Alhambra House in Charing Cross Road. And I happily settled there for the next... nine years, when the bastards decided to move to Swindon. [laughs] And to build a headquarters with the Science Research Council as well. Eventually it became a Research Council sort of enclave. In fact, I think the Medical Research Council moved there. But I did not fancy leaving Lover's Walk. So, I decided to commute to Swindon... and did that for five years. By the end I was getting fairly fed up and the commute was also getting very expensive. Originally it was subsidised quite a lot, but in the end, subsidies stayed the same but railway fares increased. So, I looked for something else. ...And that's what appeared in that Guardian first interview when I said, when the post of Data Protection Officer was handed to my duties... at NERC, I liked it so much that I looked for an opportunity and found one! Which was a brilliant stroke of luck, at the GLC – the Greater London Council. And was taken on to join a team of about five. We taught data protection to local authorities, and to London schools. And the GLC of course was abolished... by basically Margaret Thatcher. And I

knew that when I joined. Everybody knew that already, but they were very clear that they would be- Their computer section, of which this formed a part, would be transferred bodily to the private sector. A bid had already been made by a company called Hoskins. But I was very happy for about a year... in a marvellous office overlooking the Thames with the Houses of Parliament opposite, in County Hall.

[02:04:00]

Yeah...

Which was a great place. We used to say if you went round and round long enough, looking for where you were meant to go, 'cause you could never find it, you would find skeletons of people who'd never made it back, it was so... difficult to - to go along with the numbering of rooms and so on. Anyway, the GLC was fun. I learnt as much as I taught, I think. And... then we joined Hoskins and eventually Hoskins was - was... sold off to somebody called Capgemini. And we were down to a duo of two people: my senior partner and myself. And he still full time works in that field. And I retired when I was seventy. I remember when at sixty-five I was waiting for Capgemini possibly or asking them - I'm not sure which - to come and tap me on the shoulder and say, you know, "It's time to go." But nothing happened. A month or two short of my... sixty-fifth birthday, I wrote to the human resources department and said, "What's, you know, going on?" "What plans do you have for me?" The chap visited me and said, "You're not sixty-five. "You know, "You don't look sixty-five. You don't act sixty-five. Anyway, you can't be replaced so just carry on." And so, I wrote a letter back, said, "I'm quite happy to carry on subject to satisfactory arrangements with salary..." and such like. We never made much profit but we were a... I think we were a class act. Put it that way. We were quite famous - well known. Ran a helpline where people could join at a fee; could ring up any time and get advice over the phone. And because of this, and because the people who rang up sometimes had committed a criminal offence by breaching the data protection legislation, we had to have a private telephone line. And because we had to have a private telephone line, we had to have a private office. And we eventually landed up at a company who said, "Only God has a private office." This is all hot desking, by then and... But we had a private office. So... because it was sensitive information that we were dealing with all the time, particularly with our clients. As I said, we did sometimes ring up and say, "Oh, my God. What have we done?" And, "We've got the Commissioner breathing down our necks", and, "It is a criminal offence." And, "I can get us out of this." And that sort of thing. So... we, we enjoyed the time, in a private office, right until the end.

[02:06:56]

So quite a switch from the engineering aspect to the data protection.

Totally, and I was glad to make it because ...well as a family and children who could no longer ...be just taken away and so on. And Africa becoming Africa which was... not as desirable as it used to be in my day, at least that's how I felt.

Yeah...

So... And being settled in a nice home. That was... lucky.

So, did you put your roots down here in Finchley in this One, Lover's Walk?

Yes, it is, I mean... what with the address being a nice address. When we saw the house from the entrance door into the garden, Helen said, "Oh, that's where I want to live. And... that worked out. And the fact that we could build a major ...extension. A really major one, which has made the house what it is. So, yes, we've been here fifty years now, plus. So, I guess we are stuck in Finchley.

And do you feel this is your home?

Oh, yes. Yes, no - no hankering after anything much elsewhere.

Yes, and your children went to local schools here and...

They went to local schools. Yes... David went to something called Christchurch, where he made his mark, I think doing the worst ever arts... exam ever. I, I still have it in the family album. Something of minimal effort. The head teacher gave him a copy - "This came in from the examiner." And... Nevertheless, he was accepted by Middlesex for their arts degree. And at the end of the first year, when he said to us "I want to do music and recording..." and all that sort of stuff and we said, "Is there life in this?" And he said, "Yes there is." And now he's quite a well-known producer and composer. So, he's - he's ok. Still gets us worried of course, but he's ok. Naomi's made an enormous success of her shop, not financially, but financially well enough. And she went to East Anglia University.

