

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV272
NAME: Leopold Wiener
DATE: 6 December 2022
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00] Today is the sixth of December 2022. We're conducting an interview with Mr. Leopold Wiener and my name is Bea Lewkowitz and we are in London. What is your name, please? And where were you born?

My name is Leopold Wiener, should be pronounced 'Wiener' actually, because that's the way we used to speak when I was a small boy. But it's a bit difficult when one speaks in the English language to speak in that kind of way. So, I've got used to using my name, depending on who I'm speaking to. So, and nobody ever calls me Leopold, I usually get called Leo. But in my home, in our family, we all used to have nicknames. And my nickname was Poldi, not Leopold. So, I was always referred to as Poldi and when I came to England, that didn't sound very good. So, gradually, we got people to call me Leo. And that has stuck with me for the rest of my days.

And Leo, when and where were you born too?

I was born in a place called Ostrava-Svinov, which is the second or third largest town in the Czech Republic. I was born in 1932 and I was an only child, but I came from a very large family.

So, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview with the Refugee Voices Archive.

Right.

Now, let's just start quite general. Tell us, please, a little bit about your family background.

[00:02:01] Right, well, we all lived in a – that sort of walking distance of where my – our parents' house was. And we were a very close family and we all knew each other. And there was a constant – a number of people visiting and coming and going, and squeezing me, and all this kind of thing when they saw me. Picking me up and so on. And I was a very naughty boy. I used to – somebody came to squeeze me, I used to lie down on the floor and kick my legs up and all things like that. And so, I had a pretty nice childhood. It was mostly a lot of fun, really. But it was a lonely one, because I was very protected. I didn't have many friends of my age. The only one I had was the younger brother of a maid that we had coming into the house. And the other one was the daughter of our gardener, who came occasionally. But that's all, I never actually mixed with other children until I came to England.

And why was that?

Well, because I was very carefully looked after. They were always watching, you know, there in case something happened or went wrong, which in a large family, there were things went wrong with other people. You know, may have – they were watching me carefully and so I don't know what – I can't give you an explanation, but –

I see. Where did you live? What was the address, do you remember?

I can't tell you the exact address. [00:04:00] I never – I can't tell you the exact address, except it was in a place, originally – everyone's got to understand the history of Ostrava. It's a very unusual place. Originally, Ostrava was a village and which had about 200 people. That was in about 1800. But it was discovered, somehow, the people who lived in the village discovered that underneath the centre of the village, there was iron ore and coal. And that resulted in Ostrava becoming a big town. It's just unbelievable for people to hear that story,

but it's an absolutely amazing story, because from the original two or 300 inhabitants of the village in the 1800's say, I don't know the exact date to give you, but from that time, by 1939, the population was exceeding 300,000 people living in the town of Ostrava. And all the little villages around the original village that became part of the town. So, where we lived was Svinov, which originally was a village that became part of Ostrava. So, the Czech way of doing things was to give the address, you state the name of the town and a hyphen, and then the name of the village where it's [inaudible]. So, you got Ostrava-Svinov is where I was born. But the other places would be Ostrava-Vítkovice, and so forth, would have names like that. And that would tell you which part, the postal address so to speak, of that part of the town. **[00:06:06]**

And how did your parents get to Svinov? Or tell us a little bit how they met and what they...?

Well, yes. Well, it's very strange, because they lived in an era which is very different from today. First of all, all Jewish people were sort of persuaded that they had to meet up with other young Jewish people. And only actually have any social meetings with them, and not so much with people who weren't of the same faith. But the funny thing was, my father in particular came to the conclusion that – he and his brother came to the conclusion that this was not a good way of doing things in his generation. What they thought was, they'd had to assimilate and become exactly like all the people around them. So instead of being very, very religious, although they were brought up to be religious, they sort of put that less important way of following that religion, and considerably less. But what happened was, of course, when my parents met, that was carefully worked out that some – I don't know, they call them *Shadchans*, I think, was a Jewish man, who was there to introduce a girl to a man and so forth. **[00:08:02]** I don't know exactly the whole story. But basically, what it was, is that my mother's parents were landlords of a pub, a very big pub. And my father's parents also were the landlords of a pub, in a slightly different place. In fact, my father's family lived in Bohumín, which was a border town with about twenty or 30,000 people living there. And you could walk from Czech Republic, or Czechoslovakia as it was, into Poland in about five minutes, because it was only about a mile or two to cross the border. And in that town, there are a lot of Polish people of Polish descent. So, a lot of people spoke Polish and they spoke Czech. And Jewish people, a lot of Jewish people spoke Yiddish. And in addition to Yiddish,

they also spoke German because the German frontier was not very far away. So, Ostrava is sort of at the – if you look at a pear shape, the middle of the pear of the map of Czech Republic, it's sort of got a bend in it and that's where Ostrava is located. And from there, it's only a few miles into Poland, or a few miles into Germany.

Ostrava, what is it called in German, Ostrava?

Mährisch-Ostrau.

Mährisch-Ostrau, okay.

Mährisch, that means Moravian Ostrava.

This was the name in the – when it was the K und K- the empire? The Austrian Empire, yeah.

Yes. That's because these – [00:10:02] among the Slav nations, the Czech nation was one who was sort of driving to establish their prominence, let's put it like that. They were not a large number of them, they were about ten million or so people. But they were advanced more than a lot of the other Slavonic ... And so therefore, they like to emphasise the name of where they came from. So that's where – why Ostrava was known in German as *Mährisch-Ostrau*, means Moravian Ostrava. And there are other places, which also emphasise the fact that it was Czech territory and not part of Austro-Hungary. So, I'll give you an example. There's a town called Krumlov. So, it's actually *Český Krumlov*, is the name. Means Czech Krumlov, you see. So, the Czechs like to emphasise and there are lots of places with names of that kind.

Yeah, interesting.

Yeah.

So, your grandparents had – one had set up a pub in Svinov and the others, where was their pub?

Their pub was in Bohumín.

Right.

Or now, so I'll tell you also, at the time when my parents were young people, they were born before Czech Republic or Poland existed as separate countries. So, where we were born, was called Sudetenland and it was part of Austro-Hungary. And we were ruled from Vienna and we were not treated badly, where we were given quite a lot of independence. [00:12:00] But we were under the rule of the Austrian emperor. My father was born in 1902 and my mother was born in 1906. And I presume that they were introduced in the usual Jewish way. And my father was, well, let's put it like this, he was a very unusual character. He was quite good looking, I would say. He was small, but quite good looking for – compared with a lot of other guys, let's put it like that. And my mother appeared to have fallen for him very quickly. That's all I could say about that. I don't know exactly what happened.

And when did they get married?

They got married in 1930 and I was born in 1932. Yes.

So, you had your maternal or paternal grandparents in Svinov?

In Svinov, was my maternal grandparents.

So, your father moved to Svinov?

My father moved. Well, yeah, what happened, it was a complicated story. It's not... [Laughs]

Come on then.

No, I – basically- first of all, I'll tell you something about my father's family. Originally, my father's family, I think, came from Hungary. Because my – one of my great-grandfathers had

originated from Hungary. I can't – I've only just been able to discover where exactly he was and I'm only just certain now, exactly what his name was. His name was Leopold Schnitzer. [00:14:02] And that's not an uncommon name. There are quite a few people with the same surname. It took me a long time to discover that this was a great-grandfather. And what happened was that my father's father was – originally didn't live in Bohumín. He lived in another town, which is also south of Krakow, with a very difficult name. I still haven't discovered how to pronounce the name of it. But it's spelled C-h-r-z-a-n-o-v [Chrzanów, Poland].

I know how to pronounce it.

Go on, tell me.

Chrzanów.

Okay, he came from there. And apparently, he had a dress shop in the town. And there were a few other people in the town called Wiener as well, but they spelt the name slightly differently. They left out the E, because they were religious. They didn't want to use vowel sounds, like they don't – vowel sounds aren't used in Hebrew very much. So, I've discovered, for example, that there was an Abraham Wiener who had had a distillery making vodka in the town. And there were a few other people –

In Chrzanów?

In Chrzanów. There were a few other Wieners there. I don't know what they did for a living, but I – from what I heard about them is that most of them didn't want to stay there. Most of them were looking to leave that place and they were not very well off. They've struggled to make – survive there. [00:16:01]

Just to come back to your father, so what was his profession?

So, my – coming back to my father, my grandfather, the father of my father, married a woman also from a very large family, and they were called the Kasslers. Now, the Kasslers came from another town in south – also south of Krakow, which in – under Austro-Hungary was called Bielitz. Today it still exists, it's quite a large town, 150,000 people or so. The name is Bielsko-Biała. And there used to be a very large Jewish population in that town. And there were a lot of very large families. So, one of my great-grandfather's had thirteen children. And there's one branch of my family that I would say is one of the largest families I've ever come across. Because originally, my great-grandmother was Emily Wurzel and she had three brothers. And the four of these children, each one of them produced ten children each. And a lot of them were male. So, they all married and they also produced a large number of people. And the result is that in my family tree, there's about 150 going back just to 1800. There's about 150 people with that name. Anybody born with a name Wurzel, which means roots, [00:18:00] who comes from Moravia, is related to me more or less. If he isn't – if he hasn't admitted to being related, we find out that he was related. And in fact, the funny thing is, it's only a few weeks ago that I received a message through the ancestry company that – from a man who comes from Montreal in Canada. And he told me his name was a Karol Wellen, he told me was his name. So, I would I ring him? Because he said, he thinks he's 65% Jewish, he said. So, he gave me the number. I was so intrigued, I did have to ring him up and I spoke to him. And I said, 'Look', I said, 'I know the family names, you know that are in the family, in my family tree. I've never heard a name like that.' So, he said, 'Oh', he said, 'Don't take any notice of that', he said, 'because either my father or my grandfather changed our name. Originally, our name was Wurzel.' As soon as he said that, I said, 'Well, you must be related.' And I looked him – looked up the name on the family – his grandfather's name and sure enough, he was there. And this guy, he actually later, a few months later, he actually planned to come to London. And he came to our house and we all shook hands. And after a few minutes, he would- he discovered something he didn't know. He came from this huge family Wurzel, of whom there are a few 100 of them around all over the place. [00:20:03]

So, you've done quite a bit of research on genealogy?

Yes, yes.

On your own family tree.

Yes.

Yeah. But we have to come back to you personally now.

Right. So, my father –

Professionally, what was his profession?

Yeah, my father studied law. And in those days, because Germany, I don't know exactly how it was, but it has something to do with the history of the Middle Ages. The Hanseatic League, somehow was able to settle people of German descent in various parts of Eastern Europe. So, in part of Czechoslovakia, there were about two million people who were of – descendants of Germans. They were Czech citizens, but they spoke German as their main language. But they also spoke Czech. You couldn't tell exactly which they were until they told you their name. They often had German names, but some of them didn't. Some of them had Czech names, you couldn't tell who was who exactly. But what it was, sadly, is that in the 1930s, with the rise of the – of Hitler, you could listen to the radio from Germany and you could hear Adolf Hitler. And they all became supporters of the Nazis, which was a very terrible time for the other people who lived in the country. [00:22:00] But Ostrava was one of the places where there were large numbers of these people. And, for example, our gardener, who came every now and then to do gardening with his wife and son, they were of German origin, as a matter of fact.

And what happened then to...?

Well, I was telling you about my father's profession.

Yes. Okay, let's go back to that.

Well, my father – my – in those days, it was – there were some occupations which were favoured by people who had feelings of wanting to become assimilated. So, they didn't follow all the traditional jobs that Jewish people had. And to which they were, at first, originally compelled to have. They weren't allowed to do these jobs, but that fell away as time went on. So, my father and his brother were encouraged to get a very good education. And what happened was that first of all, they went – they studied law.

Where?

They started law in Prague, the King Charles University, and that was in the Czech language. And they had to be – it's a quite a long training, because they have a different system there. They – a Czech lawyer who's fully qualified, is more or less the equivalent of a barrister in England. So, he starts off, he does his university training. And then he works in a firm of a law office. [00:24:02] And he's called a *Magister*, which means a master. And he has to do that for, I don't know how – two or three years, and then he becomes a fully qualified lawyer. And there are lots – it was very, very common among Jewish people who had the same ideas of wanting to assimilate, to send their sons and I think also some daughters, I don't know exactly, but mostly sons, I would say, to become lawyers. And unfortunately, the result was, in my father's day, that there were so many of these guys with law degrees around that they had difficulty finding any work. So, a lot of these people who are lawyers that time, they'd never actually worked as lawyers, because there just was not enough business around for them to get any work. So, but in my father's case, they didn't give up exactly. What happened was that after my father got his law degree in Prague, he was sent to Germany. And he went – he studied again law in Frankfurt University, in Frankfurt am Main. And he got the same kind of qualification under the German law. And that was called *Dr. iuris*. He also studied for several years in Mannheim and Frankfurt. And he had to do – although the law was very similar, it was all based on Roman law, he qualified. [00:26:00] So he was entitled to speak in a court in Germany and he was also entitled to speak in a court in Czechoslovakia. And that enabled him to get a good job as – actually as a working lawyer, unlike a lot of the people he knew and who were students with him, who couldn't get any work at all. So, he had, my father – I know my father had two or three cousins who had also studied law, but they actually never worked as lawyers.

So, did he work for himself or for a company?

No, he – no, what happened, he – well, what happened is that in the – when he married my mother, his father-in-law, who was a very astute person and had a lot of clout, shall we say, in the world of business, enabled him to buy a partnership in an existing law office, which was called Dr. Grabler, was the name. And Dr. Grabler also was German speaking, but he was a Czech. And my father was a partner in that firm and he was entitled to have his own cases. And in some instances, in some cases, he didn't have his own case. But even then, it wasn't – I don't think he was a high earner, because I don't – there was so many lawyers around in Ostrava and all these cities where there were Jewish people, there just wasn't enough work to go around.

But that's where he worked, in Ostrava?

That's what he was a lawyer, in Ostrava. [00:28:00] I mean, he had – I know he had – there were two cousins of his who were distant cousins, third or fourth cousins, who also studied law with him. They actually couldn't get any work. And what happened is they became journalists on the Sporting Times in Prague, which, in the end, served them as a very useful career. Because when they became refugees, they became professional gamblers and made a living at it. [Laughs] So –

What about your mother? Did she have an education?

Yes, my mother, well, I have to tell you really just a bit about my grandfather. My grandfather had not a usual upbringing. What happened was that his father left, I think it was Krakow, and moved into the mountains out to the south of Krakow, to a little place called [inaudible]. And I spent about twenty years finding out where on earth is this place. I phoned here, phoned here, and nobody had ever heard of this place. Couldn't find it on a map or anything. Finally, I discovered by accident, that the only place you would find it on a map was a military map of the 1930s showed this place, which consisted of four or five houses only. And in that little sort of, I don't know if you'd even call it a village, a little group of

houses, there were two Jewish families. [00:30:05] And all the rest of the others weren't Jewish. And my great-grandfather, his name was Jakob, he had a tavern in this place. And because the location of this little, I don't know what you would call it, the village or whatever it was, was a place where a lot of mountain climbers would go for holidays. And also, people who explored the mountains and went for walks, but mostly mountain climbers. And he had this tavern. The only trouble was that when he got married, they had nine children. And that made it very difficult for the parents to bring them up. And on top of that, unfortunately, his mother died when he was fairly young. I don't know what her real full name was. I know her first name was Rosa. And the father had struggled to keep – to make a living from – with the nine children he had to support. So, he decided to move away from this place. And the one place that everybody had heard of in that part of the world was Ostrava, which was the place where they were building the city up into an industrial place. Ostrava had a sort of industrial revolution of its own. [00:32:03] It became really, the population grew amazingly fast, from about two or 300, it grew to thirty-three-hundred – thousand, and more. We don't know exactly how many people lived in the town. And –

So, when did he move there?

I can't tell you the exact date, except that my great-grandfather died and he, my grandfather, became an orphan. And what happened was that when he was ten years old, his older sister whose – her name was Anna, took him to get a job at the age of ten, and she enabled him to become a live-in trainee bartender in a pub in Ostrava. Or rather, in Svinov, I beg your pardon, in Svinov. And this pub was called the Hotel Post. And what happened, he hadn't had an education. He couldn't read or write- he hadn't gone to school or anything like that. But he grew up and he became the right-hand person of the owner. Now, that was also an interesting story, because the owner, his name was Abraham Heinrich Huppert, who became my grandfather. Because my grandfather married the eldest daughter of Abraham, who had ten children. [00:34:00] And the result was, he became the right-hand man of his father-in-law. The father-in-law had actually been trained as a kosher butcher. But also, he was a – had a sort of entrepreneurial state of mind. He was not – he was a religious man, but he only followed it to a certain – in a certain way. And what changed his life was the fact that in the First World War, he – when he was called up to do military service, he became an officer in

the Austrian-Hungarian army. And I've got – had his papers with his little, tiny photograph on it, which I had enlarged and he looked a real tough military guy. And I think he was a very – obviously a person of enterprise. And Abraham had ten children and they all went into business. They all had business activities, all different kinds of business activities. There was none of them were just labourers. They all had some kind of business enterprise that they were in.

So, his daughter married...?

His daughter married my grandfather. She taught him to read and write, and they grew up together. And gradually, as Abraham got older, they took over the business of the pub. But Abraham then sold the pub or what was – I don't know exactly what the arrangements were. [0:36:00] He sold his – the pub to his son-in-law and his daughter. And Abraham bought another pub in the south of Poland, in a place called Bielitz, on the outskirts of Bielitz, which is a holiday spot. Also, in the mountains and woods and so forth. And that, he turned into another very successful business. In fact, it's still there. It still exists. It has a swimming pool. It has a playground for children, tennis courts and everything.

So, he was an entrepreneur?

He was an entrepreneur. And his sons were – and sons and daughters were all of that type. So, all of sons were trained to be butchers, but none of them were kosher butchers. They all were catered for – to be butchers for anybody, it doesn't matter what your faith was. And there were five sons originally, one passed away, Sigmund. And another one was independent, had his own butcher's shop, which didn't do too well. And the other three became partners in a partnership. And they were very successful. They started with one shop, which originally was a grocery shop, which they turned into partly a butcher shop as well.

What was it called, the shop?

I don't know what the name, I think it is just known as Huppert. [00:38:00] I don't think they were –

Huppert?

Which was their name.

In Svinov or Ostrava? Or where was that?

In Ostrava.

Ostrava.

And by 1939, there were, I think, nine or ten branches of the shops. And the three brothers ran these shops. And they also – they must have supplied a great part of the butchering business for the whole of city of Ostrava, which was – had grown out of all recognition.

But to come back to your mother, so she grew up – did she grow up in that pub too? And that was what...?

Yes. And so, well, it's not only that, but also the women, the sisters of the three brothers, of the brothers, were also very clever in business. One of them in particular. And what had happened, the butchers, the partnership of the butchers, decided that they would go further into business activities. And they decided to open a delicatessen shop in the main street of Ostrava. It was only one door away from the main department store in the city of Ostrava, which was called the RIX. And the first name of the sister was Anna. The delicatessen was called Anka. In fact, we used to call her Anka anyway, that was her nickname. And she was a very clever, extremely clever businesswoman. She completely changed the whole sort of location where she was. It wasn't just a delicatessen. It was a place where you could go in and buy a whole meal and take it away. [00:40:03] And it was open – I don't think it was open twenty-four-hours a day. But it was probably open eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. And it had a big staff and there were a lot of people there as customers. And it was a very, very flourishing business. And it was so – the food there was so good that when my mother – instead of running her own cooking at home, she used to travel into Ostrava and we

used to go to that Anka's to get our meat. And I would be – often I didn't go in because it was a bit of a crowded roughhouse sort of place. I would be left standing outside and my mum would go in. And then sometimes, I would be left on the other side of the street, where there was a toy shop, which had electric trains running in the window. And I used to sit there, or stand there really, standing there, looking, watching the trains in the window, while my mother would be in Anka, you see.

Anka was your mother's aunt?

That's right.

Yeah.

And so, and my grandfather, he was a very unusual sort of person. He had learnt to read and write from – through his wife, he had learned how to run a business. Because of the increase in the population, he prospered enormously in the business. And not only that, but they changed the business into something very different from what it was originally. And I've just got to explain that part of it as well. [00:42:00] Is that originally, the – you know, the Czechs really invented lager beer. It came – most of it came from Pilsen. But the next big brewery which also produced lager beer, was the brewery in Ostrava. And that was owned by a family of Austrian or Austrian-Hungarian aristocrats. They were called the Wilczeks. Count Wilczek was the head of the family and he was the owner of the Ostrava brewery. And he was a very unusual person. He didn't laud it among his people of the same rank, he mixed with a population. And he was also an explorer but also, he was a businessman. He had a quite a lot of land, which he owned around Ostrava. And he decided that he would expand the business of the brewery by having his own pubs. And he built two pubs in Ostrava. One was in Svinov and the other one was in another part, called [inaudible]. And to run these pubs, he enabled two Jewish leaseholders to become the landlords. And he picked those people who were going to be the landlords and they were two brothers. One of them was Leopold Huppert, he was the first one. And the second one was Abraham Huppert and he was my great-grandfather-to-be. [00:44:05] And he was the one who gave the job to my grandfather at the age of ten, and became his right-hand man. Leopold Huppert stayed in his pub for ten or so

years and later on, he moved to Bielitz, where he gave up that business. And he went into the business of stationery and I think he had a factory making paper, but I don't know very much about it as yet. Except that the Hupperts were quite a large family. And I've discovered that there are several other Hupperts lived in that town. One was a doctor and I don't know exactly what the others did. But the father, his name was Ignaz Huppert. I'm still trying – who was a well-known man in Bielitz.

What about your mum?

Well, my mum, because the pub was very prosperous and my grandfather and with his wife, who – her name was – we called her Resi. Her real name was Therese. But she had a nickname like everybody in the family had a nickname. She was called Resi. And oh, I must tell you this also, my father had a nickname as well. His real name was Joseph. Nobody ever called him Joseph, they called him Bubi because he was the youngest child in his family. He was called Bubi this and Bubi that all the time. My mother was Stella and she was called Stellinka. And she grew up in the pub. [00:46:01] And she had a brother, his name was Jakob and his nickname was Jaki. And he helped his father in the pub and it was not an easy place to run, because the climate in the Czech Republic is not an easy climate. In the summer, it gets very, very hot. And in the winter, it gets very, very cold. But the owner of a pub, he has to keep the lager to be always nice tasting and fresh. So, in the winter, that was not difficult. But in the summer, it was very difficult. Underneath the pub, there were two other floors, and in those floors, there were walls of ice. And that's where the barrels of beer were kept. And Jaki and his father, they had to move these barrels. In the end, of course, the son was a strong – much stronger. As my grandfather grew older, he was in charge of supplying the beer into the actual pub from the ice location where they were kept. And there was a – I don't – can't tell you much about it. But except that in those days, when there was not – refrigeration was not known and was it very – if there was any, it was primitive, it required a certain kind of expertise to have your pub supply the right kind of flavour in the lager. [00:48:03] And the other thing about that pub, the Hotel Post, was it was in an excellent location. You couldn't have dreamt up a place for it to be in a better location. Because it was located about fifty – I'd better say it in English. It was about 100 yards from the entrance of the railway station, which – of the local branch railway station in Ostrava, which was located

in Svinov. And that had become a very important station, because all around that area was the location of the coal and iron ore. And that also is a special story, because the land all around there was owned – most of it was owned by the Austrian Rothschild family. And they built in Aus– in Svi – in around there, in a place, Ostrava- Vítkovice, what at the time was the world's largest iron and steel foundry. There were – by 1925, it employed some 20,000 people. And of course, they didn't all live in Ostrava. And there were other factories also opened up in that area. Vítkovice which became very, very industrialised. And in the winter, Ostrava is always covered in a smog because of the chimneys, many chimneys getting out their fumes all through – every day and also day and night, and all this kind of thing. [00:50:00] And thousands of people traveling into the centre of Vítkovice to go to the factories. And the most thirsty people among these were, of course, people who worked in the iron and steel foundry. And they crowded into the pub and the pub became a completely different place. First of all, it also opened a restaurant, so to speak, and take away. It was open from four o'clock in the morning 'til eleven o'clock at night. And originally, of course, my grandfather did work those hours. He was a worker that you can't – you don't find people like that today. He was a worker of – but he had to employ staff. I remember that they were probably about twenty or thirty people working there.

