

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	52

Interviewee Surname:	Norton
Forename:	Robert
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	21 September 1932
Interviewee POB:	Teplitz Schönau, Czechoslovakia

Date of Interview:	21 March 2004
Location of Interview:	Nottingham
Name of Interviewer:	Yvonne Gordon
Total Duration (HH:MM):	2 hours

**REFUGEE VOICES:
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE****INTERVIEW: 52****NAME: ROBERT NORTON****DATE: 21 MARCH 2004****LOCATION: NOTTINGHAM****INTERVIEWER: YVONNE GORDON****TAPE 1****Tape 1: 0 minute 54 seconds**

YG: Would you like to start by telling me your name at birth, your place of birth, and your date of birth please?

RN: Yes, I was born on the 21st of September 1932, in a place called Teplitz-Schönau, Teplice in Czech. My name was Robert Joachim Neubauer.

YG: Now, would you like to tell me about your own life experiences in that area?

Tape 1: 1 minute 13 seconds

RN: Well, Teplitz-Schönau or Teplitz was part of Sudetenland in Bohemia. It was the north of Czechoslovakia. It was a spa town. And I lived in a family of well-to-do, middle-class Jews, who were not terribly religious. The town was situated about 20 miles from the German-Saxon border. It was almost entirely German speaking, although under the Czech, the first Czechoslovak Republic dictat, everything had to be in two languages. The first language was German and the second language was Czech. So, for instance, my birth certificate was in Czech and German. My mother's family had lived in the area for about 200 years. My grandfather was a doctor, a GP. The town of Teplitz was in fact a spa town, and he was one of the directors of the spa, he was a town councillor, and he was also part of the synagogue council. The synagogue had been built, oh, about 1870, somewhere in that region. My grandfather came from that area as well, but certainly my grandmother, her family, my great grandmother, lived in that area for for about 200 years. My great grandfather was an entrepreneur, they call it these days, but he was a business-man. He owned a textile factory, he owned a horse trading company, a grain factory; he dealt with a lot of things and he was pretty well-to-do. My grandfather was one of a series of doctors, but he was the first one to be educated in the university as a doctor. His father and their father before them were doctors too, but they were what they were called in German 'Wunddoktoren', i.e. they were something like our paramedics today. They were apprenticed with doctors. They were not allowed to go; Jews were not allowed to go to university in those days. Grandfather was the first one. As in many towns in that part of the world, there was a local castle and a count. His

name was Fürst Klary. And, for his sins, grandfather was the Fürst's doctor. He never got paid, but he was sort of the local Court Jew, I think.

Tape 1: 4 minutes 32 seconds

RN: There was a large extended family. My mother was one of three children. She was the youngest. Her next sister was called Elizabeth and her eldest sister was called Tini. Grandfather had quite a lot of contacts in the town. I grew up among a very large extended family. The things I remember well were, during the high holidays, we used to have to go, well, we didn't have to, but we went to synagogue. And I'll always remember the synagogue because it was enormous. It was circular, with the most beautiful chandelier in the middle. Its rites were, I suppose, more Reform than Eastern European Orthodox. It had a choir and it had an organ. It's something that is embedded in my memory. I well remember it. All the men dressed in those days, on Kol Nidre night, in top hats and dinner suits and I well remember going with my grandfather and my uncles. One of my uncles was a doctor too, he had rather left-wing socialist leanings, and was in the Czech National Health Service, which, I suppose, is the equivalent of the British Panel Service, so he treated people who couldn't afford to pay doctors in those days. But he was well-liked and did very well. And my other uncle was the head of Southern Bohemia's Inland Revenue, so he was a civil servant too. My father, and I come to him last, was actually born in Budapest, into an abjectly poor, poor family. His father died in 1900, and he was born in 1850. So he died when my father was very young. My father was born in 1892, so he was 8 years old when my grandfather died. And that was my grandfather's second marriage. And he brought into the marriage two or three other children. So, when he died, my grandmother was left with two stepchildren, my father and my aunt, that's his sister. They were so poor that, in the end, they sent him, or my grandmother sent him, to a Jewish home in Budapest, where for a few years he grew up. At 16 or 17, he emigrated into northern Czechoslovakia, or, in those days, it was northern Austro-Hungarian, which was the town where I was born in, which was famous for, apart from its spa, it was a well known textile area, and a little bit further on was well known as a jewellery area: bijouterie, glass beads and candelabras and that sort of thing, chandeliers.

Tape 1: 8 minutes 18 seconds

RN: And my father emigrated there on his own, a 16-year old boy, hardly spoke two words of German: Hungarian was his mother tongue. And he was apprenticed to a knitwear manufacturer. In the 1914-18 war, he joined up and was in a Hungarian regiment, fighting in what later became Yugoslavia, in those days it was Serbia or maybe Croatia, I can't remember anymore. But he was invalided out in 1917, having been buried by a bombardment of shells, shell-shocked. And he went back to the company where he had been apprenticed. The boss of the company was still in the army, so father more or less ran the firm as a very, very young man. And the boss came back and my father asked him if he could become a partner and the boss said no. And so father left. But, in the meantime, he had befriended what later became my uncle, the young doctor, and they were great friends. They were both Jewish. My father had learned a reasonable amount of German by that time, he never was a great linguist, but he learnt enough. And they used to go out on Saturday nights and enjoyed themselves. Father, my uncle rather, the doctor, through being a doctor, and going to the spa and so on and so forth, got to know my grandfather, who had three daughters to get rid of. And one of them he got rid of to my uncle. And, consequently, then my uncle introduced my father into the family, to the last daughter, the youngest, who was my mother Marianne. Eventually, my father, in 1930, married my mother and consequently I was born in '32. And

that's how my father, a very poor Hungarian boy, got into this family. In the meanwhile, father had met another Jewish guy in the town, who also wanted to set himself up on his own but who had money. But he was a salesman. My father never was a good salesman but he was an expert technician. He knew all about knitting machines, he could take the bits and put them together again, and he was a technician, and he loved engineering and taking things to bits. So they set up a partnership together. The other guy had money through his family, and this was obviously prior to my father marrying my mother, so my father put the expertise in and the other guy put the money in, and between them they started a small knitwear company, which, over the years, until 1938, grew into quite a large business, which employed about 400 or 450 people. By the time he married my mother, my father was quite well-to-do, he was certainly middle-class financially, and they married and they had a flat as everybody did, people didn't have houses, and I came along.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 0 second

I remember well mixing with the extended family. There was my grandfather's brother, who was a solicitor in the town; there was my uncle, who was a doctor; there was my other uncle, who didn't live in the town but often came to visit us. But, on high days and holidays, we were invited to appear, in fact, ordered to appear almost, at my grandfather's for either lunch or dinner. And this was always a grand affair. There was, the table was set, with white linen, I well remember it, with white linen and beautiful Czech glasses, engraved glasses. There was always good food, it tended to be rather Central European food, I think, because they were very Germanicised, but my grandfather never ever had pork. But they did not keep a Kosher household anymore, not a strict one in the sense of keeping meat and milk separately. But they did not eat pork, ever. But the meals were always grand, there was always a soup and a main course and an extensive pudding with whipped cream, and that was the sort of thing I remember.

YG: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

RN: I had no brothers and sisters. I was a single child. My aunts and uncles also only had single children. The doctor uncle had one son and the Inland Revenue guy uncle, he had a daughter. And I remember at the end of the meal, we used to, all children used to have to go in and we'd be rehearsed, go into the kitchen and thank the cook and the maid and leave a small present, it was usually, presumably in an envelope, it was usually a few pounds, the equivalent - Czech crowns. The real history I remember well, in a sense, when I started school. But, before that, I suppose I ought to explain the beginning of the Czech Republic, after the First World War. I think we ought to stop for lunch probably. Shall we stop for lunch?

Tape 1: 14 minutes 39 seconds [resuming after break]

YG: So it sounds like you came from a very settled and quite a secure background and had quite a positive childhood. Would you say that is the case?