[02:09:24]

What did she study?

English. Yes, well, takes after Helen. And... she once told a story about somebody coming into her... shop and making big with her English degree. And... Naomi saying something and the woman turned to her and said, "You're very knowledgeable for a... oh, shop girl" or, "shop assistant" or even... And Naomi said, "Well my degree is actually better than yours." So... [laughs] And she enjoyed her time in East Anglia so much that she settled in Norwich and has been there ever since. She used to do trips abroad and... buying stuff for the shop in the States and elsewhere, and... is happily settled.

And what sort of identity did you want to transmit to your children, when they were growing up, or...?

Identity...

Mmm.

Well one thing we did not transmit, was any kind of a Jewish identity, I have to say. Partly because I'm very strongly agnostic. I - I believe religions are a mistake in the sense if you believe in them, they're a mistake. They're comfort stories, which, fine, if you want comforting, which we do. But... I can't see any other benefit. Put it that way. So, there was no question of their growing up as Jewish, at all. They went to non-Jewish schools. I imbibed an extraordinary amount of Christian religion. I could take a church service...completely, because of these... Singing there and of course twice on Sundays and all the rest of it. My parents didn't like that, but... they went as far as Bar Mitzvah but after that let me go my own way. Because there was no... nothing else, no other way I would have gone. So...in terms of identity, they- I think they benefited from a literate house, musical house, and... relatives of the same ilk. Was a total surprise to me that my son really had musical talent because I played the piano. I actually played at the Imperial College Music Society concert, a scherzo, a Chopin scherzo believe it – unbelievable! I never had the technique nor the hands for doing that but I played it to great applause. But...shouldn't have tried, but I did.

[02:12:20]

Did you continue your piano, did you continue?

No, once- Once I went abroad the opportunities were much less. We had a piano here for the children to learn, and as a norm. And when they moved out, we decided to get rid of it 'cause I didn't want it really any more. Also, I developed arthritic hands, so that became impossible. So, they've taken on board whatever they wanted to take from - from what we offered. And we are content with that.

And how would you describe yourself in terms of your own identity today?

...Well, I don't want to repeat. Identity quite often starts with - well let's take nationality. I see myself as European. I can't claim to be British as some people claim to be; that's a standard joke, but I am. I suppose what would be a Gold Coast pensioner, I'm certainly acceptably British. But the bulk of that pension by the way is now paid by what used to be the... Crown Agents which was a very British institution, which is now the Department for Overseas Development or something like that. The Gold Coast gets away with about a tenth of the sum. It was quite an interesting thing, because at the time, some of my colleagues decided to quit. And the question was, do you take a lump sum or do you take a, an enhanced pension and so on. And I said, "I'm going to take a lump sum and a small pension." Cause I wanted that lump sum anyway. And the small pension is just about enough for a - a beer, I used to say, at that end of the month. Something like £150... £170 a year, I think, it was quite small. But at the age fifty-five it suddenly multiplied by a factor of ten, and became worth having. And now it's something like three or four thousand pounds a year which is...but it's inflation. I have five pensions, I think. I also have one from Austria of course, yes, which we - my sister and I - filled in many, many forms. I had to fill in twice as many as she did, because the Austrians would not believe that I didn't attend school after the age of sixteen. And we always thought there was a gap, and that they said it must be "*lückenlos*" [*gapless*] that this form...[laughing] had to be filled in. And it had to go backwards and forwards several times before they said yes, yes, but I keep telling you at sixteen I finished schooling... and went to university. And they couldn't believe that, but they did in the end. It wasn't totally unheard of.

And did your parents ever get any reparation, or...?

[02:15:24]

...No. ...No. I think not. I'm not sure but they could apply...wait a minute, no. No, my mother had an accident and she had some pay-out for her accident... but they never got any money then, no. No. I'm not sure if they should have applied for something or could have applied for something. Or obviously could. But... No, I'm not aware.

And what do you think for yourself, is the most important part of your Austrian Jewish heritage?