So, you can you remember the pub yourself from your childhood? Do you remember going there?

Yes. Well, because what it was, by 1925, obviously, he had been penniless. His name was Julius, my grandfather, Julius was his first name, Faerber. And he became a very wealthy man. But he was not a – he didn't show off his wealth. Everybody knew he was a rich man, but he did not appear to be that. The only thing you could tell about him, that he was the boss, was that he bought a bowler hat and he had the manner of a boss. And he ran the business and everybody did exactly as they were told. They were – the ones who worked in the restaurant, the waiters, they had to show that they had clean hands. [00:52:05] He expands [sic] this to inspect their fingernails, and so forth. And they had to work according to the way he described. And he was a – he, of course, had been brought up in a tavern. So, he knew – he was sort of brought up in the atmosphere and he was an expert at running a place like that. And it became very popular.

So, were you allowed to go there as a child?

Yes, well, we lived nearby. I was coming to that.

Okay.

His name was Julius, but among all the workers, the pub was known as Julek's Place. His nickname was Julek in Czech. And the pub, which was actually the Hotel Post, had a nickname. It was called Julek's Place and it was very, very popular. And my grandparents said that they lived above the pub, they had about six or eight rooms there which were let out to travel – commercial travellers. And they also had a flat there. But what happened was that they wanted to spend their savings and what they were earning. I mean, my grandfather was – with the pub was earning maybe ten times what my father was earning as a lawyer. You wouldn't believe that, but that was the case. He was reputed to earn – in fact, I've got a sworn statement from a former customer, my father got it. He'd given an account of the Hotel Post, because he was a frequent customer there. [00:54:04] And he estimated that, whereas my father may have earned five or 6000 koruna a year, my grandfather was earning about 100,000 koruna a year. And so, he wanted to have another home somewhere else. And he bought a piece of land from the man who owned the pub originally, from Count Wilczek. He bought a piece of land and he built a house there. And it was a beautiful house. It was actually two apartments. One was intended for himself and the other one was intended for his daughter when she got married.

Like a dowry?

Yes, and it was – had a huge garden, the garden was 1500 square metres. Had a huge garden, most of it was lawn. And in the summer, it had a showering place in the middle. And we used to sit around there and sunbath. And if we got too hot, we went under the shower. And there were garage – there was a garage, where you could drive in from the back of the location of the house, which came off the road. And it was proper road leading into the garage in the house, at the bottom of the house, which was on a sort of a slope. And that house itself had

two apartments. There were five rooms in each house. And my father – we had the bottom apartment, because there were a lot of stairs. [00:56:00] And my father had a library or office in his apartment, and we lived there. And a friend of my – some friends of my grandfather, their sons rented the apart – the other apartment, they were called the Warners and there were two brothers. I know one of them, Nathan Warner and I've forgotten the name of the other one. But I used to see them every day. I used to open the gates of the garden to them so they could drive in with their car. My father didn't have a car in those days, he couldn't afford a car.

And how far was it then from the pub, this house?

From the pub? Well, it was very near, it was about a ten-minute walk. Around the corner, so to speak. And my father worked in the centre of Ostrava and he had to get up very early in the morning. Business in the Czech Republic is not like in the UK. Offices and shops opened at eight o'clock. So, my father left – had to leave about half-past-seven, he had to leave the house. And he was able to catch a tram from Svinov to his office. So, I – well, I did see my father only for a few minutes in the morning. And when he came late at night, a few minutes in the evening before my bedtime. That's about it, you see. I saw – most of the time, I was with my mum- when I was growing up. And she of course, used to walk around with me to the pub and we used to go into the back entrance. [00:58:02] And we used to sit by the – in the kitchen by the fireplace. And my grandmother would be there. She was in charge of the restaurant, which was very, very busy. But we used to sit quietly around the stove, which was a big stove. It had a big sort of a metal curtain around it, so you couldn't get – actually touch the stove, because it was very hot. But between the curtain, the iron sort of surrounding and the stove itself, there was a goose. And as the waiters came in with the dirty plates, anything that was left over, they would go to the goose and they had a big spoon there, which they'd open the mouth of the goose. And then anything left over on the plate would be put into the goose's mouth. And then, when the goose was finally roasted, that would be used for making all the various things, at which my grandmother was an expert at making the schmaltz, which is the dripping from the goose. And various other things she made. In fact, she was an expert. She'd been brought up by her father as a – who was a trained butcher and grocer. She had been brought up how to do everything. All around the walls of the kitchen, there were shelves

with great big jars of borscht, which is a sort of, I would say, the most frequently known food in the Czech Republic. It's made from beetroot. [01:00:00] And that was used, big jars of it ready, prepared, and all kinds of other things. Because in the winter, it got so cold, there were no vegetables grown. So, people had to – a good housewife would know how to prepare vegetables so they would last into the winter. And my grandmother, Resi, she was an expert at all that. She was like a chef, she knew everything about it.

So, what food did they serve there, apart from the borscht?

Well, all sorts of goulash and all that stuff. Svičková [laughs], I can't remember.

What is Svičkova? Tell us what that is.

Svičková is a veal schnitzel, which is in breadcrumbs, veal, and it's fried. It's a very, very tasty, and it's made – it's always served in a mushroom sauce, a very delicious mushroom – I can't tell you. I tried to get my wife to make it. I bought her, in fact, a book on Czech cooking and it tells you how to make it. But we haven't had a great deal of success in getting the right, exactly the right kind of flavour. Because the main ingredients, apart from the mushrooms, was onions and garlic. And we used to go around – it was very frequent, I won't say it was every day, I used to be – at least every second day, I used to be in the pub, sitting there. And my grandfather, I would be there about 11 o'clock, something like that, he would be having his lunch because he was up at four o'clock in the morning. He would be having his meal. And he used to – I used to sit next to him. And he used to warm his hand on my hand, because he'd been down in the ice cellar. [01:02:05] He used to touch me with his ice-cold hands, and hold my hands and warm himself on my hands, you see. And he used to talk to me about all sorts of things. And I – the funny thing is my grandparents- they spoke all these languages. They never finished the sentence in one language. They spoke Yiddish, they spoke German, they spoke Czech, a bit of *polnisch* thrown in. So, it was a mixture of all those languages. And that's how I grew up and learned to speak.

What did they speak to you?

Well, all those mixed up, you see. And I've still retained some memory of it. But of course, [laughs] I never – when I arrived in England, I had nobody to speak to. I couldn't – we couldn't speak English. We had to learn to speak English. So, I never had never prac – spoke to anybody in my own language, so to speak, except my –

What did your parents speak?

Well, my parents, because my father, because he'd studied in Frankfurt and also, he worked in a law firm in Frankfurt for a while, and Mannheim as well. And then later, on the other thing he did, which is also a thing which a lot of people aspired to, my father's brother-in-law was – originally was a diamond cutter and polisher. But later he became a diamond merchant in Antwerp. So, then my father, he knew there was a difficulty with working in Czech Republic as a lawyer. [01:04:00] He didn't make such a good living there, he wanted to learn about the diamond world. And he went to work in Antwerp for a few months. He learnt a little bit about the diamond industry. But it was not very exciting work, because what it meant, it meant one was selling something which had been made, diamonds, had been polished and cut by experts. And they knew the value, he only knew how you estimated the value. Or he thought he knew, because that's a very tricky sort of business, where you have to learn how to value a diamond when you look at it. And you have to have a very good eye. He was not a big success at it and he quickly gave it up. And he returned to Czech Republic when his father died. But in the meantime, after having his law degree in Germany, he also produced a thesis on political economy. He – it was about the alcohol industry in Czechoslovakia, was his thesis and he got a degree, another doctorate in that. I don't know how you'd call. I would – in English, I think it's – would be political economy or something like that, would be the qualification. And he did that and he published a thesis.

In German?

In German, yes. And then he re – but his father died and he returned quickly to Bohumín, where he found that the pub of my – of his – of my grandfather, it wasn't doing too well. [01:06:01] Although it was also not far from the railway station and things like that. And Bohumín was a growing place, but it wasn't doing so well. It was the building, it was an old

building and it really needed – it was completely – so old, in fact, that what my father did, he arranged to have it rebuilt. And the building of my grandfather there was demolished and a hotel was built. He built a hotel, which he called the Grand Hotel in Bohumín, I can't tell you how many rooms it had, I had no idea. And my father, in between being a lawyer, working with – together with his Dr. Grabler, also returned to Oderberg, as it was known, or Bohumín, to supervise the rebuilding of the hotel, for which he had to borrow from the bank to rebuild it. And it was rebuilt. And when it was rebuilt, it was a question of who was going to run this place? And what was arranged was that my father's sister- he had two sisters, one of them who had been married to the diamond merchant, they split up. They – the marriage didn't – wasn't a successful marriage. He was a very careful man saving his money, because he needed a lot of money to become a diamond merchants. He was a De Beers agent and he never had enough money to – for his business. So, he kept her very short and she liked to spend his money. [01:08:02] So they parted company and she came home to Bohumín, to Oderberg. And my father was persuaded by his mother that she should manage the hotel. And she became – it was arranged, she became the manager of the hotel and my father then concentrated on his job as a lawyer. But unfortunately, they were very – first of all, my father's sister had no knowledge about how to run a hotel. She hadn't the faintest idea, really, to put it bluntly. And also, she had separated from her husband, so she was beginning sort of – how shall I say it? To socialise, right? So she was in the hotel, she was running the place, but most of the time she was socialising in the beer garden. And unfortunately, there were some other things happened, which also caused a lot of – a big problem. And that was the width of the railway lines in Russia were changed. They were modernised. The width, the – I don't know what you call that. The gear? Is it the gear of the width of the rail, the actual line?

Gauge, gauge. The gauge.

The gauge, that's it, the gauge of the railway line was altered. And Bohumín was one of the stops where people travelled from Moscow to Berlin and Frankfurt and so on. And the result was that the train stopped coming through Bohumín to go to Moscow. [01:10:02] And that meant that the hotel, the Grand Hotel, lost a lot of its customers. And it had to pay the mortgage. And after I think about four years of this struggling to carry on, it actually became bankrupt. So, this beautiful building, it really was a nice building, became bankrupt and it

was taken over by the bank. And my father blamed his sister, and his mother, he blamed and relationships were a bit difficult. And then, his sister returned to her husband, had made it up with him. And he became more successful as a diamond merchant. And she wouldn't – she didn't want to accept responsibility for what had happened. It wasn't really her fault, it's the railway line stopped coming through Bohumín and so forth. So, the hotel fell into other hands. And the fact is that, in actual fact, it's still – the building is still there. And there is a hotel there. And when I went back in '92, I think it was, '93 for the first time, I was taken on a tour of various places that were owned by the family. And that was one of the one place – and I went inside. I went inside there and I saw the desk where the concierge were working. [01:12:00] And then behind that, there was a big room, it was a billiard room. And I looked there and I saw the people playing there. And there was a – on the wall there were a photograph of Stalin and a photograph of Gottwald, who was the leader of the Czech Communists, who had taken over the government and who had confiscated the hotel. It was all still there. And part of the front of the hotel had been changed into two shops, two or three shops. And the beer garden was still there and it didn't look too prosperous. The whole of Oderberg didn't look too prosperous. When I saw it, there were a few people begging in the streets. And after a look, I – well, I didn't know what to think. But it had obviously been a well-built place, originally, but it had been a failure. And nobody talks about it in the family [laughs].

Interesting.

And well, the result was that my father had to concentrate on being a lawyer and business was not good in the business of being a lawyer. And his father-in-law had to help him survive. And this is all coming up to 1939. In '37, he actually gave the ownership of the hotel to – not the hotel, of the house to my parents in 1937. And I've got the copy of the contract. [01:14:00] And well, he went – my great-grandfather concentrated on his place in Bielitz. It was in a place, it was called – it had a funny name. It was Gypsy Woods translated. In Polish, Cygański Las, it was called.

Interesting.

It's still there.

We need to come back to you personally.

Yes.

What are your memories of growing up in Svinov?

I had a very nice life really. The only thing, it was a bit lonely, if you want to – not a usual child's life.

What about school?

Pardon?

School or kindergarten, where were you schooled?

Well, I didn't start kindergarten until the last year that I was there. I was about six, I must – yes, I must have been six years old. But before that, I hadn't been to any kindergarten. I was very closely looked after, because my mother had a house maid. She wasn't full-time, but she was most of the day there. And – but she didn't live in, she came from – and she brought her – she had a very younger brother. Her name was Hanne and the brother's name was Jiří. And I used to play with Jiří. I cars, various models of cars that I played with. I usually had one car that I – was my favourite and he had – I gave one to him. And he played – and we played. And sometimes, once or twice, we were able to go out of the house. We went into a field near there and we walked around the field and came back. And then, sometimes there was a circus came to town. [01:16:01] And sort of- they had all sorts of stalls and then, we would walk around. There was a usually a sort of a train for children to get into. And I would get into the train with the – with Jiří. And we would sit in the train, it went around and around, with my mother watching us going around and around. And things of that sort going on.

So did your mother work at all in that time or...?

She only helped out when she was sort of, well, I don't know exactly. When she was needed or when she was – saw the place was over – getting too busy when she was there. She knew how – she knew all about the running of a pub. She knew how to serve the drinks and all that. But she didn't do it full-time, because her brother was working there. And they had a quite a big staff as well. And my grandmother was working there as well. So, my mother didn't – wasn't working. She was only working maybe a few hours when I was a child there, she was looking after me, you see. So, and that, and I didn't have many children to play with because of that. I played with the daughter of the gardener when he came.

The German gardener?

Yes, had many – we used – sometimes he came early, the snow was still on the ground. And I had a sleigh and I used to sit in the sleigh, and this girl used to pull me around in the sleigh. In fact, I've got a photograph of that somewhere. And Jiří also was – he started collecting stamps and I looked at stamps. And the truth was, my father also had become a stamp collector. Because one of his uncles, Josef, had been originally a coin dealer in Vienna. [01:18:06] He had to leave Vienna. And he returned to – when Germany took over Austria, the Anschluss, and he had a flat in Aus – in Prague. And from there he worked as a coin dealer and stamp dealer as well. He was one of the very early stamp dealers in the country. I don't know if he was very successful or not. But my father would often – he was – got the, how shall I say? Stamp collecting got into his blood somehow. He was often more frequently in Prague, looking at stamps or dealing stamps, than he was doing law. I don't know exactly what – which was more profitable. I don't know exactly.

And you said that they were – your friends were quite assimilated. How Jewish did you feel growing up? And what – did they do Friday night or other things or...?

No, I wasn't – I really didn't know that I was different from anybody else. I didn't – well, I suppose I knew I was Jewish. But I didn't know why. I had – no one told me, explained anything to me.

Was there a synagogue in Svinov?

Oh, yes, there was. And most of the – for the first five years, I'd never been, I never set foot inside a synagogue or anything like that. No, I didn't really know anything about – all I – what I didn't have is – was both my parents were very musical. My mother had been educated very well by my – by her father. She was – after she finished normal school, she was sent to a finishing school in Hanover, where she learned how to be a lady, let's put it like that.

[01:20:12] She learned to play the piano to a high standard. She learned how to dress and all this kind of thing, how to run a house. And she had a – when she got married, she had a trousseau. I remember that all our sheets at home, they had a monogram with her name into the sheet. It was sort of in the sheet.

Embroidered.

Embroidered into the sheets and everything like that, that she'd brought, that was her trousseau. So, and things like that, you know. I used to go sometimes shopping with her. I was taken to RIX, the department store and there was another department store. The second one was called Bachner. And Bachner was a very – it was a very good store. But it was for more – a sort of cheaper kind of store. And the owners of the store were related to my – to the man who was married, who was the diamond merchant. His name was Bachner as well, my sister, her married name was Bachner. They were related, I think they were distant cousins. And so, that's where she often went in there. And but I was more interested in going to RIX and because RIX also, the same as Anka, was opposite the children's shop, which had all the trains. Had the most fantastic window of trains running up and down through stations and all this kind – all models. [01:22:01] And I used to stand there for hours fascinated by this [laughs].

You like trains?

I was fascinated by trains. And the only other thing that I did, I was taken to see – twice I remember only, seeing a children's film. One of which was Snow White. Which upset me, funnily enough. I can't remember but I burst into tears because the Wicked Witch did

something to the – Cinderella. And I was escorted out of my seat in the cinema and I had to wait in the corridor ‘til my mum came to fetch me.

Where was that cinema? In...?

In Ostrava, yes. And there was another –

What was the second film?

The second film I can tell you also, it was – because- I don't know if my mum, who picked these. It must have been my mother who picked the film. It had a famous Austrian comedian in it. His name was Shaky Saco [ph], I don't know if you ever heard of him. But he was a man who – very fat and he made films as well. And the usual – he had a special act that was filmed. What it was, you saw him in his house. And he was dressing himself up, ready to go out in an evening dress for a man, beautiful suit, special shoes, a special bowler hat with a flat – a round one with a flat top on it. And cigars and everything. [01:24:02] And then he had – he kept in his pocket a box, which it was for matches, a big matchbox. And in that matchbox, there were some other things that he put in there before he went out to eat. And the reason he had this matchbox, he'd go into this very expensive restaurant, where everybody bowed and scraped, the door was opened by a doorman. And oh, and then he arrived, make a very haughtily – although he didn't – it was like he didn't have two pennies to rub together. He went inside, and he'd sit down and the head waiter would come over and take his order. And he would order the most expensive, big meal that you could imagine. And he would eat the meal and everything. The waiters would bow and scrape to him. And in the end, when he came to the – he was presented with a bill. And when he saw the bill, he didn't have the money to pay. So, he would take out this matchbox he had in his pocket, and he ordered some – a dessert. And in the dessert, he put this, I think it was a mouse or something, which became running around. And he jumped up and pretended to be very, very angry, to find the mouse in his desert. The head waiter and everybody was very upset and everything. And they were lucky to get him out of the restaurant with all the – so the other guests wouldn't notice. They sh – you know, they were going to put him in the kitchen to do the washing up, because he couldn't pay. But he'd got out of it with his animal thing, tricked them.

What's the name of this film?

So, they escorted into the door, with him protesting and being, I don't know, very angry with how he was being treated, and so on. [01:26:09] And complaining about the food he'd eaten and so forth, and thrown out of the place.

So, the film made an impression on you? You remember it.

[Laughs] I can't remember the name of it. That guy was a – unfortunately, I'm very bad on names.

Don't worry.

But he had – he became very famous. And when, during the war, he went to Hollywood and he made a career as a comedian. And his son became a big star as well in Hollywood, who was in – usually in these sort of big films where they're soldiering or armies overtaking in the Middle East somewhere, or the kind of –

What's the son's name?

I can't remember.

Don't worry.

I can't remember the name. He was a very, very famous actor.

Okay.

And then later on, this guy, this [inaudible] himself, came to live in England.

Shaky Saco?

[Inaudible]. That wasn't his real – that was his name.

Yeah, artist –

He had a very funny manner of about him. I can only describe him, he was imitating a not too clever Austrian citizen, who has taken a few too many drinks, and had a big sense of humour.

It's not Graf Bobby, the surname? Have you heard of that?

I can't remember his real name, I'm sorry. But it wasn't very famous guy. Anyway, yeah.

Okay. Just to come back, so when you said you weren't aware that you were Jewish, really –

Not really, no.

So when – for you, when did you become aware of being Jewish?

Well, it took a very – it was a very slow process actually. **[01:28:03]** It was very – I really have to come – I'm coming to the point where we left.

Yes, my point is before you left, when did you feel...?

Not –

Did not feel any problems, any trouble?

Nothing. Nothing whatsoever. Well, there was one slight inkling, thing that happened, which I have never forgotten. Which should have told – made it clear to me, but I didn't know, I was only a child. You know, I didn't know. What happened was that our gardeners came, they were cutting the – they had scythes cutting – when they cut the lawn and so on. And then, after a while they stopped that day. And they – my father was sunbathing and they asked to

speak to him. And the gardener came with his wife. And I think my parents had said they were going away, or something like that. And the gardener very earnestly said to my father, he said, he tried to find out when he was going. And he didn't – my father didn't tell him. So, the gardener said to him, 'Don't worry, we will look after your house. We will make sure it's – nothing happens and your house is very...' And he said that with a sort of very meaningful manner. You know, very serious he was, this guy. He was a sort of a workman, you know, just a gardener. Nobody thought much of him before. But this time, he spoke in a very serious manner to my father, and my father listened and didn't say anything. 'Yes', he said, 'yes, yeah' and just nodded and so on. And that was it and that was the first time something actually happened that wasn't right. [01:30:00] But it didn't sink in at the time. It's only much later that all that, it suddenly – the message came through eventually, but it was a very long time. Because then, the next thing that happened was my father disappeared, my father left. I didn't know he was going. What had happened, he had wanted to go – the occupation was taking place. Oh, and all these German – people of German descent in Ostrava, were in the streets, welcoming the occupation forces coming in from Germany. And you could hear – we were quite a way, we were about a twenty-minute ride from the centre. But you could hear the cries of the – the welcoming cries of the thousands of German origin Czechs who are welcoming the occupation. They were – you heard, '*Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil*', they were shouting in the streets. And you could hear –

Were you there?

No, I wasn't in the crowd.

No, but –

We could hear it where we were living. It was a huge sound, it was – because we were – lived by a river. Somehow the sound carried. You could hear it, you know, that coming.

When was that?