RN: Yes, I would say that is the case. They were a very Germanicised family. I think I ought to also - because it has an influence later on, a very serious influence - explain something about the historical background. Austria-Hungary was a large empire, which stretched from the Balkans in the East to Bavaria in the West and Northern Bohemia, right down to the Adriatic in the South. It was a large empire, with a centre in Vienna, and, after the 1918 war,

this was broken up and countries, such as Czechoslovakia, were founded, and so were countries like Yugoslavia and so on. Czechoslovakia was the only democratic state in Central Europe. Poland wasn't, it was ruled by a right-wing dictator; the Balkan states were often ruled by kings that had been put in. But Czechoslovakia was. Because it was founded, its founding president was a man called Tomáš Masaryk, who had an American wife, and he helped to put the constitution forward as an American-English type government, where every minority had a parliamentary representative. So, the Jews on their own had representatives from Slovakia, which were large Jewish populations. But the salient thing that I'm coming to is that, as soon as the state was declared, the people in it had the option to either acquire Czech citizenship, or leave the citizenship of whatever they were previously. My father was born in Hungary and so therefore, at the time, was a Hungarian citizen. For one reason or another, and I think it was sheer laziness on his part, he did not apply to become a Czechoslovak citizen. He had all the rights, he paid his taxes, he ran a business, he was married into the community, had a wife, and he just couldn't be bothered. He didn't have a wife at the time, but he couldn't be bothered. So he retained his Hungarian citizenship. When he married in 1930, automatically my mother became a Hungarian citizen, and, when I was born, I also automatically became a Hungarian citizen. Now, I had never lived in Hungary, my mother had never lived in Hungary, we didn't speak Hungarian, but that's how it was. And this had tremendous-. This was the reason why we managed to escape eventually.

Tape 1: 18 minutes 4 seconds

To go back to my life as a child, I well remember going to school for the first time. And I was sent to the junior school, which was a German-speaking junior school. There was also a Czech one, but it wasn't very, well, not many children went to that one, the majority were in fact German-speaking. And I always remember we had to get there early on the first day and every child had what was known in German a Zuckertüte, a what do you call it? A bag that looked like a three-cornered circular thing. And every child had that, it was to sweeten their first day at school. That's something I can still see and remember. We had to learn straight away the alphabet and we had to learn straight away counting. There was no children's playing like today they play, so the first numbers we counted, and to this day, unconsciously, because my wife tells me, I still count in German. It's strange but it's obviously the first thing that I learnt. Outside of school, I had my friends, my first cousins, my second cousins. The town where we lived had approximately 6 or 7000 Jews and there was something of 30 or 40 thousand people in the town, so there was a very high percentage of Jews.

Tape 1: 19 minutes 54 seconds

YG: How many Jews were there in your school?

RN: I would think in proportion to the amount of people that were there, I don't remember. At six, you don't count them off. But they were all my friends and second, third and fourth cousins, because we were a very large extended family, because my great grandfatehr lived in the area, and then, in turn, my grandmother had a brother and a sister, my grandfather had a brother who lived there, he had other brothers who had gone away, so, and each, in turn, had built children and grandchildren, and so on. So, I had a lot of friends, who were part of this family.

YG: How old were you when you began school?

RN: Five and a half, just under six. So that was sort of my school day. We played at the weekend, we went for walks. What I also remember is, and it was quite common in the middle-class Jewish families, you employed an au pair girl, or a nanny, or whatever you call them these days, of the other ethnic people. So my, because the lingua franca between my parents was German, they employed a girl from the country, who was Czech, in order for me to learn Czech, because obviously in later years you could not get anywhere or do anything without speaking at least two of the main languages. Very similar today in Switzerland, where the Germans employ a French girl, or the French employ a German girl, or from the German-speaking part of Switzerland, for them to learn two or three languages.

Tape 1: 21 minutes 52 seconds

So, we employed this girl, she was a very nice girl, she was, I don't know, 20 probably, and I loved her very much. And my parents, as in all middle-class families, led quite a social life outside of my father's working life. So my mother often went to bridge parties and coffee mornings, all the things middle-class people in Britain today do, or upper-middle-class people. In those days, women didn't work, they didn't have power jobs, so that's what they did. And we visited my grandparents occasionally, by that time they had retired, and we visited my aunt, my mother's sister. My mother's sister, the next one up, had a son, I mentioned him. His name was Peter and my other aunt had a daughter whose name was Ilse. And they lived in Pilsen, which is the beer capital of Europe. And, as I say, my uncle was a tax guy. We visited them regularly during the day, and had all the social life during the holiday. There were beautiful, beautiful mountains within ten miles of us, so in the summer we went to the lakes up in the mountains for a week, often for a fortnight. My father would join us for the weekends. There were things, there were beaches along these lakes, where children could go in the sand or play in the water. And, in the winter, we went skiing, because there was beautiful skiing. And there were no borders between us and Saxony, between us and Germany, and often we went skiing up there, you crossed the border, and you didn't know you had crossed the border, or you did, because you lived locally, and you had lunch in Germany, and you came back again. And so it was that free. My father, in the meanwhile, had built this factory with his partner, as I said earlier, to employ four hundred people. They had a large export business to all sorts of countries, they manufactured knitwear, underwear, and they exported even to England at one time. It was a successful business.

YG: Could you describe your family home?

RN: Yes, it was an apartment in, it was called 39 Maczerystrasse. It had a large dining room and a large living room. All the floors were parquet, all the carpets were Persian, nobody had anything but Persian carpets. I had a bedroom of my own, my parents had a bedroom, there was a kitchen, and downstairs there was a cellar, which was part of our- each flat had a cellar, and it was divided, and I think, I don't remember now, but I imagine there must have been about four or five flats, and each thing had a little cellar downstairs. Every week we used to get somebody called Frau Marie, who came and did the laundry. But that was done by hand. You know, the dolly tub, or whatever, and she washed it. She came very early in the morning. And once every two months or so, we had a very nice lady come and do darning of all sorts of things, sheets and pillow cases or so on, and then we had somebody who would come and do the house, the scrubbing. So virtually the middle-class housewife did very little. She did a little bit of cooking, but very little as well: they often went out for dinner. As far as I was concerned, she did very little. The au pair girl did the cooking for me, for my meals. Once, I remember my parents decided to go away for a week somewhere, I can't remember where it

was, and they arranged for me to go to my au pair's home, which was somewhere in the country, somewhere in the Czech part. And I well remember it because it was a small tiny village and I had a marvellous time with them. Her father was a beekeeper and I used to go with him to watch the bees and go round the village and it was a totally, utterly different life to what I was normally used to. And that really was my life as a small child.

Tape 1: 26 minutes 56 seconds

YG: Was there any anti-Jewish feeling around at that time?

RN: Only in the period when Chamberlain claimed 'Peace in Our Time'. The British Prime Minister gave away what at the time was Sudetenland.

YG: How old were you at the time?

RN: Well, I must have been about six, I don't know, about seven, nearly seven. And then, of course, all Jewish children were thrown out of school, and Jews were thrown out of everywhere, and those non-Jewish friends that I had, and I had a number of them, they just disappeared. And I didn't understand. And my parents were-. It was very difficult for them to explain why I couldn't play with Hansie or Lottie, or whatever their names were.

Tape 1: 28 minutes 5 seconds

YG: How did you experience that as a young child?

RN: Well, I could still play with the Jewish ones, so, I suppose I took it, you know, as just one of those things, children do take it. But I well remember being excluded from school and I couldn't understand it. My parents couldn't explain it properly and, shortly afterwards, we moved. Because we moved to Prague, which was then still an independent protectorate. It was on its own. Hitler promised to leave it alone if he got Sudetenland. So the Germans came, we watched them come in. All, most Jews' possessions were immediately confiscated. Those that left had to pay a Jew tax, 'Judensteuer', 'Flüchtsteuer' they called it. And we were exempted, which I afterwards, long long afterwards, discovered we were exempted because we were Hungarian citizens. Hungary was part of the axis-friendly, German-friendly states, they were a very right-wing government, and they were neutral, they were totally neutral, so we were exempted. Father was allowed to take his possessions. He didn't have to pay this 'Flüchtsteuer', this Jew tax, and he was allowed to take most of his possessions, and they took them off to Prague, where we rented a very small flat, on the Letna, which is one of the hills in Prague, in the north of Prague.