Mnn... Well, the most important consequence was my coming to England, and being given the opportunities I had here. I cannot claim, I mean I can claim a DNA Jewish heritage of course. And I claim- Pride, you can't- I don't think you can talk about pride in anything that you were born to, but... the Jewish heritage, this an extraordinary number of... mathematicians, physicians, artists and so on comes out of this tiny... tiny fault whatever you like to call it, is some matter of pride, of course. Jewish religion - none at all. No. I find it a mistake same as I find the Catholic religion or any other. I can't talk about religion without giving somebody offence. So... unless I'm cornered about what agnosticism actually means, and what I think about... the stories, which I - as I said I find comfort stories. Humans seek comfort because they know they're going to die. So. But to believe in it, let alone kill other people for it, is something I don't like. And that's about all my heritage, I think. Not much, but... for what I've got I'm grateful, yes.

And the music at all...do you listen to...?

No, I... Not as my sister- She, she got a degree in piano. ...But I didn't pursue music. I do accept liking classical music more, not understanding what my son is doing at all. Not one little bit.

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

Well, as I said, I sometimes thank my lucky stars that Hitler annexed Austria. But of course, it's a disgraceful thing to say, because so many people... suffered. I don't know what I would have done. ...I didn't have many role-models there at the time. I couldn't see myself doing what my father was interested in. He brought home some of these surgical instruments. [laughs] He took me to the barber... when I was ...five or four. And the barber said, "What has happened here?" I had a tremendous head of hair. And my father said, "Well what do you mean?" And he said, "There's a gap!" And my father said, "What did you do? And I said, "I used the *Knochenzange*." He brought home something that was used to cut bones. A fearful instrument. And I found it, and I used it to cut off a part of my hair. Believe it or not, yes, I had a tremendous head of hair. After that, he didn't bring home any surgical instruments again. But I had no... other than that... particular interest. As I said I was moderately bright. I - I did all the exams that I was doing there. But by the age of ten, I had no aim in life whatsoever.

[02:19:44]

And what impact do you think did your experience... I guess of the Kindertransport or of the uprooting, did it have on your later life?

The uprooting gave me all the opportunities that - that I have managed with luck, to have. So, it's - it's totally moulded me in this peculiar direction of mining geology, which was a pure shot in the dark, so to speak. ...Going to Africa. That would have been, yes, now, I read a lot of books like all Austrian German children did. Karl May and 'Old Shatterhand' and all these things... So, I also read books about... Tanganyika, which of course was a German colony. And which were anti-English, to some degree. And the disgrace of the German Army which was never defeated in East Africa, but had to give up their arms.

Yeah...

Now when Helen and I and Naomi went to Tanganyika, I introduced them to all the... remnants of Germany. There was the- We stayed for a while near the coast which was not too hot and humid. Quite pleasant climate. But there was a mountain range nearby called the *Usambaras*, where the Germans - of course, they always found the best places - had established themselves. And there was a 'Jägertal', still, on the map! Jägertal. There were people that still spoke German. African people. And... we went there to get into the cold air and Helen loved that. And as a precursor to East Africa, it was quite an experience. So ...and in south Tanganyika where I was on my own... 19... '55 to '59. We hadn't gone through all the things in Africa actually. In the Southern Highlands - which I think is the best part of Africa ever - there was also German legacy. So... I will tell you a very peculiar story about German Togoland. When I visited- When I was in the Gold Coast. Yes. The Gold Coast joined British Togoland, which was a takeover after the First World War of German Togoland. And I was sent- I went there to do some water supply work. To find good well sites for people. And I was walking... through - I wouldn't call it a jungle - it was grassland with forest. It was forest. With some... interpreter and a guide, and some of my labourers to some distant village. And this was in British Togoland. When I thought I went mad, because I was hearing - and I couldn't quite... - a folk song, a German folksong. And I hadn't put two and two together, as you already will have. It was "*Muss i denn, muss i denn zum Städtele hinaus*". This was pre-Elvis Presley making the song famous; it wasn't anywhere on the radio or anything. And I heard this, and I looked at- and nobody reacted. Nobody seemed to hear this. And it got stronger and stronger and I thought, you know, here is where I go back and claim asylum, in an asylum. Turned the corner, and there was a schoolhouse of course with children solemnly singing this song beautifully. And I heaved a great sigh of relief and... But it was a quite an experience while it lasted. It was- They still sang the German songs. It had been German Togoland, and it was divided between Britain and France... and the Germans were thrown out.

[02:24:16]

So, did you- Did you maintain your German?

No. Disgracefully I have forgotten nearly all of it. I should have A: kept on reading German books which I didn't. Sadly, Helen didn't insist. I should have insisted, or as Rauter did, speaking German to my children. And all that went by the

board. So... too bad, yes. I've regretted. It would have been good as a second language, not just for myself but for my children. But they didn't learn it, no.