Well, that was in March 1939. And you could hear that and so on. And my father had gone, I didn't know, I wasn't told where he'd gone or anything. But what it was, he'd all the time apparently wanted to leave, and he knew after Munich. And my mother didn't want to leave her parents. So, he was – didn't know what to – can't – they didn't want to go. He was adamant, and got upset and angry, and all kinds of things happened, which I didn't have an explanation for. **[01:32:00]** We used to have – they used to have musical evenings. I used to sit under her grand – she had a baby grand piano and he used to play the violin. And their friends were invited and I used to sit leaning against the leg of the piano, before I went to bed. But all that stopped. And he wasn't – my dad wasn't there for a few days. And what had happened, he'd gone back to Bohumín, which was only a little way away. He'd taken the tram back and he had a rucksack or something of clothing and things. And he made his – at night, he made his way into Poland. He knew his way around, because all around there was forest, there were paths. The frontier guard was not situated throughout the forest. He knew how to get through into Poland without passing the guards on the frontier. And the first time actually, he was caught by the frontier guard. And they hit him about a bit and sent him back. And he went back to his mum. And a day or two later, during the night he got up. And I think he borrowed a – well, the story is, I don't know exactly, he saw a bicycle leaning against the wall. He took the bicycle and he cycled through the forest, on a path and into Poland. And he made his way to Krakow. And in Krakow, my mother's father had four sisters who were married there, married sisters. And I didn't know anything, I didn't know anything about it, them or anything. Hadn't met them or anything. **[01:34:03]** But I know that my grandfather, by that time, things had got a bit – changed, the whole atmosphere changed everywhere. And we often went to my grandparents' place, which was locked up, it wasn't open. And we'd stay there doing – in the [inaudible], we went, stayed there overnight. And people were banging on the doors, knocking on the doors, to see if there was anybody inside. And all this kind of thing was going on, and shouting outside. And my mother's brother was – had was a couple of unfortunate incidents in the street outside. You know, he was attacked and hit about and so on. And my grandfather said to my mother, 'You'd better go and join your husband.' So, my mother went, she packed her – it was all done rather like a dream. She didn't – she decided she would make the journey. But before she went, she had a big trunk. And she ordered six dresses from a dressmaker. Where were we going? We were going somewhere hot, she said. He was – she meant Palestine. She – that was the plan. 'We're going somewhere very hot.'

And one – I think it was on a – it may have been on a Sunday, I don't know exactly, we went to the railway station, which was very near. We walked to the railway station and there was nobody. [01:36:00] It was a big – it's a big railway station because it was – it who carried you know, the coal and all that. It was loaded onto trucks and it went, line after line of trucks would go by loaded with coal. And that sort of thing would be there. And they had no roof over it. And as we walked in the railway station, we went past some huts. There were German soldiers in the huts. They were singing and eating and drinking. They had looted the – because Grandfather also had a sort of a place inside the railway station, where he had a manager who was selling beer in the railway station, as well as in the pub. And that was all looted. And they were drinking the beer and everything, and singing and so on. But in the station, there was not a soul about, except a Czech policeman, an old one. My mother knew them, knew him. And he just sort of went like this. And we got on the train and about half-an-hour, forty minutes later, we were in Krakow. We got off the train. There were other – not very many people that got off. And we walked out, she was looking worried, that's all I can say. I can't describe it any other way, furtively, in case somebody was looking for her. But there was nobody there. We walked out of the station. And we made our way to the sister's house, of one of the sisters of my grandfather. And I know the name was Gelber, was my family name. [01:38:00] And one of the daughters, she had been – was a pharmacist, funnily enough. Nothing to do with – but I knew that she was working. And the – I don't know, they must have been in their sort of early, sort of late forties, I would say, if not – perhaps, something like that. My grandfather by then was in his six – beginning of the sixtieth years, sort of when I –

And was your father there when you went there?

Not at first. My father appeared as well and we were in Krakow. I didn't know why we were there. And we walked around Krakow furtively, so to speak, is the only way I can describe it now. It was – it looked awful. There were people running around with attaché cases under their arms, which was probably all they owned and belonged. There were beggars sitting in the – leaning against the walls, people, some lying in the pavement. Some – there was one, there was a – we were in a part where – the Jewish part of Krakow. There was a big square. I'm not quite sure of the name, it was something like Konstanz or something like that, it was

called. Not Konstanz, trying to think of the name. Kasimir or something like that, it was called. A big square and all around, there was all Jewish shops and –

Kazimierz? Kazimierz?

Kazimierz.

Kazimierz?

Something like that. Anyway, a big square and we were walking around there and – but sort of watching around. [01:40:00] And then, we met my father and we came to the, to my auntie's in – Gelbers. And she also had, I remember, we had a lot of borscht there. There wasn't a lot of food. They didn't have a lot of food. We had eggs and borscht, all sorts of things with eggs in. There were jars all around on the wall, which is like my grandmother had. Oh, what I didn't tell you about my grandfather's pub, is in the – there was a – at the back, there was a big space for the farmers who came from the round, to park their lorries. It wasn't lorries, it was carts, horse carts, on which usually were pigs, loads of pigs. But running around in the yard, were a lot of chickens. And they were chickens that were run by my grandmother. And she would go out. And then I joined – later I used to – when I was still about four or five years old, used to join. We used to feed them with corn, 'Kookoo rutz, kookoo rutz [ph]', we would shout and shout, you see. So, I know about – so I knew about eggs and things to do with eggs, and all that. Anyway, we had – didn't have a lot to eat in that place. And my father, then he was – the reason we didn't see him at first, was he was working somewhere, but he wasn't actually working. He was learning a new trade. Because he knew he wouldn't be able to be – I mean, he knew he wasn't going to be a lawyer wherever he was going. And he was going, he went to this place where there was a man who was a glass cutter. [01:42:03] And he had this thing in his hand. And he was showing him how to cut the panes of glass for a window, or for a mirror, or various others. And my father was a – he was about as dab handed as you – he was useless. He never – he broke most of the glass. He couldn't cut it, didn't cut it straight or he couldn't cut it at all. And he was there, all day long he'd been learning this for a day or two. I don't know how many days he'd done this. Anyway, then one day, my parents said to me, 'We're going now and what is going to happen

is, we are going and we may have to leave you for one day. We'll come back for you, don't worry.' So, we went away from Krakow to another place. And I realised that was – what that was, we went to the British Con – I think it was the British Consulate. Well, that's where they were going. My parents had to queue at the British Consulate all day long, to get a visa to go on a ship that was calling in a British harbour. And but of course, I couldn't go to join the queue with them. They were there with thousands of people, it was besieged, this place. They left, I don't know, it may have been about seven o'clock in the morning, eight o'clock in the morning. They took me to a tented camp, where there were all boys of all ages there.

[01:44:01] The oldest must have been about eighteen maybe, boys, who are in these living – sleeping in the camp and sort of making a lot of noise. All Jewish boys. And two boys, they were – my father spoke to them. They were to keep me company and look after me until they came back to fetch me. And I was left there by myself. It was the most horrific day I ever had.

Were you scared?

Yes. I was very, very frightened. I didn't know what the boys spoke, they only spoke in Yiddish and I couldn't understand how they were speaking exactly. They tried to be kind, but it didn't have the slightest effect on me. Because I was all the time looking where my mum and dad were. And they went around, hours went, all day long until it was – dusk was coming down. And then fortunately, I suddenly saw my mother coming towards me. So, they – and they picked me up and we went to a railway station. I don't – I can't tell you where on earth it was. And we got on this train, which was the most crowded train I've ever seen or ever been on. People were hanging from outside of the doors. The doors were shut and there were still people hanging on to the door to be on this train. And we got – this train moved off. There was thousands of people. A lot of them were these people we'd seen before in Krakow, who were walking around with attaché cases, unshaven. Looked like they had expensive clothes, but their expensive clothes they'd probably slept in, and that kind of thing. [01:46:05] There was a kosher restaurant in that place and in that square, a very famous kosher restaurant, a very big place. But outside there were standing, I don't know maybe half a dozen young men, Jewish young men, or couples and all that kind of thing. Oh, definitely Jewish and black – the black garb that they wore, you know. It was in sort of middle of May or early May when this

was going on. They were standing outside, you couldn't go into this place unless you passed – the person would question you before you went in. And what it was, was you were only allowed in if you could show that you could afford to pay for something that you were going to order. Otherwise, they wouldn't let you in.

So, some of these people were on the train, you think, with you?

*Those kinds of people were all – the ones you saw in the streets, the ones who were inside.
And where was the train going?*

I didn't know where it was going, nothing. I didn't know anything. I didn't have ask any questions. I was in – from being that day alone that I had, I was sort of bewildered, is the only way I can describe. I didn't, it was all – I was looking in all directions. In the square, I remember seeing there was one cart, the horse had bolted, or two horses there were, had bolted and there was a man sitting in the carriage and another man trying to halt... It was going along there and he couldn't control the horses. It was whistling going past and there were people lying in the streets who are begging, hadn't had any food or anything, this kind of thing. [01:48:07] Anyway, we got on the train, we were like sardines on this thing. And it was quite a – I don't know how long the journey was, a few hours. It was a very slow-moving train. And we got off, it was in a port. Actually, it was the place the – Poland only had one port, it was called Gdynia. That's where it was. And my parents went there, we went along into the – actually where the boats were. And my father was walking along. And he was trying to get a booking for a seat on the boat. And they were all shaking their hands- heads like this and so on. Eventually, after I don't know, two or three hours, we were walking with him, I was – we were to go together, there was a boat. It was a – it was like a post – they were carrying luggage and mail. And he asked where they were going and they couldn't sp – they couldn't understand him because they didn't speak the language. It was a different language. It was actually Scandinavian and so on. And in the end, my father had a ring on his hand, on his little finger. You know this was the custom in those days. Little, small diamond in the ring. And he took off the ring and he gave it to – the boat captain came out. And with that, he was able – not with a – he had to pay him as well. He gave him the ring. He got a seat on this boat, only one seat. [01:50:00] There were only six or eight seats. He got the seat, Dad got in

with his rucksack, sat down and we stood on the side. I said, I didn't know what was going on. The boat went, saw it go. I stood with my mother there, she was looking worried and so forth. And we walked gradually away. And we walked through where, again, there was a place where they were all full of refugees. Some lying down, some sitting on their suitcases, all kinds of things like that. And there were waiters running around, carrying drinks or whatever it was for people. And as we were going along, a waiter hit into – ran into me and knocked me over and broke my arm. I didn't know, I just fell to the ground. It was a very big break on one shoulder, shoulder and down. And pandemonium, I was taken to hospital. And it was a hospital where the nurses were nuns. They were all nuns. And the doctor put the plaster on. I heard him saying, 'It's got to be a lot of plaster, because you're going on a long journey', he said. That's all I knew. I didn't – I'd gathered that much. And, 'But you're staying the night here, you're not going home.' So, I stayed the night in this place. I didn't sleep a wink, I was awake the whole time, looking around. There were all these women dressed like nuns walking around, coming to look at me and then going away. In the morning, I was wide awake. [01:52:02] And the doctor came to look at my – he didn't – they didn't take the plaster off. It was very, very heavy. It was such a thick plaster, not the normal children's thing. It took them God knows how long to put it on when they did it. And then I was sort of left sitting in the chair for a while and it must have been somewhere near midday. My mother suddenly arrived and she came to take me away, but the nurses didn't want to let me go. They wanted to keep me there. They said I wasn't – not yet ready to go from the hospital. I should stay a few days here before I went. And my mother said we had to go, we had to go. And she started to shout and scream and a whole scene developed, shouting and screaming. And the matron or the – also some other civil – in civil clothing came to look at what was going on. Anyway, eventually after about an hour of this sort of thing, they let – said they would let me go. And my mother went outside, she had a car waiting. We got into the car, we drove to the ship. We got on the ship, it was called the 'Warszawa' and it was packed with people. You've never seen a packed inside, and there were all kinds of people. Some were laughing, some are crying, some was speaking in languages I'd never – all kinds of languages, God alone knows. And some were nasty people – looking people. You know, if you know what I mean, which I'd never seen people like that. People unshaven, people with beards, all this kind – I'd never seen – or dressed in clothes that were like rubbish, you know, and all this kind of thing. [01:54:04] Some well-dressed and some – oh, it was packed.

Anyway, off the ship went and all they were talking, they were all very much afraid where the ship was going. I didn't know, I didn't know where it was – I didn't ask even where it was going. But they were very worried. It was going through a place called Skagerrak, which was where the sea was very rough and it would be stormy there. They were all worried about it, worried about – and sure enough, when we got to that place after about a day-and-a-half, suddenly the boat was going like this. Everything was falling about, every – nobody could stand up. And all these people were falling to the – you know, walking. You couldn't take a step and nobody had nothing to eat. People when they were eating, their plates would go on the floor and all this kind of – it was utter chaos. Anyway, we – eventually, we got through there and we arrived at Tilbury. And this place, we all were sat, quietened down, everybody got very quiet. And people went off in single file. And we went off and we got through a place, there were three or four men sitting at a table. And they were examining what – you know, searching you what you had. They didn't speak to you and they couldn't understand what – even if they had. They were – I had a little rucksack on my back and they were looking in my rucksack. My father had put a stamp album in there, his stamp album, and they were looking through the pages, somebody was looking at it. And then, he said, he went – made a face like that and gave it back, and put it back in the bag. [01:56:01] And finally, we got off through there and we walked out. And there was a big bus waiting. And we all got on this bus, never been – you know, a completely different – all I can describe, the scenery was totally different to anything we had ever – I'd ever seen before. Completely, completely different.

Yeah, I think this is a very good time, because you were describing the journey from Poland to England, I'd like to go back a little bit about the Warszawa, the boat.

Oh, right.

Just tell us a little bit more about the boat. And also, I know that on the Warszawa some unaccompanied children came on it. I don't know whether you came across –

I didn't know it at the time.

Yeah, so just let's –

I knew it later, but not then.

*So, let's just go back to the boat and the impressions. And you talked about some of them.
how many people were on that boat roughly? Full?*

It was packed. It was not just the cabins, it was everywhere. There were people sleeping on the deck and all this kind of thing.

Did you have a cabin?

Yes, we did, funnily enough, because when my parents had queued up to get the tickets, you see, they got a visa from the English Consulate, which was stamped, which allowed them three minutes – three months. I got the passport, I can show you the passport, three months' permission to stay. Not allowed to take on any work, or take on any contract to start work. And have to leave this country after three months. That's the condition under which we were allowed to land.

Was it a transit visa?

Yes. Which is paid for by the – what do they call them? The Quakers of Canada hired the ship. [01:58:02] They paid for the ship entirely to go backwards and forwards. It wasn't the only time they made the journey, that ship. It made that journey every week, I think, for some months.

And how did your parents manage to get their tickets? Did they get the tickets, all of them together?

They got the ticket when they got the visa in the Consulate. I didn't know how it was done. I don't know exactly. But the thing was, there were three of us. Although I was a child, there

were only tickets for two. And therefore, my father didn't have the ticket. My mother had the ticket and I was another person on the ticket.

So that's what your father had to go separately?

He went on the on the package boat. And he got – he paid for a trip which took him somewhere in Sweden, I think it was Stockholm, somewhere like that. And from Sweden, he had to come to England. But somehow, he knew where to go so that later on, we all met up. Because as we got off the bus in Tilbury, the bus took us to Bayswater where there was a big school, which had been emptied and was allocated to take all these refugees. Every room, every classroom and everything was – had beds everywhere. There were maybe ten beds in each classroom and that kind of thing.

And what was it called? Where was it?

It was in Bayswater.

Yeah, and –

That's all I knew.

Do you know the name of the school or the place?

I have no idea. I gather it was a grammar school or something like that. It was a really big school. It's not the site is not there anymore, the – where it was.

Leo, just before we come to England, what – do you remember, what were you feeling leaving? I mean, leaving Europe, leaving on the boat. [02:00:02] Do you remember what...? I mean, you must have been overwhelmed.

I didn't – somehow, I didn't think – the only thing I was – well, the only thing that was in my mind was I was – I loved my grandparents. I loved my mother's parents very, very much,

particularly my grandfather. He was somebody very, very special for me. And I missed him, you see, I missed him very, very much and –

Already in Poland? Because –

Yes.

How long did you stay in Poland before you managed to get the boat?

I'm not exactly sure the exact time, but I would say it was about three weeks maybe. In Krakow, we were so – we were in hiding, but not in hiding. Because the Polish police were not picking up people exactly. Only some who were a nuisance. There were so many people who looked like refugees running around, in all different kinds of garbs. You know, some well-dressed, some rubbish, some – all kinds. Some – you know, all kinds of people. There were people sleeping on the streets and there were, you know, lying in the streets.

So, they were refugees?

Loads of people.

Because at that time, Poland was not –

Packed with these people.

It was before World War Two? I mean, before that or afterwards?

It was after the occupation of Czech Republic.

Correct, but before September, '39? That's what I mean.

Yeah.

Yes?

It was – it would have been in beginning of May 1939. I can tell you the date I arrived in England was the 26th of May. That's stamped in the passport.

So, you were missing your grandfather? Do you think you were aware that you wouldn't see him again or...?

No. He knew, but I didn't know. [02:02:00] It didn't mean anything. You don't – a child doesn't take note – I didn't take notice of things. I never took anything – I was just sort of, I was doing naughty things, you know. When Auntie used to come, I used to throw myself on the floor and roll around, because I didn't want to be picked up and squeezed and things of that kind and things. You know, that sort of thing. I wasn't interested in much.

So, you were protected by your parents in a way?

Very much, yes, yes. And I didn't mix with other children really.

And on that boat, tell us how long did the journey last?

Three or four days.

And what else do you remember from the journey?

Nothing much, except it was a horrible journey. It was very, very rough at a certain time, for about a day or two. And then it calmed down. And then, we seemed to take an age of a time to getting off that boat. Took a hell of a long time, to put it bluntly. And you had to go in single file past these people from the customs. There were four people sitting at a table and you had to walk past. And one got up and he started – everybody feeling what they had in their pockets and so on. Oh, yes, and I think my parents, well, my father told me later, he told me, that – well, I've got a horrible story.

Go on.

At that – when they were waiting, they were queuing up with many hundreds or thousands, God knows how many people. They were told as they went in that, ‘Don't expect to be able to take any valuables with you’, they were told. Or any money or jewellery or anything of value. So, by the time my mother got there, she had sewn a few pieces of jewellery she had with her into her clothing. [02:04:01] Nothing was discovered at all, you see. So that was okay. Which we never – we've still got those particular bits, not that –

What was it?

My daughter – well, it's got various brooches of my mother had and things like that. And that's one thing, and we were with – we were on that boat. There was some distant relative, you heard me mention the name Wurzel. On the boat were – was one of our cousins. His name was Sigi Wurzel. He was – his – I think it was his – I'm not sure now, either his father or grandfather were – one of the Wurzels, were related to those. I told you, my great-grandmother and the three brothers, it was one of those people. And he and his wife was on the boat. They were childless. And he was with us as we got off the boat, and he was also in our group, when we were sent to – they dispersed everybody into parties. I don't know, maybe fifty or 100 people went to one town and some to other towns. We went to Clacton-on-Sea, where I had the time of my life, because we arrived in late May. And we – I didn't go to school or anything like that. I didn't have anything to do, except to go to the beach every day. And lie and sunbathe and go in the water. I'd never seen sea water, I'd never been. And what happened is the Clacton Council allocated a section of the beach to the Czech refugees. [02:06:05] There were about, I don't know, I can't tell you how many. I would say, between fifty and 100 altogether. But there was only one boy of my age. His name was Kurt, I had it on the tip of my tongue. His name, first name was Kurt. He was the nephew of a famous violinist, whose name I can't remember either. Began with M. Not a great viol – not one of the great ones, but a well-known violinist. And he had two parents, who were always fighting and arguing in a very loud manner. And everywhere, they were everywhere where we were. And you could hear them arguing and shouting at each other obscenities, and all the other horrible things.

Kurt?

Yeah, Kurt, I can't remember the second name.

We can come back to it.

Anyway, it'll probably come back. But the funny thing was – and he – we didn't go to school. So, what happened, we went on the beach every day in the sun. And I don't – I think we had a little bucket each or something stupid like that. And the refugees, they were all – everything was strange for everybody. They went into – they had a sort of place where you could go in, and you put money in a machine and something would come up. And one where you had to lift a hand in a machine. And there were things inside it, the machine could pick it up. And if you've got it, you could have it, get it. And this guy was – the repute, the word went around that one of them had gone there, had got a watch. [02:08:00] He'd got a gold watch and he got – I don't know if it was ever true, anything, but the word went around. And they all rushed to this machine every night and around this place, on the beach, it was. A sort of a, I don't know, a circus or something, had got these stands.

Leo, what was your – do you remember your first impressions of England? I mean, just coming from the boat and...?

That was – well, yes. Well, then my – we went to sort of a boarding house.

In Bayswater?

No. Oh, in Bayswater, as well.

Yes.

But I didn't get much impression in Bayswater. It was so – it was such a shock everything, I didn't take much notice. We weren't there that long. It was only a matter of days really. I

don't know how long. But when we arrived in Clacton-on-Sea, we were in a hostel. I don't know how many, there were about – you know, in Clacton-on-Sea, there are streets of hostels. We were in one of these hostels. And there were about fifteen or twenty people in the hostel, same as we were. And this Kurt was – he was one of them with his parents, who were always fighting and shouting at each other. And we were the only two children. He was exactly the same age as me. And we'd – no school would want – could take us, because we couldn't speak English.

Yeah.

Right? And nobody could speak English on – any of them. And they were all busy learning, standing out in front of mirrors, because the one thing they found difficulty in saying in English was the word 'the, the.' They were practicing, 'The, the' in front of mirrors. My parents were there you see.

Really?

All day long [laughs].

What were they saying instead of 'the'? What were they saying?

Well, they said, 'De, de.' That couldn't get it out. [02:10:00] And funnily enough, one of this – this Sigi Wurzel, his wife, funnily enough, her occupation at home in Czech Republic was, she was an English teacher. She was teaching somebody English. You can imagine what her accent was like. She had a very thick accent. She never – she lived to be 102 actually. She never lost her accent. She had the most terrible foreign accent you can imagine, although she was an English teacher.

And were you given any lessons at that point?

My parents went to lessons, they all had to sit together and somebody tried. And there were some old ladies came to the, you know, where we were staying. They were sort of giving free

of charge, so they meant well. Well-meaning old ladies from, I don't know, Women's Institute or something like that, and so on. And then, things got a bit worse when the war started, you know. When all the men were – of military age were called up. And most of them went into the Pioneer Corps. But there was a Czech Brigade, but they didn't – a lot of them didn't want to go in that, because there were rumours that the Officer Commanding or somebody in there who was in charge, had antisemitic manner, somehow. They didn't want anything to do with them, you know. So, they went – they all went in the Pioneer Corps. In this –

Yes, please.