Tape 1: 30 minutes 6 seconds

YG: And how old were you then?

RN: About seven, seven and a half, something like that.

YG: And how did your parents explain to you why were you moving?

RN: They just explained that the Germans had come in, they didn't like us and, therefore, we had to move. We went to Prague, we rented this small flat, most of the furniture that we had

came with us, but much of it was left. Father retained his car, and he brought that with him, which was his pride and joy. And he and his partner tried to establish their business again, but it really didn't, wasn't going to happen.

YG: What happened to the business that they had?

RN: They put in, they Aryanised it, they put in a Sudeten-German, i.e. a German, non-Jewish, who lived in Sudetenland, they put him in as the boss. He didn't have to pay anything. He was just given this factory to run. I have a feeling that the Germans were so cunning that, in the end, they made people, the Germans, pay the German state for these businesses: not what it was worth, but I don't know, whatever. They lost the factory and the business but some of the machinery my father managed, as a neutral Hungarian, to take out with him. And they boxed them in crates. My father's partner had a brother-in-law, who lived in Canada, and they shipped these crates to Canada, and that was the end of it. But they couldn't start this business of their own anymore. And, shortly afterwards, I think it was in March '39, somewhere thereabouts, Hitler marched in to the rest of Czechoslovakia. And I well remember standing at the window, watching the troops marching in. They'd got their 'Kübelwagen', these cars that were like armoured cars, motorcycles with sidecars on them, and troops actually physically marching. And it was an awesome sight. It really was. You watched them march in and because they marched-. We lived in this flat on the Letna, which is on one of the hills, as I say, and it was on one of the main roads leading out of Prague.

Tape 1: 32 minutes 51 seconds

And that was it. I never went to school in Prague because, again, every school my parents took me to, and I remember two, each time the teacher said, 'We are not taking German Jews in here'. So I never went to school. I spent my time with a boy and a girl, who lived in the flat below us, who were also Jewish, and going round with my mother to friends, who were all in the same position. And, at that time too, once the Germans marched in, nearly every Jew was desperately trying to get exit visas and visas for countries. They queued outside the embassies. And I remember watching one of the queues, and I can't remember which one it was, and they queued for hours and hours and hours, trying to get a visa. Some of the embassies they queued outside, they didn't even have a clue where the country was. They were queuing for places like Rhodesia, Zambia, I can't remember where it was. They had no idea where these places were. And if they did get one, the word passed round: "You know Cohen has got a visa for Havana. Where is it?" And nobody knew where these places were. And everybody was trying to get to England and America, or even France, and Holland, but it was very, very difficult.

Tape 1: 34 minutes 39 seconds

YG: Was your mother educating you by herself?

RN: No. I wasn't educated at all. There was no education. They were very dizzy times, they were very difficult times. My grandfather had two brothers, who, in 1890 or 1900, had emigrated to America. And they worked for their uncle, i.e. for my grandfathers' grandfather, who had founded a textile company, which was one of the biggest in America. It was in Chicago. It was the equivalent of Jackson's in England or what's the big, cheap English tailors here?

YG: Burton's?

RN: The equivalent of Burton's. They manufactured and sold. By this time, one of the uncles had died, of my mother, and the other one was still alive but very old, I think, and he got a friend to ultimately get us a visa. The difficulty again, in those days, was even worse, because the Americans had a quota system, which was based on the country or the nationality at birth. In our family, my father was Hungarian that was patently obvious; my mother was Austrian because she was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, because there were no Czech citizens in those days, she was Austrian, and I was Czech because I was born in Czechoslovakia, although I had no Czech passport. So there were three nationalities involved. If one got one, the other one hadn't. Anyway, in the end, we did get a visa, we did get an affidavit from the Great Uncle Ludwig, and we did get it. My aunts and uncles did not. For some reason, he could only guarantee for one. For some reason or other, he guaranteed my mother and father. It was difficult because then we had to get exit visas. My father got an exit visa much more easily, again because he was a neutral Hungarian. He said, 'I want to go home to my country'. He hadn't lived there for thirty or forty years but that's what he told the Gestapo and that's what they allowed us to do. So, we went to Hungary one day with suitcases. In the meanwhile, they packed three large wooden cases with the things, presumably, they valued. A couple of carpets, a bit of silver and odd bits of things they valued, and sent them to Hungary. And, through Hungary, they sent them to England. In Hungary we went to stay for probably about a fortnight and my grandmother was still living there.

Tape 1: 38 minutes 0 second

Now, we had always visited my grandmother once a year, to Budapest, in the good times. My father had a sister, who, at the age of 18, got MS, Multiple Sclerosis. By the time I knew her, she just sat in her chair, with her arms crossed, she could only move her head, and she had a Hungarian country girl as a sort of auxiliary nurse, who looked after her. My grandmother, as I said earlier, was in extreme poverty when the children were small. But father, in the meanwhile, had become affluent and paid for everything. And they lived in a tiny flat in the middle of Budapest off the, I can't remember now, off the Hiroska Utca, or one of the main streets there. And every year we went to visit my grandmother and my aunt. They both spoke German, as most Hungarian Jews did. Father didn't as a young man, but my aunt certainly did, and my grandmother did, with very, very pronounced Hungarian accents, which were very singsong, and every now and again they interspersed with Hungarian words, which, to this day, I still remember. But we stayed there for about a fortnight and finally said goodbye. And my grandmother thought we were going to America, as indeed we did. Anyway, we left with three large suitcases, got on the train in Budapest, went to Vienna, with the German 'Ausweis', the permission to cross German borders, Austrian borders, anything under their influence. We went to Vienna, from Vienna we went across Germany to Holland, to a friend of my father's in Arnhem.

Tape 1: 40 minutes 23 seconds

This was a yarn supplier, who sold to my father in the factory and they'd become good friends. On the way, again it's a memory that I've got, that I remember, a man got on the train roundabout Cologne, or I can't remember where, and he sat in the same compartment we did, and, just before the German border, he got out a bag, his lunch. And he'd got an apple and he'd got sandwiches. He was just about to peel the apple when we got to the German-Dutch border. And the Gestapo came on board. They examined him and found his papers were not in

order. So they arrested him and forced him off the thing. And he took his suitcase, and took his coat and hat, but left his sandwiches and the apple and the knife on the little table next to the window. And, as he went out, he wished my parents a good onward journey and a happy life. I'm absolutely convinced that he knew that was the end for him. And we took the knife, and we kept the knife as a memento for him. And it disappeared a few years ago. And my parents kept this knife for years and years and years. Never heard any more. Anyway, we did cross the Dutch border, which was still neutral at the time; we did stay in Arnhem, with this friend of my father's, who had a typically Dutch house, very similar, in some ways, to English streets, because all the houses were brick. And I had never, ever seen brick houses. We lived in Central Europe, where all the houses were stone or grey or that type of building. And the man had got grandchildren, and they'd left a scooter, and he said, 'If you want to go and play, just go up and down the street and scoot', which I did. Unfortunately, after half an hour, I wanted to go back, but, again, I remember every house looked identical to me and I remember I was completely lost. I hadn't got the faintest idea where I was or who I was, what. And a man walked past and I was crying, and he asked me in Dutch where I wanted to go, and I couldn't speak Dutch. Fortunately, he spoke three words of German and I remembered the name of the man. And he said, 'Oh, he lives in that house there', and he took me there. So, that was my first impression of a) a totally different housing and a totally different language.

Tape 1: 43 minutes 30 seconds

YG: How old were you then?