But in Africa you...

Curiously enough, yes. Yes. I had once one cook who could speak rudimentary but a quite good German. He was quite old of course... but he did and... One driver who could swear in German. [laughs] He must have inherited that from his father.

And did you find in Africa actually that the consequence of the different colonial powers ...interesting? You know, the Germans the British and the French?

Yeah... No, because I worked mainly in of course what were British colonies by then, for some time. I became not - I wouldn't say an apologist for colonialism - but...well 'cause I was on a constructive side. But I got to know many civil servants of course who worked their guts out, some of them, in quite difficult situations and had extraordinarily responsible jobs. Yes, you criticise them but I – I tend to be on the side of the colonial servants, and the colonies. We made a big mess of some of them of course. But the Gold Coast survived to independence without the blood – bloodshed, which was quite something. Either then or after. And the coups came... afterwards.

So, you were happy to be part of the, of the...

Yes, I'm not- I'm not apologetic about it. Occasionally I attend meetings of... colonial civil servants. I belong to one or two organisations, and they of course are very keen to... to redress the imbalance, as they see it, of the criticism, and so on, but... There's a dying breed of the OSPA organisation – the Overseas Service Pensioners' Association.

[02:26:53]

And you're part of that?

I'm part of it, but they have just signalled the end of their... their yearly publications, because they no longer have enough [laughing] to support. And they can see the end coming with shrinking membership... which is not surprising.

You're still on the younger side... I mean... since you joined it very young? That's what I mean.

No... I- Oh... I didn't know about it until... Yes, I joined it was very young, I suppose.

No, I mean you were a young civil servant. That's what I mean.

Yes. Yeah. But... so that's coming to an end. But I do think of course service overseas and my overseas work outside of colonialism, outside of being a civil servant ...there was, were more years of course as a - as a paid employee of a private

company, than there were of colonies. But it was in the ex-colonies. That moulded - must have moulded – me, in, in some degree. It was an outdoor life.

Yes.

So ...my choice of mining geology went that way. Still outdoors. Something practical.

Yeah... yeah. Did you actually- I mean I know there are some German Jewish refugees or Austrians also who made their way to Africa in the thirties and stayed. I don't know- Did you ever come across...?

I don't recall coming across any... No. None who identified themselves as that in - either way.

Were you ever politically inclined? I mean you were a civil servant but did you ever become involved politically? And you said that...

[02:28:51]

No. The fact that Benn Levy was an exceedingly rich socialist – put it that way. But he became a civil servant. He became a... a Member of Parliament in 1945, the Attlee government. And he became a member for Eton and Slough. And... He wrote to me and said he was standing for Parliament. I didn't even know that – you know - what this all involved. I was fairly ignorant. And when he said he was a socialist, I didn't- It was news to me. And he got in and I congratulated him. I did a tea or something at the terrace of the House of Commons once or twice. But I then started looking into politics and I think, I realised if I was anything, I was a socialist. So... I've been a Labour voter I guess all my life.

And what do you make today of the situation? No, I don't mean Brexit - I mean the refugees. Because I know you've been interviewed for the Guardian.

Well, I'm on the record as saying I'm very pessimistic. I don't just see it as... the refugees who are waiting to come here, or the refugees who are in camps. I see it as a – as a mass migration of people which is going to be impossible to stop. I see it as climate change. I think being- making life in Africa or parts of Africa intolerable, where they were at least supporting subsistence farming. ...I think I see it as water wars... becoming inevitable because we are incapable of stopping our human species growth. So, in a sense I'm happy I'm not going to be here to see it. And since I don't believe in life after death, or reincarnation and so on, I don't- or, well, I see no proof of that. So that's too bad. I'm sorry for my children, cause they're going, as the Chinese say as a curse - they're going to live in interesting times. But I think it's their grandchildren who may find that they're in a... a world where these certainties that we have now, no longer apply. Whether- Which aspect of science fiction will apply, I don't know. But the human species cannot survive in this way. The- Of course I'm more aware of many of the resources that the earth can yield. And of the resources that go into smart phones, where the mines are being worked out at a rapid rate, of rare minerals which are used for that. Scientists can do all sort of things, and will get over some of these. But... I don't- I feel pessimistic, sadly, yes. Sadly.

But not in terms of Britain, in terms of the world - world situation.