We were in this boarding house, you see. And what happened, the Czech government in exile was here, they had borrowed money from the British. [02:12:00] I think it was four million they got, including the Pre – the deputy of the President, Dr. Beneš and the son of the founder, Jiří [sic] Masaryk. They were all living in London in more luxurious means than we were. And they arranged that we – everybody who was an adult got pocket money of two shillings and six pence a week. Or was it? I'm not sure, it may have been a month, I'm not sure. But my father discovered that you could buy a packet of ten Woodbines for one shilling and three pence. So, he went and rushed out, and bought himself some cigarettes because he was a smoker. And he was a nervous smoker, because he didn't – he lost all control of what was going to happen to him and to us. He didn't know where the future – what was going to go, anything, nothing. We couldn't go any more to Palestine, he knew and all this kind of thing. So, we didn't know what was going to happen. And then, when Britain entered the war, I think a day or two after that, a bomb fell in somewhere near Clacton-on-Sea, you see. And that aroused everybody, and so on and so on. So, the first thing that happened, all the Czechs got together and said we'll hold – give a concert of thanksgiving to the people of Clacton for all they've done for us to give us the peace, on the beach and so on. So, they gave a concert inside, on the pier of Clacton-on-Sea. My mother and Sigi's wife were in charge of the cooking and they asked the people for a lot of eggs. They couldn't – the women couldn't believe the eggs that they had to give over to them to make all the cakes that they made, [02:14:03] which disappeared within a very short time, because none of the English people had seen cakes of that kind ever, you see [laughs]. This was completely English like it used to

be, England like it used to be. There were – on the beach there were a concert party and there was a Mickey – you know, those Mickey Mouse, what do you call those? In a box, you know, talking, I don't know, dummy you know, with –

Puppets?

Puppets, and all this kind of thing. And there were donkeys on the thing. And there were also, there was a zoo there. They had elephants standing on the beach and you could go to – near the elephant and feed it with a bun or something, and all this kind of thing. I had –

So, when did they give this thank you concert? When – in September?

No, this was in – still in the May we were there.

Oh, the –

In May, we arrived, late in May.

But you said the thank you to Clacton, when was that?

Oh, the con – I can't tell you when. It was after the bomb fell, they were – that sort of thing. And then somehow, they – well, all the men of military age were called up, so a lot of them went. And they were – my father was over military age by then, or I don't know exactly. He didn't – he wasn't called up or he wasn't fit, one or the other. He didn't go. And because military age was different then than what it is now. Anyway, he didn't go and we all stayed together. And – but you weren't allowed to work or anything like that. So, we were then – sort of people were getting impatient, you know what...? So, they were offered jobs illegally, by various people. And the place they found my parents, my mum and Sigi's wife, Fritzi, her name was, [02:16:00] they went as – washing up in a in a café on the main street in Clacton, where the beach was. And it was a sort of a, not a café, rather larger premises, but not huge. It was owned by a family called Lyons, but not The Lyons. They were English people. And they spent all day working there. And they got paid ten shillings every day, for

every day, for working about six or eight hours. And it was quite hard work there, to wash all the cups and saucers, and all this kind of – all day long. And Sigi, he was – he said, ‘I’ll make to the window, dress the window for you to make it attractive.’ And after he spent all day doing the window, he got a packet of cigarettes, which he smoked because he was desperate for cigarettes, as well as my father. And my father spent all his one – two-and-six-pences on buying Woodbine cigarettes for three a packet, you see, so.

So, were you free during the day to wander around by yourself?

Yes, yes. The other thing we had, we were able to go to the cinema free of charge. We had a special sort of pass. We could go and – I think there was two or three cinemas there. And we could go and see films, but not in the evening, only in the afternoon. So very often I went in the cinema. Sometimes I was by myself or with this other boy. And we watched George Formby films, or Gracie Fields. And actually, that's how we learned to speak English, by listening to the films. George Formby, you know, and all this kind of thing with his banjo and all that. [02:18:00] And Gracie Fields. And I’ll tell you something funny, that is really funny, is many, many years later, it must have been about 1970, I went on holiday with my first wife to Capri. And we were walking, there’s some English shops were there as well in one bit. We walked past there, it was a teashop, and who came out of there? Gracie Fields. And I walked – I recognised her immediately and I went up to her. And we told her who we were and we were invited to a swimming pool in her villa. And we spent the afternoon in the villa. I met her husband, Boris. But we weren't allowed to take photographs [laughs].

Interesting.

Isn't that funny?

Yeah.

Gracie Fields, the one with a very high voice [laughs].

Yeah, you watched these movies in Clacton.

So, but anyway, that was it, you see. Then what happened from there, we were bused away from Clacton-on-Sea. Whether it was because of the bombs, I think it had something to do with it. And we went to a place called Dorking. It was a place which was not in the main part of Dorking. It was a country house, which had been – which was standing empty, was a sort of dilapidated place and had a lot of rooms. I don't know who it belonged to. But I think, I'm not sure, it belonged to Vaughn Williams, the composer. [02:20:00] Because occasionally, some ladies would come and sort of, I didn't know how you'd describe – sort of try to make everybody welcome. And a lot of the people who were there with us together, I don't know how many, I would say by now the number in that – staying in that house had grown to maybe, I can't say, 100 or even more. But not with many men. And during that time, there were some Kindertransport children. I didn't know they were there. There was about six or eight, maybe ten. Among them was Erich Reich, he was about four years old. He came with two adults who were not Jewish. They were, I don't know, my father said, 'They must be Communists or something like that', who were wanted by the police or something like that. And they were looking after Erich, because he'd seen his parents shot dead in front of him. And he had lost the ability to speak. That boy could not speak. He was about four or five, I don't know exactly how old.

Because he came on the Warszawa as well.

Yes, but not on the same boat.

Not on the same boat?

No.

Not on your trip then?

No.

He came on the same boat?

Yes, yes. But he was there. He was always some sad, little figure walking about by himself, or these people looking after him, who were not related to him in any way. But they had – because he had nobody, he had nobody bothered about him. He was completely –

He had two brothers.

Yes, but not there. He was by himself. They had nobody bothering anything about him. [02:22:00] He was never – they kept in comp – most of the time company. He couldn't play with anybody else, or any of the other boys or anything like... He was speechless and he was a very sad looking sort of individual. Very – but he was only about four or five.

Yeah. No, it's very timely we speak about him, because he just passed away.

I know that, that's why I mentioned it actually. I often thought I would go to see him, but he might not like to remember. Or maybe he wouldn't remember.

Have you not – you never talked to him about it?

No, I never met him again, no. But I used to see him every day. Once, I tell you, we both got into trouble by – well, was my fault, because we chased a – I chased a cat. You know, I was a bit of a naughty boy in many ways. There was this cat that was in this house, looking after the rats there. And this cat was everywhere. And every time I saw the cat, I chased after the cat. And he and I once joined the – we rushed after the cat. That's one thing that happened. And there are a few other little events that happened.

Maybe you want to speak to his widow. I'm sure she might appreciate it.

Who?

His widow.

Oh, I didn't know he had – I didn't –

Yeah.

Well, I don't know if she wants to mention – remember that, something like that. Do you understand what I mean? It's something very, very sad. That boy was – he was not like a human being anymore. It was like a thing, who moved about, didn't smile, didn't speak, looked around into space.

But what's amazing, that he overcame it, isn't it?

Absolutely. I couldn't – when I first saw his name and so on, what happened, I was amazed. [02:24:00] I often thought of – I would try to contact him but I never did, I must tell you the truth. I do –

But you recognise the name?

Of course, yes. I knew his name.

And how many other children were there, Kindertransport children? You said eight –

There were about – altogether about ten. There was one of them, I remember the name because he became a traveller for a pharmaceutical company. And many years later, he called on me in my business, you see, to sell. And his name was – he was from Hungary. His name was Pártos. That was his surname, I didn't know his first name.

So, in that – in Dorking, there were not only Czechoslovak refugees, there were...?

There were mostly Czechs, but there were others.

Right.

There were a few others. There was some, one or two from Belgium, I know. A couple of girls, I know they were from Belgium.

And by that time, how were your parents? I mean, how did they manage?

Well, they didn't know exactly how to cope with things, you know. We spent in the evening – you know, there were bombing raids already. And in this house, we used to go down to, not to a cellar, sort – well, like a cellar. We all used to spend the nights in the cellar. Once we saw a German had jumped out of a plane. But he was – then he had been – either he was dead or he died coming down in a field not far away. We saw that and a few other sorts of things, odd things. And we heard and talked about, and so on. And we didn't see Sigi at all. He'd gone, I think he was sent to Egypt. He was in the Siege of Tobruk, or something like that. Anyway, we didn't see anything. And she, Fritzzi, was sent to work on a farm as a land worker and do the cooking for the farmer. [02:26:06] And we sometimes went to visit her. And once she got – she didn't like doing that job because it was beneath her, what she would do, probably [laughs]. And once she'd left the pantry door open, where the family rations were there, and the dog had got in the pantry and eaten all the meats [laughs]. I remember, and there was – she was in disgrace, of course. Anyway, that – so that went on in Dorking, we were there for a little while. And then in the group there were, again, I can't tell you the names, unfortunately, I don't remember all the names. There was a young couple who were professional musicians. He was a violinist and she was a pianist. And a very nice couple and they were really fed up with being in this place. And while I was in Dorking, I started school as well. Well, the people who – this couple, they were so sick and tired, because there were other musicians. And in this house, this big house, there was a piano, which they'd – once somebody had tuned. And there was a violin. But there were about ten people there who wanted to play on the piano, and about a dozen people who wanted to play the violin. So, they had to take it in turns. And they would have arguments every time whose turn it was to get the sit there and practice on the instrument. And sometimes, I mean, it was terrible rows and things went on. And this guy who was the violinist, when he – it was his turns get the violin, instead of playing a piece, he would make noises on the violin of animals like a dog barking and cat mewing. [02:28:13] He made the noise on the violin. And that annoyed everybody else, because he was wasting the time on the violin. Anyway, they also collected

the two and sixpences. My father had to cut down on his smoking by then. And they had – this couple had collected their money for, I don't know, a few months it was, I can't tell you how long it was. But one day they vanished. What happened, they couldn't take it being there anymore. It got – they were like – we were like sort of, you had to report to the police once a month and all sorts of other things. They were like sort of prisoners without – in a prison without bars, you know. So, they decided to escape from there, although they couldn't – not allow to work and all this kind of thing. Still – that was still in the thing. What they did, they went outside into Dorking and they saw a Green Line bus. They didn't – I don't think they knew where it was going. They got on this bus. It was a Green Line bus, long distance one and it stopped in Taunton in Somerset. They got off the bus and they walked around Taunton. And on the – when they got – there's a river that runs through the middle of Taunton and a bridge over it. And on that bridge, they were built – was a building, which was a sort of a tea room. And in that tea room, they had musical entertainment. And there was a string quartet of – an amateur string quartet, I might say, playing and they heard it as they walked past.

[02:30:06] So, they were, went inside. And after the string quartet had gone out, they offered their services to the owner. Well, he was a concert violinist and she was a concert pianist. So, they immediately got the job and the other – the quartet was got rid of. And they sent a letter to my father saying they'd arrived in Taunton and they'd got a job playing in this place. And they were getting six pounds a week each, you see. So, my father said, 'I can play the violin.' He had learned, he had actually – could play but he wasn't... [Laughs] He was no soloist, you know. He could play the violin, my mum could play the piano. Anyway, so he said, 'We're going as well. We're not staying here in this terrible place, with all these people shouting and screaming at each other.' All temperamental people, they were. So, they quietly packed, and they had a suitcase and a couple of bags we had, and so on. And they told – I'm not sure if it was that person. I think it was, they told Lady Vaughn Williams, but I'm not sure it was, I'm not sure. I may be mistaken about the name. It may not have been her. But whoever that was, this was a lady on the committee supposed to be looking after the refugees.

For the Czech...?

Yes, refugees there. And she met my parents at the rail – at the bus station, or I'm not sure. I think it was, I'm not sure whether it was a bus station or railway station, whichever it was.

[02:32:00] And she gave my father a ten-shilling note. And my father had – somehow, he'd got, through a newspaper, because he was reading the newspapers to learn English, you see. News Chronicle was his favourite, but he rang [sic] other newspapers as well. And he found he was able to get a job and he got a job as a cleaner in Taunton school in Taunton. So, we all got on the bus and we went down to Taunton. And we stayed in a boarding house for, I think, a week. It was about next door to the police station. And we were living above that in upstairs. And we were there walking around, we didn't know where we were. Nobody could hardly speak the language and all this kind of thing. And Dad found out where he had to go to work. He had to take a bus to get there. And so, he had to find another place for us to live. So that was a bit of a problem. So, the first place he found was in a – on a council estate just on the outskirts. I think it was called the Lydford Estate or something like that, as far as I remember. And there was this horrible family, a husband and wife, and I think there were two or three boys in the family. And somehow, in this tiny council house, they had offered to give us a room which my father had to pay. I think it was ten shillings a week, I don't know, something like that a week, while we were staying there. And rationing had started, we only – had already had the rati – the coupon, rationing coupons. [02:34:05] And Dad went out exploring Taunton, walking around. And he discovered that while – my mother as well went out walking, that while they were out, there couple had gone into the room where they kept their things. And they stole some of the ration, you know, the ration, where you had to pay coupons for tea and sugar, I think, was missing. Because they found a trail of sugar or something in the room. So, my father said, 'We've got to get out of here. Got get away from here. We can't stay here any longer.' So, they went looking, and in the end, they found another place. It was also – it was in a more respectable place, which was in Staplegrove, Taunton. You don't know Taunton? No, never mind. And it was a husband and wife. He was a retired Army soldier and she was an Army wife, who had retired. He had been a Warrant Officer in the Somerset Light Infantry, which was a regiment in – which was based in Taunton. And he was, I think he was the Regimental Sergeant Major. He was – although he wasn't an officer, it was an important sort of thing he had. And he was in touch with the – the barracks of the regiment was in Taunton. It had a name, an Indian name because they were – anyway, he was – he'd fought in the First World War on the Somme. And anyway, he was a Som – oh, and he was a Warrant Officer, and he was on a pen – he'd been retired, he was pensioned off. And my parents, both my mum and dad, he got a job in Taunton School,

which was a place where there were boarders as well. [02:36:02] And my mum got a job as a domestic, somewhere in some restaurant or some – I don't know exactly where. And we were living – well, we were living in this place and I still hadn't had any schooling, you see. So, my father then, he'd got to do something about this, can't go on like this. I couldn't read, I couldn't write, nothing. So, he talked to this lady in the house, she was a very peculiar woman. Very – she was very skinny and peculiar. They were both about – they must have been in their seventies, very peculiar, old people. But no harm in them, you know. And my father then went to a school and they said they would take me, you see. And I had no – I could speak a bit of English because I'd been to see George Formby, you see [laughs] and all this sort of thing.

Yeah.

So, my father went to a school, he was – that he knew, that he was told about, which was on – Taunton had a canal, you know, the Taunton canal, Somerset canal. And it was near, just there. And he went there and they were pleased to take me, you see. But it wasn't what we'd hoped. Well, my father, let's put it like that. I didn't know what was happening to me. Anyway, I went, I was – went to the school. My parents went to their work and I went to the school. And when I got there, they weren't happy with my English and I couldn't – I wasn't trained to write. [02:38:01] I didn't know how to write even ABC, you know. So, I was put in the back of the class. And the teacher came with two balls of knitting wool and some needles. And she showed me how to do some knitting. And she – and so, I spent the whole day trying to do this. I've never got anywhere, I did about this much knitting. And it was just a waste of time and I wasn't happy. I played around as well, because of the things, you know. And anyway, I didn't learn anything. I didn't know what – I didn't take any notice of the lessons. I didn't – I couldn't understand most of it, what was going on. I didn't learn, I didn't benefit at all. And that went on for, I don't know, for – it seemed a lot longer than it perhaps was, but it was for quite a while. And my father started to get anxious about it. You know, it – you know, 'What are you going to do when you're – you're going to be fourteen, you have to go out and get a job or something', you know. So, he didn't know what was going to happen, so he went around to some other schools. And there was another school he discovered just by, I don't know, through this woman or through the – somehow somebody told him. And it was

called North Town Boys' School and I was enrolled in that school. And he'd spoken – my father went to see the headmaster, whose name was Ham, funnily enough. A very English person who went – he went to school on a bicycle and went home on a bicycle. [02:40:01] And he lived on a council estate, but he was a very good – actually, a very good teacher. And I was put in a class. And by then, I must have been coming up to near where you had to sit an examination to go to the next, you know, higher school, you know. I think I had to – you had to be eleven years old. So, I was coming up to that time. And my father actually got to know one or two teachers in that school. He tried to – I'll explain to you how he did that. But he got to know one or two. He was worried about the progress. I was not making any progress. So, he spoke to Mr. Ham and Mr. Ham said, 'If your son comes to me once or twice a week, during the summer holidays, I will coach him to bring him up to date with what's happening in his class now, because he's got to take the examination for the next level of school.' So, I don't know, I think my father- he did voluntary – I don't think he was – it was because, what it was, through that there was another teacher who had questioned my father. And they heard that my father was highly qualified academically. And he was –

And he was cleaning the school?

And yes, you see. And what had happened in the school and – because in the end, I think he gave some lessons in Latin in the school, you see [both laugh].

While cleaning at the same time?

Yes, something like that happened.

Yeah.

But you know, Taunton School is one of these – it was a prestigious place. [02:42:00]

Yes.

Anyway, that didn't last for long. But I was – went to that school and I went there until I was, I think, I was about seventeen. And –

So, you got in?

Pardon?

You got into that school?

I got into that school and I was very lucky. And I did the examination, but I didn't get a scholarship. I was just below the level, because my English grammar was not so good. And I didn't get the scholarship. I would – I don't know, even if I would have been eligible for a scholarship anyway. But I didn't get a scholarship.

Yeah.

My father arranged – he didn't know what to do. So, he asked around and the people in – Sigi contacted him and Sigi made more inquiries. And he said, 'Well, the thing to go into is something to do with textiles.' He said, 'That's where the – you're going to find work and it's booming', and all this kind of thing. And my father did all sorts of things, he introduced me to people who were engineers. And he took me to a place where people made models, and I couldn't, I was useless, completely. I was no good at it, I hated it. And there was a place where they made Batchelors soups. It was invented, you know that soup in a packet, the chicken soup? That was invented by a Czech, Yidel. And he was working in Taunton, the man who'd invented it. And he – I was invited to the place, the factory where they were, and I went all around the factory. The idea was, maybe I would like to get a job there or something. [02:44:01] Well, anyway, I went through sort of, it was a very difficult time for me and I went other ways as well. I made friends with the boys at school.

Yeah, how was the school?

Yes, it was quite friendly, I made friends. I became like one of them, if you know what I mean. But there were some things that weren't quite the same. One was that when they went out in the – you know, we want – all the boys wanted to go to a dance. So there used to be two places in Taunton you could go to a dance. And I went to one and I couldn't dance, of course. So, but I thought I could have a go, you know. I didn't know what I was doing. Anyway, I asked a girl to dance and she said, she wouldn't like – she wouldn't answer. No girl would dance with me. And I didn't take long, because I realised it was because I was a foreigner. Not because I was Jewish. They didn't know what that – I don't think anybody in Taunton even knew anything about that. There were about three Jews in the whole of Taunton, English Jews.

And how many refugees were there?

Nobody else. Only –

Just the two families?

Only – no.

Sigi and –

They were in London.

But they were –

They stayed in London, yeah, they didn't come [laughs]. We were the only ones in the whole of Taunton, you see. And we were – actually, I made a slight mistake in what I told you. Before we'd gone to this lady with the Warrant Officer, we went to another place where we rent – my parents rented a room. It was in a basement and we were living actually below the pavement in a room, terrible place, which we didn't stay for long, before we went to that lady, who – I know what they were called. He was called Warrant Officer Carter, his name was,

and Mrs. Carter. [02:46:04] And she liked to give me breakfast every morning. Not – which was – I thought it was awful. I didn't – couldn't eat it, but I had to force myself to eat it.

Why? What did she give you?

Well, it was – I don't know, it was – I didn't like – I just didn't like it. It was nothing bad, but the- I just didn't like her dealing with it somehow. Anyway, that –

So, you were the only foreigners in Taunton?

In the whole of Taunton, you see. So, what happened was that disaster hit Taunton School. What happened, they had an epidemic from the people drinking the water. What was it called, again, that...?

[FS1] Paratyphoid

[LW] Paratyphoid, and it spread into Taunton. So, the school was closed. All the people who worked there had to go into an isolation hospital, where they had to be – stay in the isolation hospital for at least three months. They all got paid their wages and that, but they were not – they were isolated. They weren't allowed to leave the hospital.

The pupils as well?

Pupils, everybody, including my father. And we had to go, we went to speak to him, we had to speak over the fence. Every – once a week we went and he spoke over the fence, and so on. And while my father was in there, he made friends with two other English people who were also in there. And one of them, there were two people, one was the owner of the, what do you call it? The joke shop, they called it, the joke shop in Taunton. [02:48:00] And the other one was an owner of a stationer's shop. But not – it was more a printer. And his name was Bill Sharp, I can remember his name. So, they made friends with my father. And they found – you know, my father explained to them what had happened to him and they knew he was a lawyer, and he was a qualified doctor, a doctor. By that time, my father learnt – he was

very proud of his degrees, because he had nothing else that could speak for him, you know. So, he took to – my father used to say he was a doctor, not once, but three times. And when he wrote a letter and he signed it, he used to put Dr. Dr. Dr. Josef Wiener, when he signed the letter, you see. Well, I can understand, because he was completely drained, completely demoralised. There's no other way of putting it. He was down to the lowest way he could be. He'd been a partner in his own law firm. He'd been, you know, meeting with – in fact, one of those letters described from another – from one of our friends who my – what my father was like. You know, he had mixed in good company and so on. Do you understand what I mean?

Yes, a terrible loss, loss.

And now, he had come down to the lowest denominator he could, you see. Anyway –

But he managed, his English must have been okay. Otherwise, he could –

He wasn't mentally ill. He was just, well, obviously he would have had – if he'd had some treatment, it would have helped him, but there was no treatment. He didn't acknowledge – he was too intelligent to be – because I think actually, somebody tried that with him. [02:50:00] And he started, he said, 'I know how to do the exercises' and all these things. He said, 'Don't waste my time.' So, he was, you know – and also, once something else funny had happened. I was – in the school I went to, we had a music teacher. I used to have music lessons, which meant we went to a lesson where an old teacher, Mr. Trevett, he was a Cornishman, played the piano and we had to sing madrigals, which I didn't like. So, I started to laugh and behave badly, and got on his nerves. So, he sent me to see the headmaster to get the cane, you see. And I went to see the headmaster. The headmaster was not the regular headmaster, he was an ex-army, Indian army lieutenant colonel, Peel Corbin, he was very snooty guy.

So, was it a private school?

No, no, no.

No

No, no. It was state, yes.

A grammar school or...?

Yes, no, an ordinary school, you see. Yes, oh, I didn't – I did get into a grammar school through this Mr. Ham, I did get in in the end. But this is what happened after, in the grammar school. So, this Peel Corbin, I'd [inaudible]. But he was – he said to me, a very stern sort of individual, he was an idiot really, no other way of describing it. How he got to be a headmaster... It was only temporary, because all these teachers had been called up in the army. And he went to see – came to see my father. And he used to be very – what he used to talk about, this Headmaster, whenever he made a speech he said, 'You have to have *esprit de corps*', he said. And we had a cadet force in school as well, and all this kind of thing.