RN: Still about seven. It was in '39. And it must have been end of June, something like that. And, after about a fortnight, we caught the boat in the Hook of Holland, to England, and, again, my impression was that I had never seen the sea before. My father had been, strangely enough, to Leicester, in 1936 or 7, to buy machinery, because Leicester was the centre of the knitwear machinery industry in Europe, that and Germany, as well. And he'd been to Leicester, there were three large manufacturers there, who he'd visited and bought from, he'd bought from them anyway. So he'd been to England before, and he'd been by car, which was extremely adventurous, to come from the middle of Europe to England by car. It's like now driving across India to Afghanistan or something. And we got on the boat and to me, at that time, it was a thrill. And, after about an hour or so, I remember my father took me on deck and showed me buoys in the sea and I could see these floating, rubber things or whatever they were and I didn't know what they were. And he explained that this was the border between England and the rest of Europe. I had been well used to borders between Czechoslovakia and Germany or Czechoslovakia and Hungary, or Czechoslovakia and Russia or Romania or wherever, but it had never occurred to me that the sea was a border. So, we landed in Harwich, and I well remember these three big suitcases we'd got and the customs official. My father didn't speak one word of English, I didn't speak one word of English, but my mother was a good linguist and spoke, well, I suppose Pidgin English, you could call it, about 10 words of English. And the customs official, we'd been used to Central Europe, to deal with border officials and officials as being very autocratic, you know, 'Yes, what do you want?', 'No', this, that, by command and everything else. These, I always remember, they were so polite, so 'Yes, madam. No, madam', and they were very polite, you know. It was just strange. Anyway, we waited to get a train to London and this little toy train came along. And it seemed a toy train in relation to trains in Europe, which were high, and you had to climb a ladder, and these were single compartment things. So, we got in, got to London, and we'd been told by my father's partner, who had already lived in London for about two months, there was a sort of boarding house. And we went there by taxi, stayed there for a day, and

some friends of ours organised a one and a half room flat in Golders Green. No, it wasn't Golders Green, it was Swiss Cottage, just near, near Waitrose, Goldhurst Terrace. And we had this one big room, which was a sort of bedroom-cum-whatever, with this sort of gas ring and, next to it, there was little room with a washbasin and a toilet.

YG: Had your father earned a living since he left-?

RN: No, no. But he had, in some way, got money out, in some way, I don't understand how. I know that, many years later, I'm talking about, it must have been when he was well into his seventies, he threw a lot of shoes and clothes out, and there was a pair of shoes with false heels in them. So I think he must have smuggled a diamond or a couple of diamonds out or something like that. But I really don't know.

YG: Could I ask you to get back to Prague for a while, you were saying that he tried to start his business?

RN: It just wouldn't work, it just wouldn't work. I mean, he needed the machinery to work. You couldn't start an import-export business. You know, the time was too short. There was only a year between leaving Sudetenland and actually the Germans marching in, less than a year. And there just wasn't time. And I think the times were not right either. Everybody was panic-stricken. Would they come? Would they not come? What would happen? I think people feared that life would become very difficult but, in their wildest thoughts, they never thought of what would happen. This is why-. So many people have asked me since, 'Why didn't the Jews resist?', 'Why didn't they fight?' Because, in their wildest dreams, they never thought that life would be as it turned out. In the past, Jews have been persecuted, Jews have found life tough, sometimes they've been expelled, went somewhere else. And, apart from the Inquisition and one or two other periods in history, genocide, such as it was practised, was unheard of. Even Gengis Khan didn't practice genocide: he murdered anybody, who was in his way and, if you weren't in his way, he left you alone. But this organised persecution of a particular people was unheard of and they never in their wildest dreams thought of it. They knew that there was severe anti-Semitism in Germany, they'd heard of these KZs, concentration camps; they knew that people got beaten up and occasionally died in them, but the concept of a universal rounding-up of Jews all over Europe was totally unheard of, unthought-of of, and, what is more, of course, many of them, like my two uncles, for example, were Czech citizens, were employed by the state, and therefore believed that the state would save them or at least protect them, which, of course, didn't happen, partly because it couldn't and partly because it didn't want to. But that was a different ball-game altogether. So, I think it was very, very difficult and I think some people, I mean, whilst we were in Prague, I do remember we were living in this flat, as I say, on the Letna, and, across the road, there was another flat, and I happened to look out of the window, and it was purely coincidental, a guy got so desperate, he jumped from the roof. And I actually watched him fall onto the floor. And I shouted to my mother and I think she passed it off because obviously she didn't want to frighten me. But it's something that I've retained in my memory forever. I also found out afterwards that a little friend of mine, who, in fact, was my second cousin, her mother gassed herself and the child because they couldn't escape and they had nowhere to go. And some people, the really younger ones, sort of the twenty-year olds, some of them packed up, walked to the nearest border and walked across it, walked into Poland or even Russia or Romania or Hungary or wherever, found somewhere. And then you hear fabulous stories of people that walked into Russia, then got imprisoned in Siberia, then half released, walked across from Siberia to the south, to Persia, joined the British Army, and did all sorts of things.

But these were the younger people. The older people, with children and responsibilities, or state employees, didn't think in that sort of way. And certainly my relatives didn't.

Tape 1: 52 minutes 57 seconds

My eldest cousin, the girl, she was introduced to, or met, or whatever, an English- Jewish business-man, who was twice or three times her age, and she contracted a marriage of convenience. A Jewish guy. She was seventeen and he must have been about forty, I think. And she went to England immediately with him and automatically became a British subject. My other cousin, the middle one, Peter, he must have been 14, 13/14, he was sent with the Children's Transport, with Winton, the guy who got knighted a few---

YG: Nicholas Winton?

RN: Nicholas Winton. He got a place on this children's thing and he came here. And he went to Stoke-on-Trent, where there was a Czech children's home. There were about 20 or 30 of these children. They were brought up as Czech citizens and they spoke Czech only and that's where he spent the war years. My cousin, six months after, divorced the English-Jewish guy, who wasn't a very nice character, but that's another story, nothing to do with us. Anyway, she divorced him and she became a domestic and then, some time during the war, which is again another story, she joined the army, was in the ATS, and became a captain in the ATS, which was not bad for a young Jewish refugee girl. My other cousin also joined the army about a year and a half before the end of the war, but he was in the Free Czech Army, and he was one of the army members that liberated Prague. They allowed the Czechs to liberate it. The Russians were actually there. So that was the two of them, so they escaped, but their parents didn't. Their parents just sat there and hoped for the best. In the meanwhile, we got to England, we lived in London, we got here in July '39. London was pretty bad. I was sent to, it was a Jewish boarding school in Brighton, called Aariah House, who took a few Jewish children, refugee children, free, in the summer months, or late autumn time. So I was sent there. I absolutely hated it. There I came from a well-to-do, spoilt, I wasn't spoilt, but a well-to-do, sheltered Jewish life, into a Jewish boarding school, a very orthodox Jewish boarding school. You know, they had to tell me what a skullcap was, I had no idea what a Kippah was. You know, I got a good hiding once for picking strawberries on a Shabbeth because that was work. So, it was just difficult.

End of Tape 1

TAPE 2

Tape 2: 0 minute 17 seconds

RN: Right, so we continue with this tape two. I had got to this boarding school, which was called Aariah House, which doesn't exist today anymore, but there were probably half a dozen German-Jewish children there, of a number of ages. I was one. I was extremely unhappy because it was a totally and utterly different life for me, you know, coming, as I said, from a sheltered, middle-class Jewish home, to be pushed into this type of thing. All the children there - I spoke very, very little English at all - and all the children there were children of, in inverted commas, English Jews, who mostly were the children of or grandchildren of Eastern European Jews, who were still very involved with what they called 'Yiddishkeit', which didn't mean a thing to me at all, because we, as I said earlier, had been very Germanicised.