[02:32:02]

Yes. Yes. So as for now, yes, I've said I wish the government could let in as many as possible of refugees. I take the point that some of them... are not children at all, but are young men. And I take the point of terrorism. It's impossible to stop. So... as long as people are willing to lay down their lives for a religion, or for some cause or other we're going to have that. I don't see it being capable of being eradicated. I see it as the Muslim tragedy, because Shias and Sunnis - I mean that's basically irreconcilable. Somebody just said the other day said it was something that happened 1,500 years ago, but... if people will believe so strongly in these things, there's no stopping them.

No. And have you got any message for anyone who might watch this interview, based on your own experience?

Trust in luck, and look out for it, and seize it when it comes. That's about all.

Because you said in your own life there were tragedies, but they became opportunities.

Well, they did, I mean, starting with coming to England. But... there were other things where ...My opportunities arose from my being thoroughly fed up with what I was doing, and so on. And the opportunities presented themselves. They might not have. So, I think I've been rather lucky all my life, one way or another. And... Even in marriage, it starts with the luck of, of my sister and I and her colleagues at school. So ...I can't complain. I do sometimes, but I can't complain.
[laughs]

Is there anything we haven't talked about you'd like to add? Something? I think we've covered quite a lot.

I think you'd have to jog my memory for other stories which are not... no, not... keen to try and still sort out myself. No, I think we've really ...covered my life, I think. Thank you for jogging my memory from time to time. But...

I mean one question might be, what do you think of Germany and Austria today?

[02:34:47]

Ah... Well, I know more than one person, who not long after the war said, "I'm getting out of England. I'm going back to Germany, cause they're so efficient and they're so building up..." et cetera. With the Marshall Plan, mind you. That... I'm inclined to... accept Germany as it is. Not that I can do anything about it anyway. I don't have any inclination to go back and... and assault elderly people and say, "What did you do during the war?", sort of thing. The Austrians were bastards, yes, they were really... unpleasant, I think. Even more so perhaps than the - than the Germans. And they've been busy rehabilitating, or trying to rehabilitate themselves. I remember being on a coach of tourists in Vienna, and the first thing the guide said was, "The awful gap that has been left by the Jewish people leaving us", and so on. Well trained. It didn't

sound too sincere, but it didn't sound insincere either. So, there was an awful gap. Some recognised it; fine. But as I said we have no particular ...inclination to go and visit, let alone visit or live anywhere else than where we do. Helen was born in London, so... She likes London and what it- The opportunities it offers which we don't take often enough, but we try.

OK.

OK?

Mr Kosten thank you very much for sharing your life story with us.

Thank you. Well... Thanks for asking.

And we're going to look at some photographs and documents now.

Yes, that's a task, as you saw. [laughs] I'll try and help. I'll try and help you if you indicate the year, or anything or the type of photograph. We'll look it up. Thank you.

Thank you.

[End of interview]

[02:37:10]

[02:37:15]

[Start of photographs]

Yes, please, who is on the picture?

Sorry? I'm not with you...

Who is on the picture?

Photo 1.

Who is on the picture? That is- on the right is my grandfather, Markus Tepper. On the left is my step-grandmother, Malcha. That is his, at least his second wife, possibly his third or fourth wife.

And where was this picture taken? Where?

It was taken in Krakau. ...I'm assuming it was in Krakau, because we were never told any different, and I think he always lived there. When... That would have been after my mother's birth of course. So, somewhere between 1890 and 1900.

Photo 2.

This is a photograph of my mother. Aged about four or five, so that puts it in the year 1894 or 1895. Together with her siblings. She was a child of the final marriage of my grandfather, and they were from an earlier marriages, possibly two marriages.

And when was it taken?

I said 1894 or 1895, making her four or five years old... In Krakau... Where was it taken – sorry.

Photo 3

This is a photograph of my father Josef Kösten as it then was, taken around 1913, in Vienna.

Photo 4.

This is my father, Josef Kösten, on the left of the photograph, taken probably on the Russian front, during the First World War.

[02:39:34]

Photo 5.

This is a photograph taken by my father, Josef Kösten, during the First World War. It shows – it shows Austrian soldiers, probably on the Russian front. And it formed part of his work as an official war photographer.

And was published...?

And was published in a magazine, 'Allgemeine Rundschau'.

Photo 6.

This is the wedding photograph of my parents, Amalia Tepper and Josef Kösten, taken on 22nd July 1921. Probably in Vienna.

Photo 7.

This is a photograph of my sister Claire and myself, taken on holiday somewhere in Austria, probably the year 1929.