Anyway, he was very sort of haughty and very proud. It was Lieutenant Colonel Peel Corbin, you had to call him by his real title and name and so on. And he went to see my father.

[02:52:01] And he talked down to my father, who was down at the bottom. But he got a shock, because he discovered my father had three doctorates, you see. And he could also speak – he was pretty – in language, he could speak German and French and he knew Latin [laughs]. He was more educated than the headmaster, you see. And he got extremely – the headmaster got upset and I never – he never spoke to me again, the headmaster [laughs]. So, he felt put down by my father, when he – when they started talking, you see. He had gone there to put my father down, if you know what I mean. But the reverse of that happened. I wasn't there, I don't know exactly what happened. Anyway, so –

I can ask you, as a child in that town where, you know, you were the only foreigners, did you feel embarrassed about your parents? Or did you – I mean –

No, no.

Did you want to fit in? Or did you – how...?

I tried to fit – well, because I made friends with some of the boys.

Yes.

But I never really fitted in, do you see what I mean? Because when I went dancing, I wanted to go dancing with other girls, nobody wanted to dance with me. All girls didn't want to dance with me. So, I didn't know why exactly. I looked at myself in the mirror and things like that, do you understand? Stupid. And I became sort of lonely. I was a teen, coming up to teenage years, you know. And so, all I did was to walk around Taunton. If I met a couple of friends, I said, 'Hello', and that was it and then I went. But in the meantime, while I was at the school, which I left out, I didn't tell you, was that my father made friends with two of the people there.

Yes, you said.

And one of them, his name was Bill Sharp, he questioned my father and so on. And he was very sympathetic, very nice person. And he said, 'How is it that if you're Jewish, that you are only a cleaner in Taunton School?' He said, 'It's not possible. How is it possible?' I said, he said, 'All the Jews I know' he said, 'They own Burton's, Marks and Spencer. That's the only Jews I've ever heard about.' He said, 'I've never heard of a Jew who was a cleaner in a school.' He said, 'This doesn't make sense.' He said, 'Can't you do anything?' He said, 'When you get out, are you going to go back to your job as a cleaner on six pounds a week?' He said, he said, 'Oh'... My father said, 'Oh, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. I can't work as a lawyer. I can't do any – nobody's going to give me a job. I don't speak the language properly. And so, I don't know what to do. I can't do anything. I can't even type a letter, because I never typed anything' and so on. He couldn't do nothing. So, he said, he said, 'Why don't you start...?' The man said to him, 'Why didn't you start a business? Do something, do something. Be clever, start something of your own.' He said, 'Oh', my father said, 'Oh, what can I do? I don't know what...'. You know, and he used to walk around it in the night. 'Oh, what should I do?' And he used, you know, used to open a prayer book and shut the prayer book up, and all this kind of stuff. [02:56:01] Anyway, suddenly he said, 'Oh, do you know? I've got a good idea', he said. 'I'm going to open a stamp shop. He said, 'You know I've got an album of stamps.' He's had that with him. He said, 'I can try to sell

some of my stamps and maybe I can open a stamp shop.' So, the other guy said to him, 'A stamp shop?' He said he doesn't – he said, 'Well, a lot of people collect stamps now. A lot of school boys are interested in stamps. Oh, it maybe you could do – it might be a good idea. There isn't a stamp shop in Taunton, you would be the only one.' He said, 'Actually' he said to him, 'I could find a shop for you, because opposite to me there's a little shop', which sold wool, knitting wool, sort of haberdashery, which was owned by two old ladies. They didn't own the building, they only paid rent to the man next door, who was a fishmonger. He said, 'Maybe you could open there.' He said, 'Also, upstairs is one room and there's also a bathroom. And you could live upstairs and the rent is only thirty shillings a week.' So, my father, he thought about it and suddenly [laughs], suddenly he snapped out of his thing. He said, 'That's a damn good idea.' He said, 'I'm going to open a stamp shop.' So, we moved into that place, the rent was thirty shillings a week. He took some of the pages loose-leaf out and hung them in the window. And he waited. And about – in about a week, about three school boys came in. [02:58:00] And he sold about two stamps for about one shilling and six pence, or something like that [laughs]. So, he said, 'Oy vey, we can't stay here. How am I going to pay the rent? It's thirty shillings and I haven't earned hardly anything, nothing. Oh, what am I going to do? What is going to happen?' And that went on day after day. And then he said – suddenly, he said, 'I've got another idea', he said. Because the people, the two, the violinist and that, they'd already gone.

Yeah.

They'd left. They stayed there and they emigrated to Brazil. And we didn't hear any more from them. So, he had nobody else to talk to as well, you see. So, he didn't know what to do. And at that school, in Taunton School, there was another refugee. He'd met – but he was an Austrian and he'd been a teacher in Austria, in mathematics. And they gave him the same job in Taunton School. Freudenberg, his name was. My father used to call him Professor Freudenberg but he wasn't really a professor, but he was a teacher. Anyway, he said, 'Why don't you open a restaurant or something that you can do? Make a cake or something, or a coffee bar or tea shop. Make a – open a tea shop.' He said, 'There's a market in Taunton, some people will be – want a cup of tea or something like that.' So, my father said, 'It's a very good idea.' He said, in the morning I'll be a stamp shop, and in the afternoon, I'll be a tea

shop.' So, they bought two tables, and some cups and saucers, and chairs. [03:00:03] And my mother arrived at the stamp shop at about twelve o'clock every day. She'd given up her cleaning job and she waited. And they started there, they were going to make cups of tea. And for the first few days, nobody came there. So, Dad said, 'I don't know what I'm going to do. We've got no customers. no nothing.' So, he said, 'I got...', he said, 'I'm going to do something if it kills me.' So, he actually – by then his sister had arrived in New York and he sent a begging letter to his sister. And they sent him \$200 from America. They were also refugees from Antwerp, but they sent him that money. And they said, 'Do something, do something', they said, you know, 'Do...' Encouraged – so, what happened was that just at that time, America entered the war. And after maybe six weeks or something, it was announced the American army was coming, to be coming to the UK. And one of the places they came to was Somerset. And outside of Taunton there was a big camp, it's called Merton Camp. About 80,000 American soldiers arrived. They came in – for one week, the lorries were coming day and night filled with soldiers. All these American Yanks arrived. Nobody had ever seen a Yank before. Some were black and some were white, and all this kind of thing. We never saw any of them then. [03:02:02] And one day, two of them ventured out of the camp and they walked down the road where Dad had his shop. And by then, Dad had written on the door, Czech Cafe, you see. And he wrote – and they walked past and the other – oh, the other thing my father did was in Taunton, everything was like of 1920. It wasn't up to date. Every shop in Taunton had a shopfront, it was painted either black or brown. There was no colour anywhere.

[Phone rings]

One second.

So anyway, so – what was I saying? Two American Yanks walked down the street. And by that time, my father was so anxious to make sure his shop – there was a café in the afternoon. He said, 'The front of the shop looks so – nobody would walk in. How would they know they can get a cup of tea in here?' So, he bought some red paint, bright red paint. And he had never had a paintbrush in his life, in his hand ever. He painted the shop front bright red. So, when you looked down Station Road you saw all these shops, black front, brown front.

There was one shop, a bright red front, you see. And these two Yanks came walking down the street. And they went to – and stood outside the shop and they saw it said Czech Café. So, one said to the other, they must have said, ‘Well, let's try it, see what it's like.’ So, they came in and they went in. And they sat down, they ordered a cup of coffee. And Mum made them a fresh cup of coffee and one tasted the coffee. [03:04:02] And one said to the other one, he said, ‘Gee, we've been here for two weeks. This is the first cup of coffee, real coffee, I've tasted since I've been here’, you see. So, my father by then walked out to where they were drinking. And they said to him, ‘What's your name?’ So, my father told them the name. ‘Oh’, they said, ‘you're Josef?’ One of the other guys said, ‘My name is Josef.’ He said, ‘But I – my family came from Yugoslavia.’ ‘Oh’, so my father said, ‘Oh, what were you, a refugee?’ ‘No’, he said, ‘we came...’ Anyway, his name was Josef, Joe Milisic [ph], his name was. And the other guy, they were all in praise of the coffee. And one said to the other, said, ‘Gee, we must tell the folks at the camp, that this place – we've never seen such a place since we've been here.’ So, the next day, when my parents came to open up the café, there was a queue of about 300 Yanks. They stood outside their shop and up past the fishmonger, and past the next shop. They were standing there. And there were – the MPs from the American army with their clubs were walking up and down, waving their – like this. And they wanted to go in to have a coffee, but they had only about four cups to give them the coffee, you see [both laugh]. Anyway, from that, they learned they had to get more cups and saucers, and a bit more, another couple of tables. And gradually, that became a restaurant.

And what was it called? The Czech...?

It was called The Czech Café. And downstairs became – thing, became the Czech Café. [03:06:00] I don't know how many people it could sit, but it got crowded. So, then they extended the cafe back, because it had – it was one of these buildings where there was sort of something, nothing behind the front of the shop. They extended it back and they put some – they got a carpenter put seats in. And so, they could take more customers. And then, it got even more crowded with – it was only American soldiers in there. All kinds, white ones and black ones. Sometimes it was even raided by the American police, and they hit these guys if they got drunk or misbehaved themselves.

What did the other locals think of it? What did the locals...?

Well, they actually couldn't believe it, what was going on, you see. And of course, there was the market on Saturdays and the weekends. And some of the farmers started to come in. But mostly it was American soldiers. And there was – there seemed to be an endless number of them. And it got so – they said we'd have to move out of the top room. And the top of – the room upstairs and the bathroom, it was changed. And there were tables and chairs and everything put there. And they had, I think, three women, married women, they advertised, who came into work part-time and then they worked full-time. They came and worked on the counter. And then, Dad started to sell cigarettes and used to start to actually cooking. Instead of cakes and coffee, they used to have fish and chips and things like that. And they used to have egg and chips, used to be one and sixpence. He said, 'Oh, Dad' – then my parents started to argue, because he wasn't charging enough for the meals. My mother said, 'It's got to cost more, because we're only making three pence per for each time you give out egg and chips. [03:08:03] You're only making three pounds – three pence profit.' And the eggs, you couldn't get the eggs. You know, there was rationing. So, a woman came in who had a chickens, black market, and he was buying the eggs black market. And the soldiers who were –the Americans in the camp, they went to their equivalent of the NAAFI and they got some other stuff. Coffee powder, stuff to make coffee, beans, coffee and other things that they could – that they were – I didn't know if they took them knowing, you know. And they brought them to my parents, so they had enough supplies.

And did you help in that restaurant? Did you help?

No, I was at school, you see.

So, yeah –

No, oh, well, I did help in one because it got to the point it was really busy. And they were open 'til twelve o'clock at night. They started work at midday and worked 'til twelve o'clock at night. Dad was on the counter, serving and taking the money, so to speak. And they had three girls, four girls came and my mum worked in the kitchen. That was too much work, a

terrible amount of quantities of stuff. And then they had to hire a couple of people to help in the kitchen. And then the fishmonger next door complained, and the one on the other – everybody complaining.

How many years? For how long did they run this?

Well, this went on 'til the end of the war. And it was extremely busy and the Czech Air Force, who were stationed in Yeovil, they learned about us. So, they came, they drove all the way from Yeovil to –

So, for five years, more or less?

Yes, something like that, yes. And they went [laughs] and I had – I came home from school and I had to go in at the back entrance, so I could get my – something to eat. And we had to go home then. [03:10:04] So by then my parents had – my dad had bought a house. I think he'd got – he bought a house from the fishmonger next door. I think it was for two-and-a-half thousand or something like that. He bought a house. Can you imagine? That was what they sold at. Two-and-a-half or 3000 pounds.

But they were – your parents, they decided to stay there? They didn't want to go?

Well, they didn't know anything else to do, how to make a living, did they?

One question, was there any contact with any Jewish community or anything?

Nothing.

Nothing?

No. And they – and that went on, they were very, very busy the whole time. They worked – my parents worked themselves into the ground. My father went around, he had to buy all the

stuff, you know, and you couldn't get it during the wartime and so on. And the American soldiers kept coming from their equivalent of the NAAFI, surreptitiously bringing something.

And Leo, at that time, did they have any contact with their parents or any no respondents?

No, nothing, they didn't know nothing. And that went on, and I used to go in the back door. And then, he bought a machine to peel potatoes because everything was with chips. So, it was my job to work the potato peeling machine. He had this machine. He had two sacks, I don't know, about 100 weight in each sack of potatoes, two sacks a week. And I had to pour some of the potatoes into the top of the machine and turn a tap on, which fed water into the machine. And then, the machine spat out the peeled potatoes. There was a bucket standing at the other side of it. And I would turn the machine on, the water on, everything. **[03:12:00]** And it would spew out the potatoes being cleaned, or the potato peel. And then, I used to carry it into the kitchen, a big bowl. And then after I'd done that, I could then have my tea, so to speak [laughs]. And then, I was given the key to where we lived, to the house. I went and I set at – every evening, I was alone, completely alone in the house. That went on 'til I was about eighteen, seventeen or eighteen. And they were earning – it was quite good money and this sort of thing. And well, there's a lot more to it. But basically, that's what it was. And my father then – it was time, I couldn't get through – I didn't get my higher school certificate completely. I didn't get enough to go into university. So, he had still this thing about the textiles. So, my father took a few days off and he took the train to Bradford.

Where there were –

Where he knew there were other refugees.

Textiles.

And – but he wanted me to study textiles. So, there was a college there and he went to the college. And he went to see the Dean of the college. And he said- I wasn't there when he went but I know what the conversation was. He said, he said, my father said, 'I want my son to study textiles.' So, the Dean says, 'You can't talk about it like that. They're all different

departments.’ He said here in this place half the students were studying textiles. And they were all doing different things, textile design, this and that. [03:14:00] All different aspects of making – from the raw material to the final material. And designing it and print – the whole caboodle. He said, ‘Unless you’re a mill owner’, he said, ‘Even if you do the course, you will never get a job, because it’s only mill owners and people who are in the industry who actually do the work.’ He said, ‘You’ll never find any work.’ So, my father said, ‘Oh’, he said, ‘What shall I do?’ He said, ‘What else have you got here?’ he said. ‘Oh’, he said, the Dean said, ‘Oh, we got all the departments of the university’, he said. And he started going through, architecture, this and that. And engineering and so on, and so on. And when he got to P, pharm – he said, ‘Pharmacy.’ As soon as he said pharmacy, my father said, ‘That’s it, pharmacy. Put him down for pharmacy.’ And I went to Bradford to study pharmacy. And I didn’t have much background of education, you know. I had a few years of – but not – I wasn’t good at maths. I was hopeless at maths.

Why did he think pharmacy would be for you?

Because it was something he said I could do, was running a shop, you see. He thought all you had to do is hand over the stuff and get the money, you see [laughs]. He did – what he knew about pharmacy, you could write on the back of a postage stamp.

But yeah, I was wondering, do you think his background, the family background in running the pubs and things in Czech Republic, do you think it helped them to run this restaurant? I mean, very different but –

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, it did because you see, both of them, their parents had a restaurant in their pubs.

Exactly.

They knew everything about restaurants. In fact, my mother knew – could cook like a chef. What she didn’t know about cooking... And you know the secret to it, people don’t know. I mean, if somebody says, ‘Oh, you’re going to be a chef in the restaurant’, [03:16:00] what –

if you are a cook in a restaurant, you have to – two things are very important. First of all, you have to supply whatever they order quickly, because people are not going to sit for two hours waiting for you to cook the meal. And secondly, when you make – you have to prepare everything in the quantities and in readiness, so that when somebody comes and orders something, in a very short time afterwards, after you've taken the order, you've got to serve the meal. Otherwise, they're not going to sit waiting for a couple of hours, are they? They're going to walk out. But they knew about all –

They knew that, yeah.

They knew how to deal – my mother knew everything. She'd learned from her parents about it, yes.

It was lucky for them that they had this knowledge.

Yes. And my father also knew. He even knew how to make, you know, we had sauerkraut, *zeli* in Czech, it's called.

Sauerkraut, yeah.

Yeah. And gherkins.

Pickled gherkins.

He knew how to do all that. And they did that and he made – and that's why the Czech air force, they had people that came. They drove all the way from Yeovil.

For the gherkins?

For the gherkins and the sauerkraut, and schnitzel and goulash they made for them. And the American soldiers of course, ate goulash as well. And so [laughs].

So, it's really interesting because they kind of moved away from it in a way. But now, because of the circumstances they had to come back to it.

Yeah, that's right. But –

Really interesting.

But then, when I finished my pharmacy, at first, I worked for a short time. I worked for about a year for a wholesaler and manufacturer in Bradford. He had also five or six shops, and he had a factory making tablets and so on. I worked there, but in the wholesale department. It was a horrible job, because it involved packing pharmaceuticals. And when – a lot of – in those days you – there was a lot of powders. [03:18:01] So there were some powders, like magnesium carbonates, I don't know if you know about these. Magnesium trisilicates and so on. If you had to pack them in pound bags, at the end of the day, you would look like a snowman because the powder floats. As you're weighing it, it floats. And I used to come out white all over, and all this kind of thing. Anyway, I put up with it. But I kept contacting my parents back in Taunton. I was in Bradford, I'd stayed in Bradford.

Yes, I wanted to ask you, what was it like to...? I mean, Bradford's quite far from Taunton. The first time away from your parents.

It was a long – it was about an eight-hour journey on a train. Yeah.

Yes, so what was it like for you? I mean, like –

It was not very nice. I stayed in – I was in a boarding house in Bradford near the university. And I had a landlady, Mrs. Perkins. She charged two-pounds-fifty a week for bed and breakfast. And on Sunday, we got a tea in the afternoon, which was two eggs on toast every time, every week. And I stayed, I put up with that for four years, you know [laughs].

And in Bradford then, did you have any contact with other Jewish students? Because there were –

Yes, there I met Jewish students from Leeds.

Yes.

A lot of Jews studied at Bradford from – who came in from Leeds.

So, what was it like for you? Because before, I guess you hadn't met –

Well, they were all completely strange. Their behaviour was very – I was not used all this kind of behaviour. When – the girls were very sort of, you know, Yiddishe girls and [inaudible] all this kind of thing. And the boys were the kind of – Yidden that you get here. Do you understand what I'm saying?

What do you – no, what do you mean by that?

Well, they were different. I'd been for seven or eight years, I'd been brought up in an English grammar school, behaving like an English boy, not like a Jewish boy, do you understand? I didn't know – it's the first time when I was in Bradford, that I went to the synagogue with another [03:20:03] – I met – because that was – what happened, I gradually improved my digs. And I was living in digs in Manningham Lane in Bradford, which is now the crime centre, the prostitutes all marching up and down in Manningham Lane now. But in those days, it was near the park. And I was living in this sort of – it was a sort of a hotel that was going to ruin. And the man had let it to various people of every room and they were paying a weekly rent. And I had a place there. And there was another boy, well, he was a bit – he was two or three years older than me. He was also a – he actually had studied textiles in Bradford. And he already had a job with a textile company in Bradford. And I made friends with him. And he was of German origin, I could speak German, we spoke German. And there were one or two other boys that I knew.

So, you kept your German? You kept –

Somehow, I kept my German easier than my –

Your Czech.

My Czech, yes, because my parents spoke most – more in German than in Czech.

Together? Yeah.

Together. So, I –

But despite – you kept the German somehow.

German, I speak almost like I speak English. But I can't speak hardly any word in Czech.

And so –

You said, so it was the first time you went to synagogue.

Oh, yes. I went to synagogue.

What was that like for you?

Well, it was very strange. I just said there silent for Yom Kippur, for –

Did you recognise anything?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

But you were looking for it somehow?

No, I wasn't actually. I was persuaded by this other boy.

Okay.

But –

So, was it a positive experience? Or you just thought, what am I doing here?

I don't – can't explain really, exactly. What it was, there was also a club for Jewish people in Bradford. [03:22:04] I went there and I saw they had herring there you could eat. I was eating some herring and some matzahs, which are familiar to me. And I spoke to one or two people. But I was not – I didn't know anything about religion. I couldn't read or – Hebrew or anything like that, nothing. So, I didn't know when it was Yom Kippur or anything like that.

But did it feel a bit more familiar than your – Taunton? No?

Not really. I went once or twice to a synagogue. I felt like completely out of place, completely. I didn't belong there somehow. It was – I didn't, can't say. Anyway, what happened, later on, after I'd come – my parents had moved, got rid of the shop. Well, it was – they had a few problems. But Dad bought the building and then he sold the business. And then, he came to London.

When was that, Leo?

It was about 1950, I would say, something like that, '49.

So, they stayed there for ten years?

Yes.

More or less.

And he – they came to London. At first, they had to take a room somewhere in West End Lane and there was a Czech restaurant there.

Yes.

Oh, you – did your family go there?

Yeah, I know it.

In West End Lane?

Yeah.

So, we used to go there. For ten shillings you could get lunch there. At one time –

And was it similar food to what they sold?

Yes, yes, you see. So, but didn't help my parents there. I know Herbert Lom, you used to see him there.

Who? Herbert?

Herbert Lom, the film actor, the famous film actor. And Oscar Homolka, the author, who was seeing another actor, and very few other people. And but it didn't help at all. And my parents didn't know what the – on Earth they were going to do. Again, my father started doubting and oh God, he got himself in that state, you know. [03:24:03] And I didn't – I went, I got a job with Boots. But it was –

Bradford?

No, I had to get a job in London.

Okay.

Because I wanted to get away from Bradford and to be with my parents.

So, you wanted to join your parents?

Yes. So, I had that awful job. It was in Forest Gate. So, I had to travel from West End Lane every day to Forest Gate. Can you imagine? It took about nearly to one-and-a-half hours each way. It was terrible. And I had to – because I had to do one year working in a pharmacy before I could become a pharmacist, registered. So that's how I got the job with Boots, you see. And I had to promise that after I qualified, then I would stay with them for at least a year afterwards. So, I did all that. And then later on, I moved to a job in Marble Arch, the Boots in Marble Arch. And I was already then, a pharmacist.

And were you happy to move to London?

Yes, I wanted to do it all the time, because I thought there were a lot more people like me here and I liked – and one of them was that boy that I knew in Clacton-on-Sea. He had become a violinist. He was a leader of an orchestra- of a ballet company. And I can't remember his second name. But anyway, he was – he had a very good job. But he really wanted to become a soloist, but he never made it somehow. And in the end, it was a major surprise to his parents and I couldn't believe it. Because I loved classical music and he was a, you know, violinist. [03:26:00] He gave up the job as a violinist and he went into the business of fitting kitchens. Yeah, that's the truth of it. He went into that job fitting kitchens. And there was – also at that time, I didn't mention it, there was another Jewish boy in Taunton also, but an English Jewish. He was sent to the same – because originally, I won a scholarship to the grammar school. And in those days, you had to pay to go to the grammar school. But I was lucky, I was the winner of the – through that teacher of the Foundation Scholarship. There was one place and one place only every year, given to a Foundation Scholar- I won the Foundation Scholarship. So, my father didn't have to pay when he was only earning six pounds a week. And I went to that school. And then there was another boy, his name was Bernie. Bernie, I can't remember his second name again. Something like – he had a funny name, a Jewish boy, whose father was an antique dealer, who had two antique shops in London, who was very well off. And he put his son into the grammar school where I was and paid the fee. But this boy, Bernie, was what we called at the time in English, thick.