We didn't speak Yiddish, except some odd words like 'meshugga' or things like that, but basically we did not speak Yiddish. And these people, most of them came from Yiddish backgrounds, and they were totally strange to me. They were as strange for me as the English were. I didn't make many friends, except among the German-Jewish ones. The problem was that I couldn't speak English properly, if at all, and therefore I tended to mix with these boys and I'd speak German to them. And, after a while, the teachers caught on, and told us to stop. If we didn't stop, we'd get beaten, which was something I'd never experienced before. I'd never been hit or beaten before, but that was it. Anyway, towards almost the end of 1939, after the war was declared, the whole school moved to Colwyn Bay, to an old castle, and I moved with them. But I was so unhappy, and I wrote many terrible notes to my parents, and some of them were secret, because all the letters were censored by the teachers. Finally, my parents collected me. And they were living at that time in London.

YG: Why did they send you there in the first place?

Tape 2: 3 minutes 5 seconds

RN: I think primarily because they thought I ought to learn English, but, of course, it was the wrong place to learn English. And, secondly, it was free, they didn't have to pay. Thirdly, it was Jewish, so they thought it would be less of a shock, but, in fact, it was more of a shock. Lastly, I think they were very preoccupied by themselves, trying to sort out, because they had this visa for America, but they had to coordinate it with shipping. And, inevitably, their visa ran out, because it was only two months or three months, their visa ran out, they had to reapply for it, which they got, but then the ship that they'd booked hadn't arrived or was not available. And this was like chicken and egg, every five minutes, either the visa ran out and no ship or ship arrived and they had no visa. So, it was, they were pretty busy. Plus the fact that they mixed with all the other refugees, and they all met at the famous Cosmo restaurant, which sadly no longer exists, and they discussed what was happening in Europe if they could. My mother had a, I think a second cousin, who lived in Sweden, he was a journalist, and, through him, they got letters to Czechoslovakia and vice-versa. And from my grandmother, occasionally, they had letters. So, they knew roughly what was going on, but not in its extreme.

Tape 2: 4 minutes 56 seconds

I came back to London, end of 1939, beginning of 1940, just when the Blitz started. I distinctly remember that every night we spent in Swiss Cottage underground station on the platform. We went there early, with a blanket, or a bedroll, or sleeping bag, or whatever, and you sussed out a place on the platform. And we went there every night. We children, and there were lots of us, until the trains stopped running, the escalators still ran, and our prime enjoyment at the time was to run up the downwards escalators and down the upwards one, until we were stopped by the employees or whatever. And I well remember lying on this, sleeping on the underground station, for month after month after month. During the day, my parents tried to get me into schools. And I started at three schools in that sort of area and, after a week, each school got bombed. So, I don't know, I don't know if Hitler was following me or what. Basically, we got bombed. Basically, I didn't go to school at all.

YG: What sort of schools were they? Were they all in that area?

RN: They were all in that area, but I can't remember the names of them anymore.

YG: Did you speak any English yet? You had no help with your English at all at the boarding school?

RN: No, well, very little, because I mixed with these German-Jewish boys. I spoke basic English, but very little and very accented. And, most of the time in London, I spent going round picking up shrapnel, which, in those days, you got a penny a pound for it. And, as a small child, stupid as I was, the bigger the bomb, the bigger the shrapnel, the more money I got. So, if I found a huge piece of shrapnel, I was delighted, of course not realising that some poor devil had lost his life because it was in a house or somewhere. But we were lucky. The house that we lived in in Greencroft Gardens never, ever got hit. And we used to stand in the cubby-hole in the stairway. And there was one lady, who lived in one of the rooms there, who was so enormous, she couldn't get in. So she used to wedge herself halfway between the two. And, years later, I thought, I still remember Mrs. Rosie, Mrs. Rosie was her name, if a bomb had dropped on the place, nobody would have ever got out because she would have jammed the whole doorway up. She was also very fond of cats. She lived in one room and she had three cats, which she fed on number one quality salmon. I always remember that. I spent most of the day roaming around the streets on my own. I had no English friends because I spoke no English. That's what I remember.

Tape 2: 8 minutes 29 seconds

YG: How were you received as a refugee? Did you experience friendliness, hostility, indifference?

RN: I didn't know any English people at all because in that area, I mean, you heard more German on the street outside the Cosmo than you heard English. There were so many German-speaking Jews in that area and they all met- there was a Czech restaurant not far - they met there. My parents took me everywhere and babysitters didn't exist and I was eight years old and I went everywhere with them. If they had an early evening dinner at six o'clock, that's where we went. My mother often cooked very simple things on the gas ring, and that's how we lived, all in this one room. At the end of 1940, my father said, 'This is no life for us, sooner or later we'll get bombed to glory', and contacted some business-friends of his in Leicester, and he decided to go to Leicester. And he knew somebody else, one or two other people in Leicester, so we picked up our three suitcases and went to Leicester.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 57 seconds

YG: Was he working at the time again?

RN: No. He wasn't allowed to because we were still on transit visas. But then he was given a visa for the duration. But, by that time, the normal boats had stopped. There were one or two people got on boats but relatively few. Ordinary English people organised certain boats. I've known of one or two English people, who went to America as refugees, to escape the war, but, for some reason, the boats that they wanted to catch, they weren't running anymore, or they didn't go, or their tickets weren't valid, or whatever. They decided to stay in England for the duration. And we went to Leicester. We first stayed a couple of miles from the centre. We had a semi-detached house, we had one bedroom and one room downstairs, we shared the kitchen with the owner of the house. There we stayed, it must have been perhaps a month, and, again, I did not go to school. And again, I used to go round with my mother to the town,

walking around and so on and going around all the other refugees that they got to know or that they knew anyway. After about a month, somebody recommended a village just outside Leicester, called Wigston, and somebody found for us, no, it was prior to that actually, it was before then, yes, it was before we went to Wigston. My father said we ought to find a small apartment. And they had no idea how to find one. And somebody said, 'Go to the Jewish quarter in Leicester, which is further up London Road, there is a very orthodox Jewish rabbi there, he's actually not the rabbi of the congregation, but he happens to be there. So, he might help you'. So we went to see this guy and, despite our prejudices, and there were prejudices against the ultra-orthodox Eastern European Jews, he was very nice. He had a big black beard, and his little flat was absolutely filthy, it was indescribably filthy, but he was very nice. And he found a flat for us. It had two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen and a toilet, a bathroom or something, and it was just round the corner from the synagogue. We went to see the landlord, we arranged to rent it, we were going to move in a fortnight or a week's time, and, the day before we were going to move in, Leicester had its one and only raid, and it demolished that house. And there wasn't a thing left of that house or anywhere round there. It was about 3 or 400 yards, maybe more, a quarter of a mile away, from the synagogue. And there wasn't any damage in the synagogue. They just bombed all the way round it. And we were very, very, very lucky, we really were. And, after that, then my father said let's go to Wigston, this place somebody recommended. They found, through somebody else, a very small semi-detached house, where the guy had had to join the army, his wife was, they had no children, they'd been relatively newly married, this was a semi-detached house, and she moved in with her mother or mother-in-law. And they were quite happy for us to have the house, at a nominal rent, if we looked after it. So, with the money we had, father rented this place, and, for the first time, I went to school properly. It was a lovely little house, it bordered at the back on some fields and a farm. The people around us were very, very nice. I went to the village school in Wigston. To begin with, it was a bit traumatic because my mother didn't quite understand that - it was getting on towards winterish, the first winter, and my mother dressed me in warm clothes, which were quite common with boys in Central Europe, in a pair of thick wool tights. Well, you can imagine, little boys in those days in England had shorts, ankle socks, or socks up to their calves, and a boy arriving in wool tights was somewhat ragged, to put it mildly.

Tape 2: 15 minutes 18 seconds

YG: Did you get teased?