Photo 8.

This is a photograph of my father Josef and myself taken in June 1932, by the Donaukanal, in Vienna.

[02:40:41]

Photo 9.

This is a photograph of my sister Claire and myself taken in Vienna, in 1932.

Photo 10.

This is a photograph of myself and Claire, my sister, playing in the Augarten in Vienna. In 1932.

Photo 11.

This is a photograph of my sister Claire in a dirndl, and myself in lederhosen taken on holiday, next to the Wolfgangsee 7th of August 1937.

Photo 12.

This is a photograph of my parents, Amalia and Josef Kösten, together with my sister Claire and myself, taken in Hameau, Austria, in May 1937.

Photo 13.

This is a photograph of my class at Volksschule in Vienna. I'm sitting next to Mr Adler, our teacher, and it is 1937.

Document

This is the *Abgangszeugnis* [leaving certificate] from the Jüdische Lyzeum [Jewish High School] in Vienna, issued in February 1939, for myself, Manfred Kösten].

Photo 14.

This is a photograph taken by the Evening News photographer on the 15th of March 1939. It shows Katie Cohen, who lived at 64 Old Church Street, collecting us. That's my sister Claire and myself, in the reception hall for the Kindertransport children who arrived on that date. Prior to going with us to 66 Old Church Street.

Photo 15.

This is a photograph of myself taken in Gibbs School uniform, and standing on the balcony of 66 Old Church Street, in the summer of 1939.

Photo 16.

This is a 1939 photograph of Constance Levy, whose stage name was Constance Cummings, who, together with her husband Benn Levy, were guarantors for my sister Claire, my mother and myself, during our stay in London, with them.

[02:43:49]

Photo 17.

This is a photograph of Benn Levy, playwright, taken in 1939, in whose house my sister and I and our mother lived, after our arrival in England.

Photo 18.

This is a photograph of my mother ...Amalia - usually known as Mina - Kösten, my sister Claire and myself on holiday in Eastbourne in August 1939.

Photo 19.

This is a photograph of the Aldro School Rugby Football Team in 1941, with myself, back row, second from left.

[02:44:42-

[03:08:00]

[Here follows talk between Bea, photographer and Freddy Kosten in which they look for a last photograph – some interim timings given.]

Oh, that's me with the python I was telling you about.

Where is the python - there?

I'm holding it, yes.

Was it not dangerous?

Was it not poisonous?

Pythons are not poisonous. But they are infectious. You get an infection in the wound if it bites you. But there is no poison.

Did it not bite?

No, I stopped it from biting. I didn't - I held it the right way, put it that way.

We can take it. This one and then...

[02:48:20]

Well, we can say it's the first snake in this archive [laughs].

Ah well, there's always a first time.

OK...

'My life and hard times', I used to call one of these with...with girlfriends.

Do you want one with me and the Governor? This was the first one...somebody said– she is going to an exhibition... tennis, lots of tennis, yes... Climbing mountains. Girlfriends...

It's funny.

Wait a minute. Which is the one I was...you know, there is a proper photo, I got somewhere. I'll have to look for it, sorry.

[more conversation]

That's my favourite, early photo, Kilimanjaro. No, no, no. I think... The one with the governor is in my other album. There is one with Rauter somewhere here, I thought.

No, no, no.

I'm afraid I have to tell you that it may be in the other photo album. This goes back to the origins of Helen's family.

Is that an engagement photo? Yes.

Is that an engagement photo? Let's just go back to your sister with the two children.

Here we are.

[02:51:35]

I've no idea where it was taken, I'm afraid. I think they were in some park or other.

[02:55:49]

Peter's a photographer.

He was, he died young, very tragically, heart attack.

Because there was an exhibition of his photographs...

Yes, that's right in the Jewish Museum.

OK. OK. Now.

That's our wedding.

[02:57:45]

Well, it comes to a matter of the same thing. We were engaged for a total of four months, I think.

But Andrea has children.

Yes, that's right. Christopher and his family.

They live in Thailand? What do they do there?

I have no idea.

OK.

[low discussion of photos goes on for some time]

Almost done. Almost done.

[03:08:00]

Photo 20.

This is a photo of my wife Helen and myself, taken at the occasion of our Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary in September... 2012.

Mr Kosten thank you again for this interview.

Thank you for your... stout efforts, I have to say - stamina and enthusiasm. Most grateful.

Thank you.

[3:08:27]

[End of photographs]