He never did his homework. He couldn't keep up with the class. He was completely, a complete and utter waste of time. His father had these two shops, he had plenty of money. I was invited sometimes to his house. He had a suit of armour there, the antique dealer had. [03:28:00] And we used to play with the suit of armour and things like that.

So, he was in London when you came to London?

No, no, this was still in Taunton.

Oh, still in Taunton? Okay.

And then later on, I lost – he was – and he was – used to sit doing nothing. You know, he was a complete idiot. And then later on, when I went to a dance hall in Taunton, hoping that a girl would dance with me, this Bernie – what was his second name? I can't remember his second name. Anyway, he was – he learned to play the guitar. And in those days, every – in every dance, they didn't play recordings in those days. They had live bands and I used – went to that. It was in the castle in Taunton. They had the dance on a weekend. I went in there and in there, and then I noticed, who was that sitting in the band playing the guitar? It was the same boy who had been kicked out of the grammar school. Bernie, you see. And he was sitting out there. I said, 'Oh, my God, what are you doing here?' And was playing the guitar in the band. So, and then I didn't see him again. And I'll tell you something even more funny, is many, many years later, oh, he had – he was the kind of person, once seen never forgotten. He wasn't exactly good looking. But he had a sort of a – there was some image about him that you never forgot that face. One day I was driving along in St. John's Wood. I got to the bottom of the road in my car. And I was coming up to the lights, stopped at the lights. And behind me, there was a Rolls and he was hooting and hooting, because I hadn't gone through the lights. I got out of the car to give him a piece of my mind. And who was driving the car? It was that idiot who was kicked out of the school. I said, 'Bernie, what is it you're doing?' [03:30:00] 'Oh', he said, he said, 'Don't you know?' He said, 'I'm in the nightclub business now.' I said, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'Well, all I have to do now is I have several nightclubs. I go around every evening to collect the takings.' [Both laugh]

And that is the truth. I can't remember his second name. But he was a complete idiot at school. But he became – he had one night club, where you had to pay ten shillings to be an annual member. And it was packed out all the time.

Leo, just to come to a slightly more serious topic. What's about the end of the war? And when did your parents find out what happened to their parents?

Well, what happened was this, you see. That one or two people started drifting back. And we also learned about the concentration camp. But we learned there were some – the family survived somehow. And there was – one survivor was a cousin of my mother's. There was one of the daughters of one of the great-uncles. Ruth Huppert, her name was, and she actually was taken into Auschwitz pregnant. And she gave birth in Auschwitz and she murdered the baby. Because Mengele was in there and he was looking to make experiments on newborn babies. How long they could survive without being fed, and all sorts of things like that. So, after two or three days after she had given birth, she killed the baby. But she survived. We call it – we used to call her, her nickname was Rutka, when she was... And we knew her and she went – returned to – when she was in a displace camp, and then she went back to Prague. **[03:32:06]** And she married another survivor as well, Kurtz, Elias, his name was. And they went back to the Ostrava. Oh, this is where I'm coming to, this story. Her father was one of the three boys who owned the butcher's shops. So, she went into one of the butcher's shops and she was also – there was another aunt, who had survived by pretending to be a member of the Christian faith. And had joined a church, survived that way. And together, they went into that shop. And they saw that that shop was being run by somebody who had been a workman in the meat processing plant. And he behaved like he owned the shop. And they said to him, 'What are you doing here?' And he said to them, 'Well, I own this shop.' And he said, 'When Otto was taken to the camp, he made a will. And he left me the business and that's why I'm here running it, and it's my business now.' And then after a few days, they wanted to – they couldn't believe that something like that would have happened. So, they went to see him and he said, 'Well', you know, he admitted that he wasn't all above board. And he said, 'In that case, I'll give the freehold back to the land registry.' And then Rutka, and the man she married, they decided to emigrate to Israel. And they went, they left, left everything as it was. And I've since heard that guy's got a hold of three of those shops.

[03:34:02] I got his name and in fact, I got his details through my lawyers. I got lawyers in in Prague, they investigated. They found out his name, the name of his lady friend who he lived with. And they got a whole thing, I can show you. They call it a protocol, they send me, where they saw the whole – what went on. Apparently, he persuaded the authorities to make reparations to him and give him the business. Although I don't think he actually produced the will. Or he may have produced the will, we don't know, because they haven't found the will. And nobody's seen the will, you see. And nobody's claimed the will against him, you see. But this time, if this goes on with the Sally Sealey and all – because she's done a terrific job –

About the reparations?

Yes.

Yeah, I think that's a –

Then I'm going – I've talked to the – one of the lawyers in that firm, in – that I'm using, who did all that investigation for me. And I said, 'Surely this is completely illegal, what's happened? I don't believe a word of it.' I said, 'I want you to be able to investigate that there was actually a will, which is very unlikely.'

Yeah, I think the property topic is a big topic. It's a big topic for you.

Yeah, I don't want to talk about it.

I think we should just wait a little bit.

Okay.

Let's just come back to the question of the grandparents and what happened to them.

Well, my grand – all the family were more or less, just the entire family, were murdered exactly. My grandfather was the one whose picture is on there. He was very clever, because

he could see what was happening. [03:36:00] And so, what they did, they went into hiding. And a few of the Czechs had the intelligence to do that, but it didn't help all of them. They actually found a place near Brno, where they went in a small – it was a small place where they went into hiding. Their son was with them as well, Jakob was with them. And they were there for a while, but they were betrayed. And it was rather – we don't know exactly how. But the thing was, in the family, the word had spread that they'd gone into hiding. And they had to have – they had to draw money from the bank to survive. So, one of the faithful, so to speak, employees had to go to the bank to draw money from their account, and go to them with the money in cash. And through that person, one or two other family members, contacted them. And the result was other members of the family went to them and into the same hiding place. And somehow, they were betrayed somehow, and a whole lot of the Hupp – the entire Huppert family were taken all at once, more or – I don't know exactly, the exact details.

To where?

And they were taken to Auschwitz and some were taken to Treblinka. But they didn't actually – the ones – my grandparents were taken to – were on the way to Treblinka, because that was so busy doing the murdering that they had a camp on the way to Treblinka. I've got the name, [inaudible], where they stopped. They took the people on the train, you know, on the open coal trains, and crammed them into there. [03:38:06] And then they were offloaded in this place, and put into houses and kept there. And they all their clothes and valuables and everything, they were robbed of them. And they were kept there until Treblinka death organisation had room to get the next lot. And they got – that lasted a little while. But actually, I discovered my grandparents were actually taken from that place only two weeks after they'd actually been taken there. And they died about a month later in Treblinka, we think. But they may have – we don't know exactly, because nobody knows where people died. They may have died, probably I would say, they almost certainly died on the way, because not many people in their sixties survived these sorts of places. So, we don't really know what happened. And my father's mother, she was a widow. She had got from Bohumín, she'd got to Krakow. But she was in the Krakow ghetto. And she, and also a brother of hers, another Josef Kassler, they both died. I don't know if they were together, but they both died

in the ghetto, when the ghetto was eliminated. And the other sisters and their husbands and their children, they all were sent to a concentration camp, which is south of Krakow, which is called Plaszow or something like that.

Plaszow.

Yes, there. And they all perished there. And I know, I've got all the details of them there.

[03:40:00] And I think that's also what's happened of the ones that were in that town, which I can't pronounce.

Chrzanów

Yes. But I don't know exactly. I've got this Jakob Krupinski, his name is. He speaks fluent English and he was actually a tour op – he used to take people around Poland, to show them all the places. He does research and he's doing this for me. And he's trying to do – put those people back on our family tree. I know that they are related. And he found the will of one of my ancestors and things like that.

And Leo, when your parents found out about their parents, how did it – how did they manage?

Well, both of them, devastated. My mother, I mean, she never stopped – well, she never stopped grieving from the day she left Ostrava, to put it bluntly – I think she had an inkling. We knew really what was... So, she never – she was constantly in a state of grief.

And your father?

And hardworking. My father, he was very, very different. He – I don't know how to say. He didn't behave in his normal manner, he became a different person, let's put it like that. I didn't get on with him when he was like that. He didn't care what I did. He knew I'd qualify as a pharmacist. He didn't know I had to do something, you know, it didn't occur to him that I would want to start my own business, or I would go to work for somebody, or this or the

other. Anyway, he didn't know anything about pharmacy. What he knew, he didn't know anything at all and he kept making silly remarks. He said, 'Why don't you go and invent some substance that you could sell or something?' [03:42:03] 'Or do something?' I said, 'What are you talking about?' [Laughs].

So, he couldn't be supportive or...?

No, absolutely useless. But what happened, while they were in that room in West End Lane, there was something that happened, which for a time, saved them for a few more years. They saw an advert in the Jewish Chronicle that a Jewish golf club was looking for people to run their restaurant, and to run – in the club. And it entailed working there for four or five days a week. And also, it included having a flat in the golf club, which they could use the whole time. And there was a contract, but they – and the meals that were served were – the prices were controlled by the committee of the golf club, and so on. And my parents went there, and obviously they knew the business of restaurants and so on. They got taken on. It was actually it was Potters Bar Golf Club. I don't know if you've heard of it.

[Inaudible]

Well, I tell you, I'll tell you. Potters Bar Golf Club was the biggest Jewish golf club in the country. It was a very big golf club. It was very, very expensive to be a member. And there were loads of people who are members there and paid. It had a big social life, they had – once or twice a year they took over the Coliseum theatre and they put on a variety show for charity. [03:44:00]

So did your parents...?

And it was a very big thing.

Did they like...?

My parents? Well, my parents had a job there to work. My mum ran the kitchen and my father ran the bar. And that went on for – until about 1955, something like that, when my parents got too old to carry on that work. And my mum wasn't too well and my father wasn't all that well either. And then my mum became ill, she had got breast cancer. And my father – they retired. And my father was kept down the house in – we bought a house in Willesden Green. And we kept there, I lived in that house and my mother spent most of the time in hospital. She had a very big operation. But then, she was in the Westminster hospital for about eight months, and she passed away. And my father failed completely – he was completely lost. And then he said how in life sometimes, here and there, you get a stroke of good luck comes along. He learned that another refugee, who had been a colleague of his, a law man and a very clever businessman, had survived the war and was living in Frankfurt, where they originally studied.

Yes.

And this guy, his name was Solly Topel. You may not have heard of him.

Solly Topel?

Solly Topel, his name was. During the war, he and his wife escaped to Turkey and they lived it out in Turkey. [03:46:02] And he had the same kind of degrees my father had. And then what he did, he worked for the – this is before the war, he worked for the Skoda company. And he became Ex – he was pre-war Export Manager of the Skoda company. And the Skoda company was not just cars, they also made tanks and military equipment. And he was an expert on all these kinds of things. And he had gone sort of to America, and he knew all the companies and made all these things. And he also got – first of all, he discovered that my father and he were entitled to a pension from the German government. Because having German degrees, they were entitled to claim loss of income as a lawyer in Germany. So, he first – Solly became first pension – he actually sued the German government. He took them to courts and they – it was announced in his favour. He got paid a pension of 12,000 a year.

When was that? When was that?

I don't know the exact date.

In the sixties? Early sixties or early...?

I think he got it a bit earlier. And also, he got back payments to 1945. And my father met up with him and my father learned all the details. He had to be resident in Germany. So, my father moved to Germany, left me in the house in Willesden. He went to Germany. First, he rented a room in Offenbach, then in Frankfurt. [03:48:03] And then, he got the same payment as this guy got, 12,000 a year and back payments to 1945. And he lived – there was a big community of Jewish people in Frankfurt. And all sorts of people who are pensioners of the German government. There were a few 100 of them.

And did he stay in Frankfurt?

He stayed in Frankfurt. The Jewish community there arranged for him to get a flat in Frankfurt, which was subsidised by the German government. And he stayed in this flat. It was on the site where the cemetery had stood. They built a huge building, I don't know how many floors. I don't know, maybe about 300 flats or something like that. And he got one of these flats. And I used to go to Germany, to Frankfurt to stay with him. By then Dad had – my mum had passed away and dad had met a lady, he married again. Not a very pleasant person, but I have no say in the matter, if you know what I mean. Anyway, they got – they lived in this flat.

Where was it? Where in Frankfurt? Where was it?

It was in Röderbergstrasse [Röderbergweg]. It was not in the centre of Frankfurt, it was on the outskirts, a little bit out. But it was on a site of where it had been a cemetery. And when I got there, the first time I got there I was shocked, because there was a police car on each quarter of the – on all sides of the – of this building. And the entire building was full of these refugee, German refugees, who had been given flats by the German government. And my

father got one of the flats and he also got the – his English pension was six pounds a week.
[03:50:05] And suddenly, he couldn't hardly survive on that.

So, for him it was a good thing?

Well, it was – yeah, it was – because now he got 12,000 a year in Frankfurt. And he lived very well in Frankfurt, he had social life there.

He was happy there?

He was very, yeah.

Despite the fact that it was German?

Yes.

Despite?

He managed, he knew – he had a special name for the local Germans.

Yeah? What was it?

Gesindel [rabble, scum]. And all the Jewish refugees used to go in the park in Frankfurt. And they all used to put on as many jewels as they could, to show – to sit with the – showing, so that all the Germans could see who they were, and this sort of thing. And –

Palmengarten? Palmengarten?

I don't know, something like that. And all these places, and I used to go sometimes for a week and stay there. And –

Did he die in Frankfurt, your father?

Yes, he passed away. But he lived 'til much later. He died in 1983.

Okay. Yeah, I think we still have a lot to talk about – but I think we will come to an end maybe for today.

Right.

So, I think this part of it, because I asked about the impact on your parents.

Yeah.

What do you think is the impact of your experience of your emigration and the loss of your grandparents?

On me?

On you.

On me.

And your choices in life.

Completely different, because for me, by the time I'd got – by the time I was out of university, out of Bradford, got my qualifications... And also- I had – I was doing what is locum work. I didn't – I did first have a permanent job with Boots. But they also messed me about a bit. They said, 'Go there and go there' and all this. [03:52:02] So I said, 'Why do I need to do that?' What – I said, 'I'm going to do that kind of work, but for myself.' And I hired myself out as a locum, whereby anybody going on holiday or becoming ill would give me a call. And I will look after their business while they – until they recovered or returned from their holiday. And I worked all year round doing that for a few years. And it was – that was very useful, because what happened was that I learned about shopping, about shops,

where was a good place to have a pharmacy. How some people had no idea how to run shops, but had shops. And other people had successful shops. I learnt all about and I formed my own opinion. But what I didn't tell you was before I started working like that, I had to do my military service. So as soon as I finished it, I got my university qualifications, I got my national service call-up papers. And I had to do two years national service. So, I was called up, I got a telegram to report in Aldershot to the army barracks. Just out of – came out of the blue, you see. And I thought, oh, my God, what's happening? I didn't know. I said, 'Can I pretend I'm not well, not a fit person to be called up?' Nobody – I couldn't get away with it. I went, had to go down there. And I had to – I did two weeks' square bashing just outside Al – have you been to Aldershot?

No.

It's the home of the British Army. Every building, nearly everything is British Army. And that outside there was called – had to do marching up and down for two weeks. Getting up at four o'clock in the morning, running around for a mile and all this kind of thing in army uniform. [03:54:04] It was terrible. And then, I was actually posted to Aldershot, to a medical, Royal Army Medical Corps in the British Army, to Aldershot. And I arrived there. There were not many pharmacies in the same position. Most people first did their military service and then went to university, but I did – preferred it the other way. So, there were only two or three other qualified pharmacists turned up for this, to meet the commanding officer in Aldershot, who was in charge of the main hospital of the British Army. It doesn't exist now, but it was called the Cambridge Hospital in Aldershot. It was the hospital of the Royal Army Medical Corps. It was run by the Royal Army Medical Corps. All the nurses were QARANCs and everything was RAMC. I was called up there and the commanding officer was a brigadier general. He came out and looked at three of us. And he came up to me and he went like this, and he said, 'You are now in charge of the pharmacy of the hospital.' I'd never had a job before. That was my first job I ever had.

So that was a good experience?

Yes. No, I had no experience. I'd never been –

No, but it was a good experience for the future?

So, for two years, I worked in the hospital, which had about, I don't know, fifteen wards and a whole battalion of soldiers were running the hospital, the telephone, the ambulances, the whole caboodle. There were consultants, there were lieutenant colonels, the head of the Royal Army Dental Corps were stationed here. The head of the Royal Army Medical Corps, all those people were there. They were highly qualified doctors and all this kind of thing. I was in charge of the pharmacy. [03:56:02] I had to learn the whole system. And then, when they went on – around the wards, sometimes I went with the lieutenant colonel. But I was promoted. I was one of the few who arrived as a private on day one. And fourteen days later, I was a sergeant and I was paid eight pounds, eighteen-and-six as a sergeant for two years. And I bought myself, with the money I was – both myself a Standard Eight car. So, I was able to drive on a day – weekend off. I was able to drive from Aldershot to Potters Bar with my –

To see you dad?

To – my parents had the flat. [Laughs]

Yeah, I want to hear more about your career. But what I meant with question was not only professionally, obviously, but what emotional impact you think did it have on you? Or, for example, what – to choose pharmacy, do you think if you'd stayed in Czechoslovakia, let's say if the war hadn't happened...?

I don't think I would have been a pharmacist. My father- no, you see, in those days when my father said that, I was at a state – everything my father said, I was always a good, obedient son, you know. I always did what he said. It was only later on that I became very – I didn't – I dislike everything he told me. Everything he said was rubbish. Everything he said was – I said was no good. He said, 'Don't start your own business.' He said, 'Don't work by yourself.' He said, 'If you want to start your own – something with your own, always make sure that you've got two other partners. So, you've got a tri – three people looking after

business and not you, just yourself.' He said, 'Don't do anything. Don't spend any money. Don't save any money, just do...' So I didn't take –

You went your own way. You –

I didn't take the slightest notice. [03:58:01] I just saved money. I worked very long hours to save my money. I didn't save – I carefully saved my money. I worked sometimes twelve hours a day, nine 'til nine in a pharmacy, week after week after week, in the summer. Saved my money. And I was all the time going to different places, looking around what was happening. And I knew where the good places were for opening a business or having a business.

You wanted to open your own business?

Well, that's the only way you could earn above the going rate, you see. And what happened is that I learned there was another man who had a business in Chapel Market. And this man, it was very strange, he had been the chief chemist of Milk of Magnesia, of the company that made Milk of Magnesia, Mr. Broxson. And he owned the building. He didn't want to sell the building, he only wanted to sell the business. And I went there, I ummed and ahed. He wasn't – he was already past retiring age. He really had to retire. He didn't want – he wanted to retire but it didn't want to, and all this kind of thing. And so, I made him an offer. He'd wanted more money, but I reduced his – what he wanted, because I didn't think he had much of a business, really. And he had three girls employed in his shop. And it wasn't – it was not very well run. It was, you know, it was more like a retired old boy running a shop, you see. Anyway, I bought the shop and I changed it completely. First of all, I couldn't take what was going on in the shop. [04:00:00] I got rid of all the – I sacked all the girls that he employed, got rid of them. And also, I refitted the shop. But I didn't refit it just as it was, I knocked out the back wall of the building. And instead of having twenty feet of shop space, I made it go back seventy feet. So, I had a very big shop area, it was really big. It was about eighty feet, from window to the rear of the shop, big. So, I could put a huge amount of stock. Oh, I had to make a big arrangement with my bank, because I didn't have the money to put in all this stock just to fill the shelves. I had to take on a debt of quite a few thousand pounds. You know, the things in a pharmacy are not cheap.

When did you buy the shop?

Pardon?

When did you buy it?

I can't tell you the exact year. It was about, must have been about 1957, something like that.

Right, okay.

And I made a very big success of it. Although there was a lot of problems, because Chapel Market was a crime area. There were criminals working in the market, there was a market in Chapel Market. There was selling – but behind that, there were criminals.

In Islington?

In Islington, who did all kinds of things happening, and you had to be very – it was very dangerous really, in many ways. You had to park your car, you had to watch where you're going and all this kind of thing. But the business, I made a very big successful of. I pulled out the bag, I completely redid it. It looked like a modern Boots does now, right? [04:02:01]
And within the first year I quadrupled his business.

What was the name of the pharmacy, of the business?

Oh, it was called Endo Chemists.

Endo?

Endo, E-n-d-o.

You kept that name?

No, I called it – that was –

You called it Endo?

I called it Endo. He called it by his own name. His name was Ransom.

And why Endo?

Pardon?

Why Endo?

Because there's – that was the name of an American company who were trying to come into Europe, but didn't make it. And if they did want to come to the UK, they would have to buy out the name that I put on my business. That's why I put that name [laughs]. Anyway, that was just a sideline. Anyway, that – this shop when I sold it, I had twelve girls working on the counter. And sometimes I had 1000 customers in a day in Chapel Market, it was really busy. Really, really busy. At Christmas time, you know, it was – I can't tell you. It was extraordinary. I took in, say a month, week, December, as much money in one month what many pharmacies would take in a year, maybe. It was colossal.

From when to when did you run it for?

Well, I ran it for about twelve years – 'til about 19 – mid-1970s. But my wife was – became ill. That's one reason why I was – had to move to – had to look after her. So, I had to give it up, because I had to be there the whole time. And that shop, my success depended on the fact that it was open seven days a week, not just six-and-a-half days or anything like that. Open seven days a week. I had a lot of staff, a lot of stock. I was one of the, I wouldn't say the –not the first, but it was one of the early pharmacies that cut price. **[04:04:06]** So I had things – I sold this funny – I hit back at Boots. Boots were trying to sell – they had a product which they sold to other chemists called Sweetex, you see. And you could buy it from a wholesale,

you didn't have to deal with Boots. So, I bought it from a wholesaler and I sold it at a price which was cheaper than Boots sold in their own shop. And 1% of my turnover was just in that one article. I was selling dozens and dozens every day, because I was selling a cheaper than the Boots down the road. And I then did that with other items. I started – I got doing so much business, I actually had a wholesale account with some makers, like for hair spray and things like that. And some things, because I'd been working for a manufacturing company, I knew how to make things as well. I made some things that I sold –

Like what?

Which I made. Well, I made my own nail varnish remover, I made my own shampoo. I made my own cough mixture, packed it and bottled it with my name on it. That's also I chose the name Endo. My cough mixture was called Endo Cough and Endo Pain for pain.

And where did you produce all this?

In the back of the shop, I had whole building.

In the back of the shop?

Well, also upstairs, it had two floors. And I had one girl packing those all the time.

Amazing.