RN: Very much so, very much so. Then they started asking me questions, 'Where do you come from?' And I said, 'Czechoslovakia'. And they had no idea where it was. And, 'Do they have dogs there?' 'Do you live in houses?' 'Yes we do.' All sorts of questions. Because, in those days, refugees or foreigners were one in a billion, there were very, very few, and, certainly in Leicestershire, there were very few in the countryside. Then I played on the street with the children, on the street. Because everyone played cricket on the street, against the lamppost, which was the wickets. We played in the fields, in the back, which belonged to a farmer, who lived a few hundred yards away, whose two daughters I played with, I mean, they were among lots of other children, and my next door neighbour, and we all played together, football and cricket and all those things.

YG: Were you quite accepted, after the initial period?

RN: Absolutely, absolutely. And they even invited me, at that time, to go to the local Methodist Sunday school. And my parents thought it wasn't a bad idea. And I got my stamps at that period for every Sunday appearance. But they were very, very nice. And the people were very nice. And the farmer's daughters, when the rationing really came in, every evening came by with a couple of eggs or three eggs extra. They were very, very nice. The whole village, it was a big village, but everyone was pleasant. They respected us. My father got on very well with our neighbours, on one side particularly. There were large gardens and he taught my father how to do the gardening. My father had no idea. My father knew how - he had vague relatives in Hungary, who lived in the countryside - and he knew how to clip birds' wings and pluck chickens. This guy kept chickens and had no idea how to pluck them, once he'd killed them, nor had he any idea how to clip their wings, and father taught him. So they became great friends. He also was a knitter, the artisan, who actually knitted. And, of course, they had a lot in common; they talked about machinery and so on. All this time, father was not allowed to work, but the other thing that I remember is that they came to take away the radio, which didn't belong to us, and they came to take away the bicycle in the shed, which didn't belong to us, just in case we were spies. All the German Jews had been sent to the Isle of Man, to be interned. Because my father was Hungarian, and it still was a neutral country at the time, he'd not been interned, but nevertheless they suspected he was a spy. And he had to report to the police station, every week, on Friday. After about a fortnight, a man came back, bearing the wireless, and said, 'I think you ought to have this back again'. So we then discovered that this guy's name was Honey and he was a detective sergeant, who lived across the road from us. And this was a total revelation to us. He also said, 'Look, why don't I come round to your house on Friday night? And then you don't need to go to the police station and be separated from everybody, and it's embarrassing'. And, to us, this was a revelation. I mean, you know the secret police in Eastern Europe were the 'Sicherheitsdienst', they were the-, you feared them. But this guy was a very nice guy, came round every Friday and discussed all sorts of things, and, in fact, he and my father became friends, until he died 20 years later. So that was our first introduction to British bureaucracy and British finesse. And it wasn't until many, many years later that we discovered that they're just as efficient as the Gestapo, just as efficient as the Sureté in France, but they're just more polite. And I think it was summed up by a guy who wrote 'How to be an Alien', called George Mikes, who wrote in it, 'In Europe, if you overstayed your visa time, the Germans would send you a message saying, 'You've overstayed your visa time, get out'. In England, you would get a letter, which said, 'Dear Sir or Madam, it appears that you've overstayed your welcome on our shore. It would be most obliging if you could leave within the next 24 hours. Your most humble and obedient servant, George Bloggs'.

Tape 2: 20 minutes 48 seconds

And it is that attitude that, from this one sergeant, that we learnt: the politeness, the kindness, within the iron fist. He knew what we were, he trusted us, and yet he was still the police. So we lived there, money was dwindling, whatever money we had, but father worked illegally for another refugee, a Hungarian, who'd been here since 1934/5, or something like that, who had a very strange business. He bought old books, thick old books, he bought orange crates, and bought any old rubbish, and converted them into luxury things. So the books, he chiselled the middle out, stuck them all together and they became cigarette boxes. Orange boxes, he padded them out, put bits of cloth around them and fancy studs on them, and they became treasure chests and all sorts of things. And he sold them to large stores, which during the war you couldn't get. He had the ideas and, again, father was the practical man. He was very clever with his hands. And he employed him illegally, cash in hand. Of course, there was no

question of fraud in those days because the state didn't give any money. So the only crime that he committed was working without legal permission to work. My mother got a job, two jobs, in fact. She put face powder in boxes, which was a terrible job, because you came back from work covered in white or pink powder, sneezing. And, on top of that, she also made string shopping bags, which was a terrible job. You'd finish up with your hands cut with the string. She got six old pennies per bag, so she made a few during the week and got a few shillings out of it. But, from being an affluent, well-to-do family to being an impoverished one, looking at every halfpenny, it must have been very, very hard for my parents. I didn't quite understand it, obviously as a child, because we had enough to eat, we had a roof over our heads, and I went to school, so-. A lot of other children, on the face of it, were in the same position. They lived at home, their parents were there. The thing that I missed, more than anything else, was my extended family. The children were all, 'I'm going to see my grandmother this weekend', 'I'm going to see my uncle', 'I'm going to see my aunt'. I didn't have this. I had an 'extended', in inverted commas, family, which were all the other refugee families in Leicester. So, they all had tea with each other on Saturdays or Sundays, we all came round, playing bridge on Sunday evening or afternoon. They went to all sorts of places within the town. There was also the German-Jewish, German-Czech, or Czech-German, refugee club in Leicester, where they went once or twice a month and where I went as well. So, there were one or two other children, but mostly they were adults. So, in a way, yes, we had a childhood, but it was an adult childhood. We had a very good childhood, in many ways. You know, we did all the things that children wanted to do. I went to school, I made friends with the children at school, I made friends with the children in the street, which weren't always the same. I was given books by the children in the street. And, to this day, I've still got Robin Hood, children's history books, and all sorts of things that kids gave me. And it was a nice time. Then roundabout 1943, thereabouts, I think, '44, the woman that owned the house wanted it back. So we had to find another one. We moved a little bit nearer to town, an area of Leicester called Niton, we rented a semi-detached again, a house there. And, of course, I was sad because suddenly all the friends I'd made disappeared. And I had to go back to finding new friends. So, I went to the junior school there for some time. And that wasn't a very happy time for me. They had teachers there, who today would be sitting in prison. I mean, they beat us and they hit us and they were pretty violent, they were pretty nasty as well.

Tape 2: 26 minutes 27 seconds

YG: Did you experience any prejudice or intolerance there?

RN: It wasn't prejudice against me as a Jew or a refugee, no. I did not. In those days, you had one teacher per class. You didn't move around from class to class. He was particularly violent. I remember there were kids there, they were orphans from a home, and he used to make examples of them: 'You, orphan child, go out'. And that sort of thing. And, if we didn't get things right, he would beat us. And he really did beat us. So, I wasn't terribly happy. We had to do the scholarship and I failed, perhaps not surprising. I was not very academic anyway. So I went to another school. And then, through the Czech-German Friendship Club, there was a very distinguished headmaster there, from one of the top grammar schools. My father had a word with him. And he said, 'How about, I know a headmaster in a school, try that one'. And it was a school that was odd. It wasn't a grammar school, and it wasn't a non-grammar school, it was something in between. Every teacher had a degree. They taught, it was divided into language, science and craft, so it was sort of a precursor of the schools that we have today. And you had to pass an entrance exam at the school, an intelligence exam, and so on. And they found I had an IQ of something like about 140, I don't know what it was, it

was high. But I was just lazy. I wasn't academic. So they let me into the school and I was disruptive. In today's world, I suppose, you get all this scientific nonsense, you get people examining children and all that, but I was naughty. In my private life, non-school, I belonged to a gang, which were all my peers, and we did all the things that boys in gangs do. It wasn't as vicious as today, but we stole from people's allotments and cooked them on open fires, we had fights with other gangs, we stole apples and ran away, we smoked because we stole cigarettes from our parents. We did all those things that, I suppose, boys do.

Tape 2: 29 minutes 20 seconds

YG: Is that when you were in your early adolescence?

RN: Yeah, I was twelve/thirteen, you know. And I suppose, looking back on it now, this unsettling time was a time that was unsettling and it affected people in different ways. One of my contemporaries, whom my parents were very friendly with, was a boy, who was my age, who, a few years ago, was head of the British Medical Association, Doctor Hollander. He was one of the top guys; he got a scholarship to Rugby and became one of the top pupils. Another one, Simons, was one of the top international solicitors in Britain, who, unfortunately, died at a very early age from a heart attack. But I just wasn't that type. It affected me differently. All of us refugees, our lives, it affected us differently. And really, I was very naughty at school, but I was very, very lucky, because we had a headmaster, who was exceptional in his understanding of children. He was married but had no children of his own. And my father was distraught because he'd heard that I often got the cane, I was nasty, and naughty and so on. And he went to see the headmaster two or three times, and the headmaster said, 'Don't worry, it will sort itself out'. My father was distraught, he threatened all sorts of things. But when I was about, oh, I don't know, about fifteen or sixteen, I and another boy were called at the head of the assembly, and I thought, 'God what have I done this time?' But, in fact, I was made a prefect. And, from that day on, I studied, I behaved myself, I did all the right things. Probably, I was a late developer, it reached my brain that one doesn't behave like that. We had also moved and my father had got permission to work and he became a warehouseman in a Jewish hosiery company in Leicester, which, again, was a pretty downward step from co-owning a factory, employing five hundred or four hundred people, to become the warehouseman. But the manager was also Jewish, and they became quite good friends, and he at least got an income. And we were fairly steady. I did reasonably well at school in the subjects I liked. And I went in, ultimately, for what was then the School Certificate, which is the equivalent of the GCSE, or whatever it is today. So really that brings us up to getting on towards the end of war.

Tape 2: 32 minutes 50 seconds

YG: Were you aware of what was going on in the rest of Europe?

RN: Oh, the war, we listened to the news many times a day, my father read the newspapers, we watched as the armies went this way or that way, we discussed it left, right and centre. And I think my parents had some inkling of what was going on. Again, they did not know. I understand that you wanted photographs and certain letters and things. I have these letters. And one of them points out that, officially, they didn't even know what happened to these people. It was only after the war that we discovered. As I said, my father got a job, I was at school, my mother did not work full-time anymore, she found another job, making artificial jewellery and that sort of thing. So, we just sat the war out. At the end of the war, it was

wonderful, I mean, it was like an end of an era. And we sat round the kitchen table, and we really did sit round the kitchen table, and we really did have a family conference. And they said, 'What do we want to do? We've still got this affidavit to America. Do we go to America?' I said I wasn't particularly keen to move again, because we had moved umpteen times to all sorts of places. My father didn't want to particularly move either, so we decided to stay in England. And we decided to apply, ultimately, for British citizenship. We had lived in England, by that time, for five years, four or five years, and that was the requisite amount of time that you had to live in England. So, we did, we applied for British citizenship. I, in the meantime, had done this School Certificate. I didn't want to go to university. My attention span was not very good. I didn't think I was going to do well. And also my father had borrowed some money and started a tiny little company up, under the nominee ship, if that's the right word, of acquaintance of his, an Englishman, who had been invalided out of the RAF. Because he wasn't allowed, as a foreigner, to own a business. That's how strange England was after the war.

Tape 2: 35 minutes 43 seconds

And this business started in a place that was, I don't know, they had six machinists, one cutting table, and a writing desk. And that was it. And somebody told my father, I mean, he couldn't start knitwear because you needed machinery, and somebody had told my father that corsetry, bras and girdles, that you couldn't get, were the thing that women wanted more than anything else. So, my mother and he, they ripped one of my mother's bras to bits, and they copied, they laid them on paper and copied the patterns. And they decided that that's what they were going to do. The big problem was that you couldn't buy fabric because you needed coupons. And the only way you could get coupons was, it depended on how much you had used during or before the war, so they gave you that amount of coupons. So, my father one day walked down to the market, the famous Leicester market, and there was a trader selling old parachutes, and he bought the whole lot, lock stock and barrel, the whole stall-full. Now parachutes, as you may or may not know, are in triangles, they're in a series of triangles. So, we all set to, we cut these triangles out. And, in the textile and clothing industry, you make lays, by laying out fabric in one long stretch, because the fabric has a certain width, so you lay it out. These are the only lays that I know of in the textile industry, that were in triangles, so we laid them out in triangles.

Tape 2: 37 minutes 25 seconds

They were, of course, during the war, would you believe, pure silk. So these patterns that copied my mother's bra, they'd made out, and they made all these bras up. Well, in those days, it was extremely difficult a) to get silk underwear and b) to get any sort of clothing, so there were queues outside my father's piddley little factory to buy this stuff. Other than, the reverse of today, where the salesmen are queuing up to sell to somebody. He, of course, demanded coupons, which he was allowed to do, so he got a whole load of coupons, and with that he could buy more fabric legitimately, proper fabric, and so he carried on, and eventually it developed into, over a number of years, it developed into a small business of about sixty or seventy employees. But I remember, at that time, I used to get out of school, used to go up to the factory and help in the factory or whatever, then go home, have my dinner or supper, and then do some homework, and repeat the process. So, we all helped in this little business, which grew. And the guy, who had lent him the money, was also another Jewish guy, who wasn't a refugee, in the true sense of the word. But he was a wholesale warehouseman, so he got repaid, not in money, but in goods, which is a totally different way of doing things, in those days. Gradually, he became reasonably, I wouldn't say affluent, but he lived well. They

had a nice semi-detached home. I left school when I was seventeen, thereabouts, and I went to Leicester Technical College, which is now, I think, Leicester University. It used to be called Leicester Polytechnic, and that's where I went to study textiles, and I did that for three years, I studied, basically, design and general textiles, and got a diploma. I tried at first to study pure knitting, but gave it up, because, again, unlike my father, I was terrible in machinery, I hated machinery, my brain didn't work that way.

Tape 2: 40 minutes 17 seconds

And I left there. The first job I had was down in Surrey, near Epsom, in Fetcham, again with a small company. But then I worked there for just a year, just to get some experience, and then I went to work for my father. That, more or less; I worked on the shop floor, cleaning machinery, dealing with all the things one does, as a sort of manager, if you like, on the shop floor, did a bit of designing, and so on and so forth. In 1965, thereabouts, my father, by that time, was about 72, 74, he wanted to retire. The business wasn't big enough for him, for me to carry on the business and pay him a large salary, enough to keep him and myself, so he sold it to an American. I remained in the business but, a year later, for a number of strange reasons, it went bust. So, I was out of a job. In the meanwhile, I grew up in Leicester, had many, many non-Jewish friends and a few Jewish ones, the non-Jewish friends I'm still friendly with to this day, so we're talking about over 50 years of friendship. They all knew I was Jewish, I never hid it. And 99% of them respected it and still do. In the meanwhile, occasionally I went to the local Jewish social club, which, in those days, was the Makkabe club, and there I saw a girl I quite fancied, but she, I felt, was very stuck up, but I prevailed, she gave in, and we got married.

Tape 2: 42 minutes 39 seconds

YG: When was that?