And there was – and I sold huge quantities. I'll give you an – I can tell you, for example, Heinz – one, you know, you have to cater for the locality. The most – it was all family lived around there. [04:06:02] So the main thing was women and children and that kind of thing. So, one of the big things that chemists, some – chemists didn't sell at Heinz baby food at all. They didn't bother with it. Some did, but they only sold it, you know, it was seven pence for a tiny thing. I went into that. I had a deal with Heinz. I bought 1000 cases every month. Each case was twenty-four tins, I was selling 24,000 cases of Heinz. 24,000 tins of Heinz baby food every month. And there was a – as it was – as the stuff came in, it was sold. Their lorry

came with all the boxes, 1000 boxes. The staff had to stand in line to hand the boxes, just to unload the lorry.

Amazing.

And then, I had one girl, her job, she didn't serve any customers. She just had to keep filling up the shelving where that was located. And then what I did, I sold it less than most other shops sold it. If you – I didn't sell one tin at a time, you had to buy six tins at a price which was lower.

Yeah, it was special offers.

So, it was constant, you see. And then, I had other firms that I made deals with. And then, I had had a coincidence. I discovered, have you heard of Bourjois? Bourjois was a cosmetic company, they produced a big soap. It was about this size, a bath soap and it was wrapped. And it was in three, four colours. And this soap was quite – a lot of people liked it. So, I found out who make – where that soap – they didn't make it themselves. [04:08:02] I discovered where it was made and I contacted the maker. And I asked them to make a special soap, if they would, for me. And they said, 'No, you don't need that.' He said, 'We've got another one soap that we make. We don't sell to Bourgeois. And we want to sell more of it, but we're not selling it. It's made with oatmeal in it, oatmeal soap.' So, I said, 'Send me a couple of boxes and see we'll see what it is.' So, they sent this box, it was also – the soap was about as big as this and it was wrapped. And it had speckles of the oatmeal in the – which was mixed in with the thing. And apparently, this company only employed old – retired old age pensioners or something like that, who wrapped the soap. Anyway, I started doing something that if you come to my shop and you buy something, and you spend more than, I think to start with ten pounds, I'll give you one of those bars of soap for nothing. So instead of buying, in the end, I was selling grosses of that soap, oatmeal soap. And this is how I – this is my – if somebody bought – it wasn't a prescription pharmacy. There were pharmacies around that did prescriptions. But as far as I was concerned, if somebody brought a prescription, he was wasting my time. Because I had other things to do in running the business, than to stop by to make a mixture or something for that –

But you had prescriptions as well?

I did prescription, I did.

But that was –

But it was, you know, I –

Did you employ a...?

Yeah, in the end, I had to employ another pharmacist to do the prescriptions. But because I was too busy, I was all the time ordering more and more stock. And one – another thing which was, which, again, you don't find all these sorts of mentality like I had, [04:10:03] I was bus – a real business mind. That's the only way I can describe myself. I discovered a lot of women in the poor, working-class area, are interested in their hair. They go to the hairdresser, they dye their hair. And so, they like to dye their hair. And also, and funny thing is – a lot of people who are black people, they don't like to be seen to go grey. So black people dye their hair with a black dye. Did you know that? Which they use so that nobody – because in their villages in Africa, once somebody got white hair, grey hair, he was kicked out of the village. So, they dyed their hair black, so they wouldn't be.

So, there was a market for that?

So, I made my own black hair dye, which I called Everites Black Hair Dye, which I used to put – it's very easy to make. I made all that and pack – had a girl packing that and was selling that. And also, I was selling things I had bought wholesale, you see. And then, I packed like, I'll give you an example, like codeine tablets were – in those days, were sold for pain. You can't go into a shop now, but in those days, you could go into a shop and ask for codeine tablets. I had a firm that supplied me with tablets. And I said, 'I don't want white codeine tablets, like they use on the NHS. I want pink ones. When you make for me some tablets of codeine, I want them coloured pink.' So, they supplied me with those in pink and I had them

packed. We packed them ourselves, we packed them, I had a tablet counting machine, into packets of 100. And put them in and it was called Endo Pain. [04:12:00]

And looked nice.

Somebody had a headache, I gave Endo Pain, you see. And then, I did all sorts of things. I even imported a perfume. That was by chance, because my trouble was, I couldn't hardly ever take a holiday away from the shop. But once when I took a holiday, it was coincidence in the south of France, I was sitting in Juan-les-Pins and there was a French man sitting next to me. We just got talking. And I said, 'What do you...?' I said – he was talking about his business, but I didn't know. He said – I said, he said, 'What do you? I said, 'What do you do?' He said, 'I sell perfume.' 'Oh', I said, 'What do you – what make?' 'Oh', he said, 'We have my own make.' 'Oh', I said. So, I said 'What is it – what's it like, you know?' 'Oh', he said, 'It's a wonderful perfume', he said. He said, 'I'll get you a sample.' Next time I saw him, he brought me a sample. And he said, 'If you want, I can supply you.' He said, 'I don't – at the moment I'm not selling any in the UK. I can – but I'm selling it in Germany and South America and so on.' He said, 'If you're interested', he said, 'I can supply you.' So, I said, 'Yes, I'm interested.' He said – but I said, 'You have to teach me, because I know nothing about it.' 'Oh', he said, 'it's very easy.' He said, 'I'll send you the concentrated essence, which you have to dilute. And the diluted thing you put into the bottles. And you pick your own bottle', he said. 'We can supply the bottles and you pick your own label.' Susan, what was it called?

[FS1] What?

[LW] My perfume?

[FS1] Green Fruit.

[LW] Green Fruit, I called it. Fruits Verts. And I sold it seventeen-and-six each bottle. And I told all the staff, I said, 'Every...' They were all girls, no men. [04:14:03] I said, 'Every time you sell one of our bottles of our own perfume, I will give you two shillings and six pence immediate bonus, on top of your salary, straightaway on that day', right? So, I bought

– I had, I don't know a gross of these things. And so, they're all trying to sell this perfume and I sold quite a bit of this perfume. And I'd say it was actually a very nice perfume. But it doesn't exist, you can't get it now anymore.

Okay. Yeah, I think, listen, we have a lot more to come. I think we need to finish for today. And we'll come back and pick it up from here.

Yeah.

And talk about your private life a little bit more.

Yeah.

And also, about the issue of the property.

Yes, there's no – but you know, then after that my sort of private life, there's not a great deal to –

Well –

It was just, I put an awful lot of work into my business, because it was open seven days a week.

Well, it sounds amazing. Innovative.

Yes, it was very hard working.

Sounds – yeah.

And I learned it partly because some of the people in Chapel Market, they were selling different things, clothing and different things. I saw how they were very – how shall I? They were price conscious, how they charged, how they sold, how they got them, the goods that

they sold, and what they did exactly. I learned from them. And then, it got to the point where in the street they were selling some things that pharmacies are allowed to sell without, you know, you don't have to be a pharmacy to – you like hairspray and things like that. They weren't able to sell it anymore, because I was selling cheaper hairspray in my shop than they were selling on the stand. So, all that put them all out of business, you see. [04:16:01] And sometimes, when – there were other things like I had a very big row with Old Spice. I don't think – at one time when that first came out, it was a sensation, Old Spice.

Yeah, yeah.

It was, oh, everybody wanted to wear Old Spice. So, I – obviously, I had Old Spice and then the sales declined. So, to put up their sales every now and then, Old Spice said, 'All our stockist, we'll give – if you buy a gross or spend so much money, we'll give you a 20% discount.' So, I said that – I gave them one order which was enough to fill a lorry, it was a huge amount. It was just before – it was sort of November I gave the order, because I was planning for Christmas. And when it arrived, I priced every – all of the boxes and everything priced at 20% less than the usual price Old Spice is – was sold for. In those days they had a right to fix the price, but I didn't take any notice. They sold it to me at 20% less. I sold it to the public at 20%. So, they said, 'Oh, we're not going to supply you anymore.' I said, 'Never mind, don't worry.' I said, 'I guarantee nobody else within five miles of here will be able to sell a bottle of Old Spice without coming to me first.'

And?

Well, I sold the whole lorry load, you see, of it. [Laughs] That's the kind of – those are the things I did, you see. I was that kind of...

Okay, Leo, I think let's close for today.

Right, okay.

And we will continue.

Okay.

Soon.

You see, a lot of the –

[04:17:54]

[04:18:00] *Today is the 15th of December 2022 and we're continuing an interview with Mr. Leopold Wiener. Leo, we – last week we finished, you were telling us all about your pharmaceutical business.*

Yeah.

So, what I'd like to do today is pick up – if you could tell us a little bit about your private life post-war, what happened to you –

Right.

And where things took you?

Right, well, I didn't actually have much of a private life to start with [laughs]. It was just that I was very keen on increasing my business in any kind of way that I could. And, er, some strange things sort of happened, that I discovered that one could import drugs to this country, provided one comply with certain rules and so forth. And I was looking how I could – that was going into the big business, because a lot of drugs that were supplied to the NHS, they were actually produced abroad, like antibiotics, oxytetracycline came mainly from Poland at that time. And paracetamol came, a lot of it from Denmark and so forth. And that's where, of course, you could be very successful if you were importing something correctly. I – quite by chance, it was through a somebody I knew who was unwell, he was prescribed a drug for a urinal infection. And there was only – in those days, there was only one that was any use at

all, that could be used, and it was quite expensive to – as it was imported from the States. [04:20:08] And there were no– it was just a one substance that really helped anyone. And I learned that there was a company in Israel, that had been able to manufacture the same drug, somehow bypassing the patent. They were able to make this in a different – completely different way to what the American company had made. And it was very, very much cheaper. So, I thought that that would be of interest, if I could get the rights to bring it into this country. And also, there was another thing I did also, is I also learned that there was a shortage of thermometers in the UK. And I learned that the Japanese were the biggest makers of thermometers. And that I knew somebody who was importing some other things from Japan. And I spoke to this – I met this Japanese person and he told me could put me in touch with a Japanese manufacturer of thermometers. Well, that part of it that went out of – that was became useless, because I learned that all thermometers that were imported had to be tested before they were allowed to be sold in this country. And there was a laboratory where these tests were made. The charges that they were going to make for each – testing each thermometer was more than the actual thermometer cost from Japan. [04:22:03] So it became pretty useless to try even think about importing thermometers into the UK, although there was a shortage at that time. But the other thing that interested me was this medicine for treating a urinal infection, do you know, I can't – with all my good memory, I can't remember the chemical name of it now [laughs]. But I discovered there was a firm in Israel that had found a way of manufacturing. In those days, Israel didn't actually have a drug industry. So, that was a very surprising discovery. You know, and I just read about this and I rang the various people in Israel who were – there was a lady I knew who was really relation of mine, who was involved in actually – she was a representative for a drug company for a short time. And she told me the name of this – who this firm was. So, I cont – I sent a message to them and they asked me if I would like to come to visit them. And I booked a flight to Israel and I stayed at the Dan Hotel. And it was an overnight flight. And I met the sales manager, so to speak, of the company at that time. He came to the hotel and he was going to take me to the – where the drug was being made. So, I got – it was very early in the morning. [04:24:05] I got dressed, very – I hardly had any sleep. And he drove me, to my great surprise, to a chemistry pharmacy in Tel Aviv. And well, it may – I can't actually – it was Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, to tell you the – I think it was in Tel Aviv. And as we got out of the car and I looked, I saw it was just a shop. And I thought, that is the manufacturer? 'Oh

no', he said, 'It's – the factory is behind the shop.' So, we walked through the shop and came out the back-end exit. And there were about three or four corrugated huts. And I looked at him and he looked at me as though it was perfectly okay, everything. And we went into one of these corrugated huts and this was the place where this drug was being manufactured. It was very strange, nearly all the people that were actually English speaking. And so, I spoke to them, they explained to me they were – how this was being made. It was made – going to be a lot, lot cheaper than anything that was coming in from America in those days. And I worked out the price had been about a quarter of the price that was being paid for by the NHS. But as I went around this factory, I noticed that it was a – very much a sort of quickly made-up place. [04:26:03] The whole factory was – everything was rusting, the machinery was old, there was no – none of the up to – the people were barely dressed properly for a factory, to be – you know, had to be sterile and all this kind of thing. As I came out after – I didn't bother to go into all the huts. I came to the conclusion that it would be hopeless, because the – in order to import any drug from abroad, it had – the factory would have to be inspected by the NHS inspectors, so – who would decide whether it was suitable as a source of a drug, which they were – wanted to import. So, that was absolutely, completely out the question. The funny thing is that actually, that company, I don't mind telling you, it was a firm called Teva. And they weren't always working under those conditions, because that Teva became one of the largest factories producing medicines in Israel. But it became one of the largest in the world. Teva has got factories all over the world. They – I know for example, they had a factory in Czechoslovakia, which employed about 5000 people. And they also – I also knew that they were increasing supplies of generic medicines worldwide, even to the NHS. [04:28:04] They bought up companies, which were functioning in the UK. And they increased the range of products and so forth. It became a huge company.

But that's much later?

That was much later.

So, let's go back to your Israel stay.

Yes, so –

What else happened there?

What happened was that I was exhausted from that visit. I went – returned to the hotel where I was staying. And there was a beach behind the hotel, Dan Beach, and I took a deck chair and I fell asleep on the deck chair. And I don't know how long it was, I was asleep for a few hours. There were – when I'd sat down, there were just a few people around, but I was woken up. And there was a girl woke me up with a cigarette in her hand, and she asked me if I could give her a light for a cigarette [laughs]. So, I tell you, I looked – took one look at this girl and I was completely – I don't know how to describe it. Let's put it that I was completely stricken. That's the only way I could describe it. I didn't have a lighter, as it happened. But I found – managed to get one from somewhere else to give it to her. And from that moment, I made sure that I left – didn't leave her side for the rest of my stay in Israel. And her name was Ruthi, Ruthi Offner. She could speak quite good English with an Israeli accent, of course. She also spoke Hebrew, and Arabic, and Ladino. [04:30:02] And she seemed quite intelligent and very sort of confident, full of laughter. And she took me on a tour of Tel Aviv, because I'd not been there to see it in that kind of way before. I had been in Israel once before to meet a second cousin I had. But this time, she took me to Jaffa and all those sorts of places. And I asked her out to dinner, obviously. I didn't want to let us go at all. And what happened is that the rest of the three weeks of my stay, I saw her every day. And I made sure before I left the country that – I had to go, I had to return to London, because I was doing a locum pharmacist job for some – for another company and I was – had to be back. So, somehow, we had more or less an understanding as I left the town, as I left the – Israel, and that I was going to return. And that is what happened. And I did return after about two months. And this time, I decided I wouldn't just fly back to Israel, I actually drove back. And I had a new – I had a – bought a new car. It was sort of a Ford – it was a sort of a sports car made by Ford. It's not made anymore. Again, I can't remember the name but it was a sports car. And I decided that I would take the car and a suitable amount of luggage with me to Israel, so I could be with this girl that I had met. [04:32:11] And I put all my clothes in the car and I drove. I had to drive through Europe to Italy, to Brindisi, which took three days. And in Brindisi, I'd arranged to get on a boat, which was a boat from Cyprus. And the boat would take me from Brindisi via

Cyprus, to Haifa, in Israel. And that is what happened. It took three or four days to arrive in Israel.

Haifa.

In Haifa. They were able to take – I arranged for this boat to take my car on board. They could only take three cars and my car was one of them.

And was your intention to stay in Israel?

Yes, I was going to stay there because I had no other – I'd not booked myself for any other work. I was going to spend all my time with this young lady that I'd met. And what happened? Well, first of all, the thing that – first thing that happened to me was when I got onto the boat finally, in Brindisi, they – the car was slightly damaged by the loading. And then when I went to my cabin, I went to the toilet and I got locked in in the toilet on – aboard the boat [laughs]. And I spent about two hours banging on the door, before I was let out. And I had to – the food on board was so bad that it was about as much as I could do as eat bread every day, for three or four days that I was on board the boat. [04:34:12] Anyway, I managed to survive all that and the boat arrived in Haifa. I got off the boat, the car was taken off the boat. And I managed to drive this boat – from the boat, after customs and everything, I drove the car to Tel Aviv and I met up with Ruthi. And the result was that I stayed with her and after a while, I just asked her to marry me. She was a bit doubtful at first, but she was very keen to see out the rest of the world, I think was the – something in her mind. Because in those days, Israel was not the country that it is today. It was a – people were poverty stricken. The things were pretty hard. And a lot of – they thought that, you know, if you get away from there, you might have a far more luxurious life and so forth.

And what did her parents – were they still alive?

Well, her mother – she had lost her father, but she didn't consult her mother. She was so excited at this prospect [laughs] of leaving Israel that we – she arranged the marriage, she arranged the marriage. [04:36:00] And it was done in the – it was – I think it was called the –

I don't know the name of it. The head office of the Rabbinate in Jerusalem. And I went there and to meet up with her, and I didn't know what she'd arranged. I thought there'd be some other people there as well. But first of all, I went in the front entrance and I discovered the front entrance was for divorce [laughs]. And the back entrance was for – to get married. So, I went round the back entrance and she was waiting. And there was only one guest that she'd arrived as a witness. And the rabbi was waiting. And the rabbi took us into a room, where he went through the procedure of the marriage. And I had to sign a marriage bond. And he had to put in this bond how much I would pay the wife if I happen to leave her. And he walked up and down, this rabbi, and he looked at me and he said, I think, 'Oh, you come from London. I think we'd better put 10,000 pounds on this – into this document, you see. So, is that agreeable to you?' So, I nodded, yes, okay. So then after the ceremony was over, he locked us in a little sort of a kiosk place. It was sort of a closed – it was really a cupboard, I think, which was about two-and-a-half feet wide. We could just about squeeze in this. [04:38:01] And we squeezed in there for about five or ten minutes. Because according to the way things were done in those days, was that I was not supposed to have even seen my bride until I'd gone through the marriage ceremony [laughs]. So, that's what – that's how I started my married life. And we went on a short honeymoon in – near Herzliya and then, we had – I had tickets for her to – and for me to go on a boat with my car back to London.

So, you didn't work in Israel?

No, I didn't work anything, no.

So, it wasn't clear then, at that time, that you would come back?

There were a few adventures, funny things. We went out to various places, because I hadn't really seen Israel. And one of the places I went was where – it was a town where they were – was the nuclear research station of the Israeli government. And we went, I can't remember the name of the town. But on the way there, we were met by a group of about, I don't know, fifteen Israelis. They were actually, I think they were Iraqis. And they called us over. And they entertained us with drinks and so on, when they heard that we just got married. And they begged me to stay in this place, because there was no pharmacy there.

Dimona, was it?

[04:40:00] Dimona, that is the name of the place. Exactly, that's where it was. And they said – begged me to stay, because they didn't – there was no pharmacy in Dimona and they needed a pharmacy there. And they even offered us, I could get a house from the Israeli government and all these kinds of things could be arranged and everything. But by then, we were set on going – coming to London, you see. And Ruthi was, of course, very interested in seeing the rest of the world. She had never left Jerusalem before. So, she got very full of excitement. And so, we travelled by boat to England and we had certificates to prove we were married, because she had an Israeli passport. And I had to get permission for her to leave Israel because in those days, Israeli citizens were not allowed just simply to leave the country. You had to get a signed agreement from somebody of importance.

So, which year was it? When did you get married?

It was – which year was it? 1965.

And when you came to London, where did you settle?

Well, I stayed in my parents' – I was – been staying in my parents' house.

But your father wasn't...?

But my father was not there. I was the sole occupier of the house. Yes, it was quite a large house. It actually, it consisted – it had three flats and the other two flats were empty. And we stayed in the downstairs flat, which had been my parents' flat. And that's how we started our married life and...

And how difficult or easy was it for her to settle here in London, coming from Israel?

[04:42:04] Well, it was very, very strange. And she didn't have any clothes, of course, suitable for England. She only had the clothes for an Israeli summer. So, the first thing I did was to take her down to Oxford Street and I showed her all the shops there. She got more and more excited as we went from one place to another. And I said, 'That's where you can buy all your clothes and I'll give you some money.' And I'd already arranged to do some work and I gave her 200 pounds. And I said, "Go into...", I told her how to get to Selfridges and to go to Selfridges and buy some underwear and a few other things. So, it wasn't a clever move on my part, because she had never been in a proper department store in her life. And I went on, had to do my work in a pharmacy. And then, I went back to pick her up from Selfridges. And when I got back to pick her – to meet her, I found – I asked her, 'What have you bought?' And she came out, she said, 'I bought this.' And what had happened, she had bought a wig. She – what had happened, she had gone into the department store. And there was a demonstrator who was selling wigs on the ground floor, blonde wigs. And she was fascinated by this wig and she spent about half of the money that I'd given her to buy this wig.

[04:44:06] And that's all she had bought, you see [laughs]. So, I wasn't very pleased at that. We went straight home and then, I decided that I'd have to take a day off and take her shopping. So, I returned after about a week to Selfridges with her. And I went into the ladies' underwear department. And I bought a six of everything of the underwear. And then, I went to another where they sold clothing and I bought her a skirt and a few other things, and so on. And as they were – as we were in there, the buyer came over and showed us some dresses. And we added to the – spent – bought some more. Spent far more money than I had anticipated. So, I bought two or three more dresses, etc. And then to my surprise, the buyer returned and spoke to me and asked me if the young lady that I was with would like to work as a – in Selfridges as a demonstrator to – as a model to wear the clothes, you see [laughs]. So –

Yeah, and did she?

Well, no, we looked at each other and said, 'Well...', I said, 'That's not the actual idea of coming here.' I said we'd only just got married recently and that we had other plans ahead. So, she never actually – we'd never took her up on the offer of the job. And – but what had happened was, in fact, that she tried on some of the dresses and a crowd of other customers

came to look at her. [04:46:11] And they saw how she looked in these new clothes. And they immediately started to try on the clothes for themselves. And this is why the buyer had come over to make this offer.

And did she ever – did she work in England?

No, no, no, no.

But you had a daughter?

Well, she – it was not long afterwards, she became pregnant and she was due to give birth about a, you know, few months later, obviously. Yeah.

And which year? When was your daughter born?

My daughter was born in 1965 and – no, I beg your pardon, 1966. No, I got married in '65. 1966, my daughter was born in May 1966. And unfortunately, it wasn't – it was not an easy birth. She had to have a caesarean and it was – I don't know exactly what happened. I think it was she was very nervous at what had happened, that she had to have a caesarean. And she had an attack of a – a condition, a mental condition after the – after she'd given birth. So, what happened, she couldn't come home with the baby. [04:48:00] She was taken to a special unit with the baby. And she had to be there for quite a long time, it was about nine months or something like that, while she was being treated, sort of for a nervous breakdown after giving birth. And in the meantime, well, I had to stay at home and leave her there. I had to go and visit her. So, I had to drive every day to – from my house to Shenley, it was located and to this unit, and see her for a few minutes. And a nurse was looking after the baby, and it was a girl. And to see that everything was going well. And gradually, she was going – doing – going through the steps of recovery, with some not very pleasant treatments, by the way. And – but suppose that was what was available in those days. And when I was – got home, I was obviously concerned that her family didn't know any of that what was happening. Well, they didn't even know that I'd got married to her, you see. So, I managed to find, among other things, some addresses and phone numbers. And I eventually got through to send a

message to her mother. And explained to her how – what had happened, on the phone.