RN: 1959, July 19th. And we've been very happily married since. We really have. So, 1965, I finished off with no job. Fortunately, I personally wasn't bankrupt in any way, but we certainly had to start from scratch. And then we moved in here, which was a pretty derelict bungalow at the time. It was all we could afford. It had a huge garden, twice the size it is now, but it had four bedrooms, and we had, by that time, we had two children, two sons. I worked originally for Courtauld's here and, after a while, they closed their department down, moved it to London. And then I got a job with a delightful English company, which started its life in 1793, and its attitudes were about the same actually in the 1960s, they hadn't changed much since 1800, but they were a delightful company. I became their export sales director, and I really enjoyed working for them, they were a very nice company. I moved on from there to another couple of companies and then, ultimately, well not ultimately, but then I worked for a company, called Falmers, Falmer Jeans, who were in Rayleigh in Essex. I became their export sales director. I worked for them for a number of years. But commuted from here, every week, on a weekly basis. And then I left because they downsized, in those days they called it something else, and I went to work for Coats Viyella, here in Nottingham, in Mansfield actually, as an export guy. They had four actually, so I was one of four. Yes, it was quite a job. But, in the meanwhile, we had started a small export company of our own, from our own back bedroom; we did all sorts of things. And, after I think it was three years, or thereabouts, round about '86 or thereabouts, I left Coats Viyella, and we literally started our own business properly from here. And we built that up, eventually leaving the back bedroom. We hired a warehouse and offices in the village here. We employed very few people but we became

fairly successful. We then, for various reasons, it's got nothing to do with this story actually, we half bought, we were partners in two small factories, which presumably, between them, employed some sixty or seventy people. So, we finished up owning a distribution company, which veered towards, in fact, in the end, made uniform clothing, not underwear anymore or not exporting, we didn't export anything in the end. We basically made corporate clothing for all sorts of people, for shops, airlines, banks, whatever. And these two factories made the clothes, or some of the clothes, that we, in fact, sold in our uniforms. And, basically, that's what we did until '97, where, in '96 actually, I fell ill, with a rather complicated illness, and I had to be operated on, and then I lost the use of legs and so on and so forth and decided it was high time, at sixty five, to retire. And that's in fact what we did. We sold our business, all of our businesses and, at sixty five, we retired, in '97 we retired, and, since then, that's it. So, that's really my life.

Tape 2: 47 minutes 23 seconds

YG: Could you tell me a bit more about your wife's background?

RN: Yes. Her grandparents came over from Lithuania and Poland at the turn of the century. One of her grandfathers owned a small clothing factory. Her other grandfather belonged to, as far as I understand it, the 'Bund', which is rather a left-wing, socialist, Jewish thing. And he, most of his life, agitated for union things, never held a job down properly. Consequently, he had a very impoverished family that had 8 children in it. My father-in-law was the second oldest, I believe, or the third oldest, the third oldest, and dragged himself up from nothing to own an antiquarian second hand bookshop in Leicester, which was renowned throughout the East Midlands, and indeed exported, and he gave information and help with the British Library and the British Museum on ancient books and so on, and he, in fact, in his time, he did quite a lot of work for the Christians and Jews, you know, the association. He wrote quite a number of books on Palestine and the mandate and particularly on the times of Lawrence of Arabia. He wrote a number of privately published books. And that's about all I can tell you.

Tape 2: 49 minutes 44 seconds

YG: How about your involvement in Jewish activities or other activities at this stage in your life?

RN: Well, obviously, not obviously, but we are members of the Jewish community here, the orthodox one, although neither of us are terribly orthodox, but in the last few years I've worked with, or helped with, Beth Shalom, the Holocaust Centre. And I go up there and give talks occasionally to school groups. Sometimes I'm asked to go to schools, junior schools, and sometimes to church groups. I find that very very rewarding, and anything I can do to help I do because I think they're a fabulous set-up, they really are, for what they've done and who they are.

Tape 2: 50 minutes 40 seconds

YG: Could you explain a bit who they are, what they do?

RN: They're a Methodist family, non-Jewish, their father, the father, was a Methodist lay-preacher, they owned a small food-producing factory. And they went on holiday to Israel and saw Yad Vashem. And they were so horrified or impressed, or whatever way you look at it,

with it, that, on the way out, they took a taxi, they thought, 'Well, what can we do? Somebody ought to do something'. And the taxi driver said, 'OK, you feel like that, do something'. And that's exactly what they did. They went home, they were young men, they pestered their mother to allow them to start a sort of exhibition in their farmhouse home. And one of them became a doctor of medicine and the other one has a PhD in I don't know what. And they eventually built up this thing, so the farmhouse they lived in they gave up and they bought another one to live in. And, what it is is unbelievable - they've built up an exhibition and a memorial garden, and primarily it's a teaching aid, to teach children and people tolerance - and for a non-Jewish family to get themselves so involved and be so successful with fairly high-falutin' people, I think it's unbelievable. They've also published a book, which they've called 'Survivors', which you may or may not have heard of, in which they feature people like me and others, like Simon Winston, and many others. And I think that, through their teachings hopefully, they go to schools and so on, they will try to alleviate this intolerance, not only of Jews, but they're now concerned with holocausts in Rwanda and Cambodia and Yugoslavia, where people hate each other just because they're different. And that's what they try to solve, if they can. And that's about all I can tell you.

Tape 2: 53 minutes 12 seconds

YG: And have you got any message to anybody watching the tape, something you'd like to say, in terms of what you'd like them to take away with them?

RN: Only, basically, that my experience has been fairly gentle, in the sense that I was very, very lucky, through this very lucky Hungarian passport, to escape the real Holocaust, the real camps, the death camps. But my life has altered, it did change, and I want people to know that this change need never, ever have happened if people would have been more tolerant. Tolerance of other people, who may be Jews, who may be Muslims, whatever, but it doesn't mean to say we haven't got the same feelings, the same wants, the same desires, that other people have got. We want a house, we want food in our stomachs, all those things. And I hope that, through this film, through this talk, they will think twice before they do anything like, as the last Holocaust. That's as far as I can go.

YG: Thank you very much.

RN: You're more than welcome.

Tape 2: 54 minutes 40 seconds

Photos

Photo 1

RN: It was taken in Prague, in 1939, it was the green Hungarian passport, which enabled us to escape, which so many people couldn't use because we were supposedly neutral citizens. That's it.

Tape 2: 55 minutes 7 seconds

Photo 2

RN: This was a tax, in German it's called the 'Flüchtsteuer', or Jew tax, when Jews escaped. When Sudetenland was attacked by the Nazis, or invaded, or collected by the Nazis, the Jew

tax was, any Jew that wanted to escape had to pay x percent, I do not know and cannot remember how much it was, but it was very high. And, because we were Hungarian citizens, my father was exempted, and that was the certificate he was issued with.

Tape 2: 55 minutes 53 seconds

Photo 3

Grandfather's house, Stein, May '95.

RN: It was taken only in the 1990s when we went back to Teplitz, to the town where I was born, with my wife. We went to try and get the property back, but it was very difficult, because the Nazis had confiscated it, and then, after the war, they had thrown the supposed German owners out, and confiscated it as enemy property, and it became Communist property, and the communists therefore owned it, and they wouldn't let us have it back. But it's still vaguely going on, the claim, if it ever comes. But that was the property that grandfather lived in. He lived in the lower floor and the top floor he rented out to a friend of his.

Tape 2: 56 minutes 55 seconds

Photo 4

My parents wrote to the Czechoslovak Red Cross during the war, I believe it was about 1942 or 3, asking if they knew of the whereabouts of our relatives. My parents knew that they'd been transported East, but nothing else. And the Czech Red Cross more or less wrote, as the letter states, they had no idea where they were and they would try and find out. But they knew, they didn't know exactly where our relatives were, but the Red Cross certainly knew what was happening to these people, but they did nothing about it.

Tape 2: 57 minutes 44 seconds

Photo 5

The first photo is as a very young child, of probably 1-year old, with one of my aunts, and my mother holding me; then, my aunt and her son, there is my cousin Peter, who actually went back to Czechoslovakia and became a professor at Charles University, and my other cousin, Ilse, who is now 82 years old and lives in Toronto in Canada. The other one is friends of mine and one of them's a relative actually. The other one's a passport photograph of myself, taken in Prague. The fourth one is my parents and myself, taken in 1940, taken in a self-take picture booth in London, and the last one was when we got married in Leicester, with my wife, Jerry.

Tape 2: 58 minutes 54 seconds

Photo 6

This was done at my eldest son's wedding in London. He married and the three of us, my youngest son's on it as well, he was best man. The older one is Paul and the other one is David. The older one lives in Switzerland, the younger one lives here in Nottingham. They're both married. The older one has two children and the younger one's got one daughter. And we're on very very good terms with both of them.