[04:50:02] And I had to phone, it was not an ordinary telephone, it was some kind of radio phone that to get through in Jerusalem. And I was very fortunate, the mother spoke fluent English. And she had a very high-pitched voice. And she was also a Sabra, was born in Israel. And – but she understood what I said. What had happened, her mother, Zipporah was her name, she had got – been educated at an English school in Jerusalem. And that's why she could speak very good English. And then, as Ruthi came out, was allowed to come home, first for a few days only and then had to go back, and then eventually, was allowed to come home for a bit longer, her mother offered to come to London to look after her while I was – so I could go about my business. So, that is what happened. And we went to the airport with the baby and my wife went to the airport to wait for her to come out of the – through the – from the airport. And as they came out into the arrivals lounge, I said to Ruthi, I said, 'How would I recognise your mother?' 'Oh', she said, 'You'll definitely recognise her, you will definitely recognise her.' [Laughs] So, I didn't know what to expect exactly. And I was looking at every woman that came – was coming out. And eventually, this lady was coming out. [04:52:04] She was dressed in completely black clothes. And she had very little luggage and she came also looking like she was lost. And Ruthi said, 'That's my mum.' So, we might- went, met her mother. And she had never been away from Jerusalem in her whole life. Not even in another part of Israel, let alone anywhere else. So, this was a – she was very, very unsure of herself. And she had got on the airplane with a bottle of water and a loaf of bread, in case there was nothing to eat and drink on the flight [laughs].

Why was it that you hadn't met her before? I mean, why...?

Well, because – it was partly because Ruthi was afraid to – well, how shall I say? Was embarrassed somehow to disclose her background exactly. Because she was one of those people who, well, her family were quite a large family. She had seven brothers and sisters. But I didn't meet any of them to start with, or her mother, because she was embarrassed to show me how they were sort of poverty-stricken people. They didn't appear to have much going for them, if you know what I mean. And her mother, she arrived dressed like, I didn't know, something you'd see more in a film rather than in reality. She just had this sort of clothing that was sort of hanging on her, if you know... [04:54:06] And her head covered as

well. And anyway, we took her home and I had to make sure that we had food for her, because she was very strict kosher. So, I had to go to take her to a butcher. I couldn't go by myself, I had to go with the – with my in-law to the butcher. And we – I took her to a butcher in Golders Green, a kosher butcher. And she went into this big butcher shop. And she went up to the counter, there was a man standing, sort of middle-aged man and jovial sort of looking. Now, I'd never been in this place before. And she said to the butcher in her high – this very high-pitched voice, with a slight Israeli accent to her voice, she said, 'I want to buy a young chicken.' So, this butcher made a – put a big smile on his face. And he smiled and he said, 'All our chicken are young.' 'Oh', she said, 'That's good.' And he put a chicken in front of her and she looks at it. And then, she put her hand into the chicken and brought something out in a handful. And she told him how old the chicken was [laughs] and the butcher, he couldn't believe what he'd heard. So, that was my first experience of my mother-in-law. [04:56:01] And then, the other thing was, of course, that we couldn't let her walk around in the clothes she arrived. So, we had to take her to various department stores to kit her out for life in London, because she'd come not for just for a week or two. She'd come to stay for a – we didn't know how long she was going to stay.

And how long did she stay for?

And she actually stayed for six months. And so, we took her shopping in the West End and a department store. We took her to a hairdresser to have her hair done. And to bring her into the sort of the way people looked in England, you know, because she'd come from – where she had been was a completely different place somehow.

And what was it like for you? Because you had grown up in quite assimilated circumstances, suddenly to have a kosher thing at home and...

Well, yeah, well, yeah. No, she was – they were kosher. They were ko –

But for you, what was it like for you?

I didn't know anything. Well, I didn't know what it meant really, kosher. I had a rough idea what it was and I had to make sure that everything that we had in the house, all the food was strictly kosher, because mother-in-law, she looked and inspected everything that was bought. And as she knew everything – what to do everything. And she took over the household and she did the cooking. And my bill, household bill dropped by two thirds, because everything that was bought, she made into something else. And she – I bought a chicken, she even made a soup from the legs of the chicken and all sorts of things, that most people would – were going to put in the dustbin. And she made her own noodles and all sorts of things, that I'd never seen anybody make before. [04:58:11] And by then, my daughter was beginning to move around. And she started talking to my daughter, a mixture of Hebrew and English. And that went on for a few months. And then we – the thing was that mother-in-law had a twin sister. Her name was Mindel and they were very, very close. And in fact, what had happened was that Mindel was a single woman, or maybe – I'm not quite sure, she may have been a widow. But she helped Zipporah to bring up her eight children. So, and she was very much missed by Mindel, they were both missing each other. So, she wanted to go back to Israel. And so, we kitted mother-in-law out, we bought her, actually, a whole suitcase of new clothes. And took her to the airport with her hair done and we put – had make-up on her face, my wife had given her and so on. And the whole family were at the airport, I was told, the whole family was there at the airport to meet her. So, she had – there were seven – her seven other children, and their husbands and wives, and any other children. And they were quite a big crowd because she had twenty-eight grandchildren. [05:00:00] And there were these – her children and her – the in-laws, the husbands and wives of the children, of the family. So, when she came through the – into the airport at the arrival, they didn't recognise her [laughs], she looked so different. It took them about half-an-hour before they discovered that it was her, because she looked so different. So, we thought it was a great joke, and so on. And then, from time to time we would ring. She had a telephone in her house, and we would phone to speak to Zipporah and Zipporah would speak to me. She didn't call me, Leo. She called me Leon, because that was the sort of name she thought – I didn't know my Hebrew name. But I guessed it was probably Uri. But I never told – I never said anything. I just didn't know what my Hebrew – and I didn't know much about being Jewish at all, really. But I learned it through what was happening to me, so to speak at home.

Yeah, but you were reminded?

And – but no, my wife was not keen to be religious, either. She'd been brought up to be very religious and she didn't care for that way of – austere way of living.

So, what sort of identity did you want to give your daughter?

Well, she wanted to have the same identity as I did, so to speak. So, she wanted to go out, go to the cinema, or go to a concert. And she could speak English, she wanted to go out, go shopping and so forth.

But you had not much family here, while there was a lot – a big family?

[05:02:01] Yeah, I know she was – so she was alone. She had to find her way but somehow, we – well, I took a lot of time off from work to be with her. And she got to know how to get to the to the West End and go to a store and buy something. How to go to a butcher and buy something and so forth. And how to use a bus and so forth. And gradually, she got acclimatised to the thing. And then, when my daughter was about – started to learn to talk, my wife spoke to her more in Hebrew than she did in English. So, my daughter grew up being able to converse with my wife in Hebrew, as well as in English. And so, and as they got older, they were able to hold conversations. I didn't know what on earth they were talking about. All I knew when my name was mentioned, you know, 'Abba, Abba', then I knew they were talking about me. And I also knew when they were talking about money, they were talking about money, and one or two other things like that. But I didn't really know at all what they were talking about. You know, 'Abba' this and 'Abba' that. And that's how we started our life. And after about, I think it must have been a year or two, I can't remember the exact time space, must have been two or three years. Yeah, it must have been, may have been perhaps even more than three years, three or four years, I decided to start my own business.

[05:04:02] And I – because I'd been doing locum work, traveling all over various parts of London, I had a rough idea the kind of place I wanted to start my business in. And it meant buying an existing business.

Leo, we discussed all this last week.

Yes.

So, we have all that, it's on record.

Right, right.

Because I think what we should do now is really talk about the issue of the buildings in Czechoslovakia and how, for you, that journey started.

Yes. Well, it's – yes. Unfortunately, I had a few more tragic things happen to me. And that was that my wife, unfortunately, was diagnosed as having – as a result of the previous illness she'd had at her birth, that it was a consequence that she had rheumatoid arthritis, which is a terrible illness. It started off very slightly, barely noticeable. She – it seemed she had rheumatism, you know, pains in her arms and legs and her fingers. And it got worse and worse, where she couldn't – she had to rest long hours during the day. The medical treatment was very, very poor.

How old was she when this started?

I don't know, she must have been about – maybe about thirty, maybe, something like that. **[05:06:01]** It may have been longer than – she'd been here quite a while. It really started and it gathered pace. I really lost all thought of time, what – where – how old we were, what time. She just got worse. It started off, she could hardly walk. She used to take my daughter to a kindergarten, and she had to walk to the kindergarten. It wasn't very far away and – but it got to the point where she wasn't able to do it anymore. And she had to stay at home. It got to the point where she couldn't even open the door from one room to the next. Or she couldn't make herself anything to eat at home, while I was at work. She couldn't make a cup of tea or a cup of coffee for herself. I had to hire home helps. And it got to the point where there were – I had to have a home help there the whole time I was away from home, which was sometimes – I was away maybe eight or ten hours in a day working. So, I had to have two

home helps in the day, seven days a week. And it got – it just got very, very bad and that condition also had a very bad effect on her mentally. She deteriorated in a terrible way, she lost weight. She – I just don't want to describe it. [05:08:00] It was a terrible – she went downhill in a terrible way very quickly. But it went on, it seemed to be an age that it went on. And somehow, we were able to carry on, I don't know how she or I got through so many – so much time. When this was going on, my daughter was – had gone from kindergarten to a small, sort of other sort of school, little school nearby. And I had to take her or arrange for her to be taken there. Her mother couldn't take her or to collect her. And it got worse and worse. And it got to the point where she couldn't get up in the morning. She couldn't wash herself, she couldn't clean herself. Her carers had to do everything for her. And her doctor we had, apparently there was hardly any treatment for this condition, except soluble aspirin. And they were large doses of aspirin every day. I think she took about seven or eight aspirin tablets twice a day. And the effect of that had an effect on her liver and things got very bad. I mean, it took – it was over quite a few years. My daughter was growing up and – well, there's all sorts. [05:10:02] I can't tell you how long, it was many years it went on for, until my wife had reached her fiftieth year. And then, it got very, very bad. By that time, my daughter had met – got – met somebody and had got married. She was in her – she had just – I think she was just twenty-one or – I don't know exactly how old my daughter was at that time. She was sort of, you know, very early twenties and...

So, you had a lot of responsibilities, you were a carer, a parent and –

I had to keep a job and at the same time, I had to look after my wife. I had to keep an eye on my daughter. Things – you know, she sort of went a bit her own way. Her husband was sort of – how shall I say? Decided on the style of life they had, and so forth. And what happened, it got to a point where she was hardly eating, she'd become –

She was at home all the time?

She was at home. She became – she lost an enormous amount of weight. And no matter what food we gave her, she couldn't eat it or it caused trouble digesting it, and so forth, because of the continuous amount of aspirin, which was the only thing that helped to reduce her pain.

And it got to a point where she was not able to – we couldn't be left alone. [05:12:02] So I gave up my work. I came home to look after her, but I was in a – I can't describe it. I didn't know how to cope with this situation. I had nobody to help me. Nobody I could ask for advice. I did ring Jewish Care, but they were busy. They – it was – I don't know, they came to have a look and I didn't actually get any help somehow. And then, the doctor who's not far away, the surgery, didn't want to come to visit. So, I had to take her to the doctor and it was a new doctor. But what she knew about rheumatoid arthritis, you could write on the back of a postage stamp. And she had been a patient in the hospital as well. She had gone a few times, because she also had a mental breakdown, because she could – her condition had deteriorated all around. And then, it got to a point where suddenly, it was on a day when a few days later, my daughter came to visit. Suddenly, my daugh – my wife, her skin became yellow. She got a jaundice. I didn't rec – somehow, I didn't recognise the change exactly. Because I'd been conditioned, I was there the whole time, day after day. So, I didn't notice how much that it – how jaundiced she was. But she came, she got very jaundiced and my – it was a day on which my daughter visited. [05:14:01] And my daughter saw her and she got a hold of the doctor on the phone, and screamed at this doctor in a very determined voice. And eventually, the doctor came around and my daughter was still there. And they got – an ambulance was called and she was taken to hospital. And when we got to the hospital, as she was going in, her consultant was sort of at the door, waiting for her to arrive as an urgent case, the consultant said to me, 'I don't know whether she has more than a week to live.' And he was absolutely right. That is what happened. I didn't return from the hospital, I stayed in the hospital. I slept in a room in the hospital near her, near the ward. And I sat with her all day long, into the night, day after day. And then one day, I think I went home to have a good wash and a bath or something, and see that the house was all right. And when I returned, I learned that she had died. It was a great tragedy, she was only fifty-six. She was just a few days from her fifty-seventh birthday. And that was – that's, I mean – there's a lot more to it, I can't describe to you. [05:16:03] It was an absolutely terrible time. We were both shattered with grief, my daughter and myself, it's the only way I can describe it. I was – I kept asking myself what could I have done to stop it? But there was nothing I could have done. I had – the doctor had seen her, a consultant had seen her, they didn't do anything. They didn't change her medicine. They just kept on with the same treatment, that was all they had.

Did she ever go back to Israel in that time?

No, no, no she couldn't be taken out of the house in the end. At – I can't – I just can't describe what we went through. It was so terrible. I had to do all the laundry for her. And she was – there was a lot of laundry, because she couldn't control her urination and all this kind of thing. And I cooked food for her, you know, and she couldn't eat it because it upset her stomach. And it was terrible. She got in a very, very bad way.

And you had no support? I mean your father –

My father –

Did your father come and...?

No, my father was living abroad. He had to stay resident, so he wouldn't have known what to do. He was already in his eighties then, he wouldn't have done anything. So no, there was nobody came to help, the synagogue where I had – they just didn't. I think once somebody came to have a look and there were some also from that – there's an organisation where you, I don't know what they call them. [05:18:12] If you're in terrible trouble, you can phone them. I used to phone them, tell them what happened. And they told me another number to ring, and I rang this and somebody came to look at her. And they came to look and they just really went away again. They didn't have a lot to say and they didn't have a lot to advise. And I think the doctor was – I was very, very angry at this – at the GP. Very, very angry. And I decided that after my wife had passed away, that I would do something about it. I blamed her, that she had done nothing really to help her patient. And that she was in a way responsible for getting as ill as she had, without any help of any kind. And so, later on, it may have been a year or two later, I had contacted an organisation in Brent, which was concerned with – dealt with doctors, complaints against one's GP. And I told them the story, what had happened, and they made a complaint on my behalf. And that didn't amount to much, it just seemed to be a problem in just getting hold of the medical notes, and things like that. And then, I decided I'd go further than that. [05:20:00] I just wouldn't let this – I really started to get angry with this GP. And I decided to go to the General Medical Council and said I had a

case against this doctor, for complete neglect to the pati – negligence of the patient, complete disregard of the condition of the patient. And the patient had probably died as a result of her conduct and had suffered as well, a terrible end, because of the way the doctor had completely ignored her condition, which she did. And by that time, I'd met Susan Perchen, as she was and who had been a pharmacist as well, who'd worked in a hospital, knew a bit about... And we gathered – she helped me gather evidence against this doctor. We went to another – we had to get evidence from another senior doctor, also a GP, who was head of a firm of doctors. And had to explain to him, you know, that – what – the condition that has gradually increased, what it looked like and so on. And that she had become yellow, she'd had –

Hepatitis.

Had the diagnosis. And what he would have done, if a patient of his had suddenly turned yellow, wouldn't she have immediately sent her to the hospital at the very least? And even had done it long before that situation occurred. And –

And what happened to the doctor?

Well, the doctor was then investigated by the authorities.

And...?

Well, it was very strange, because this doctor had – I think it was bro – I'm not sure if it was brother, yes, two brothers who were also doctors. One of whom was a consultant, who put in a good word for her. [05:22:12] And the people, they investigated and there was a hearing, first of all, by the local NHS. I don't know, the Trust or whatever it was. And I was called in evidence and I submitted what evidence I had. The doctor had to give evidence. And for the doctor, I was determined that doctor would pay a heavy price for that. I contacted the Medical Council and I said she should be struck off. She should be brought before the – she should be brought before a hearing. And so, all the evidence was that had been at the first hearing, which had been about an hour or two, when I gave evidence, a doctor gave evidence and

another doctor gave – on my behalf and so forth. That didn't lead to anything. You know, the doctor was just put in the position, she knew that we weren't going to leave it at that, to just get a slap across the wrists for some – treating somebody in that kind of way. And so, it did go to the General Medical Council. But it never came to a hearing, because this relative of the – also, I think he may have been a consultant, I don't know, had spoke to the – made representations on our behalf. And this doctor was – the doctor was thinking of retiring anyway, this is what was... And said she wasn't well herself, or something of that sort. [05:24:10] And they were looking at the evidence, whether to bring it to a hearing, or where she could be struck off, and so on. And they had a meeting about it, which, of course, I wasn't present and nobody representing me was present. They discussed it among themselves in the General Medical Council. I don't know, it's a department that discusses these matters. And they decide that they wouldn't go ahead. And they would just pass various restrictions they gave her. And that she had to spend two years attending a course, during – she was still allowed to practice. But she had to attend a course, where she had to study the illness of rheumatoid arthritis and other similar things, and had to attend. So, and had to keep red – and the main problem with her altogether, was that the medical records of my wife couldn't be found. And they spent – took about eighteen months before the medical records were discovered. And what had happened was that the person who had been examining the medical records, who was appointed by the trust of the area, had taken the medical records and hadn't returned them to the doctor's surgery. [05:26:00] She had put them in her – in a drawer in her office and they were discovered later on. And they showed the – these records were seen by people in the General Medical Council and these records were not properly kept. She had – the doctor had hardly made any entry, even when she'd seen the patient, hardly made any entry when she prescribed anything. And hardly any entry about a patient at all, who was fi – had been fighting for her life. And she was let off.

Leo, I want to ask, you know, whether – how do you think dealing with this grief...? Was it affected by your own earlier experiences of emigration? And you know, do you think that had an impact on this at all?

Well, yes and no. Yes and no, it was just – it just seemed that I was going from one disaster to another disaster. I mean, it wasn't quite like that. Because the first – when I first arrived in

England and so on, I was seven years old. For me, it was an adventure at first. You know, I was on the – went to – was on the beach in Clacton-on-Sea and all this sort of thing. It was sort of fun and games, you know. But it was an adventure, so to speak. And there were several – I was a bit sort of a naughty boy, you know. I did things that I shouldn't have done and always disobeyed people and things like that. And I went to school, I didn't pay too much attention and that sort of thing. I used to stay after school and play in the school background, football with the boys and because I couldn't go home to my parents, because my both my parents were working. [05:28:08] My parents worked. They had started a business and they were working 'till eleven, twelve o'clock at night. I had to go home – when I left school, I had to call in at their business at the back entrance. I'd have my tea and then walk to our house in Taunton, where – which was – there was nobody else there. And I just spent the whole evening by myself, go to bed by myself, and wake up by myself and get dressed. And all this kind of thing all by myself. It was all an unmitigated disaster.

You told us –

And summer – yes. And so, I went from one disaster to – it was more than disaster when Ruthi died and my mum died.

I mean, my question is –

My mum died.

My question is, do you feel, you know, you could have dealt with it differently if you had more support or a bigger family or, you know?

I had no support from anyone, not from my synagogue. They must have known about it. And not from – I didn't have any support from anyone. I was completely alone. I was going from one disaster to a worst disaster. My mum died, then my wife died. I was completely alone. Nobody came to see me or asked me how I was managing. Or if they did come, the odd person, one came from Jewish Care. They came and looked, two ladies, and they went away again, they didn't do anything, and so on.

Okay. Leo, let's just stop for one second. Yes, Leo, we're – so we're talking about synagogues.

Yes. What it was, I was never brought up to be religious. [05:30:00] But we – my parents originally, and I, was a member of the Belsize Square synagogue, which is a continental synagogue. And I'd been – then when my father went abroad and my mum had passed away, I was still a member.

Right.

But – and I'd taken my wife there. But we only went on – it was Yom Kippur and the very – we didn't go regularly. But what happened, one year, which was towards the end of my first wife's life, the synagogue had a problem. They had the – I think it was a Yom Kippur service. It was not held in the synagogue building. It was held in the Odeon Cinema in Swiss Cottage. And they had been so held year after year. And we used to always attend. But in the last year, what had happened was that they didn't have it in that cinema. Something had gone wrong and they switched the service to a place miles away. It was in – I can't remember the name of the place. It was a good –

[FS] Wood Green.

Wood Green.

Yeah.

It was switched to Wood Green. When I got to Wood Green with my – I had to go in a car with my wife, she couldn't walk. It was an ages walk just to get her to the synagogue. And we gave – I gave up. We never actually met made it. We got back to the car and I never attended synagogue again. And we'd already – you had to pay extra for those services. It was about thirty, forty pounds per head you had to pay. And I was running sh – I hadn't worked much because I'd – looking after Ruthi. [05:32:08] I hadn't – I was living on savings. I was

spending money like water here, there and everywhere. And so, I couldn't – I'd spent that money. I said, 'I'm not going to go through that again.' I tried to get to a local synagogue. I became a member there and we did attend once or twice. My daughter came with me for the holidays. It was in Euston.

[FS] Daddy, sweetie, just to say for this...

[LW] Yes?

[FS] You didn't belong for many years to the –

[LW] No, I didn't attend. I belonged all the time, Susan.

[FS] No, but all I'm saying, Dad, is if you're part of a community, because you'd had – you came as a – you were –

[LW] No, I belonged to – a part of it. I'll tell you why. Because I'd moved to attending the synagogue in Euston Square, in Euston. It was – I don't know what it was called. It was where Rabbi...

Hugo Gryn?

Hugo Gryn was, yes. We went there, services were in Eng – I went there, yeah.

West London Synagogue?

Yeah, West – yeah.

West London.

Yeah. I liked it for one respect, it was in English, a lot of it. And Susan was also not educated in Heb – so I thought she could take it. And being a teenager, she'd had to be dragged there

and all this kind of thing. But the point was, that got to the point where I just couldn't attend anymore.

I think, Leo, we get the idea.

I was – although I was a member, I could – I was a completely isolated. They didn't come to find out what had happened to me.

You were not part of a community in that sense?

Not really. I didn't – it was my fault, because I hadn't been attending anything for a long, long time.

That made this situation very difficult?

Yes, you see. So, I was completely... so.

[05:34:00] *Yeah, I think because your daughter's here and she has to leave, I think let's bring her on.*

Yeah.

So, let's just stop for a second. Leo, could you please introduce the person sitting on your left?

Right [laughs]. This is my only daughter. We've had our ups and downs, I'm afraid. It's difficult to say. I suppose it's – we went through a very rough time with my wife passing away. And the other thing was that Susan had met my – her husband, who came – who was a very frum kind of person, very religious. I wouldn't say he was frum exactly, but he observed – was a very observant Jew. And he had a different, completely different lifestyle from what I had. He didn't approve of me and I didn't approve of him, if you know what I mean.

Leo, let's just leave it at this, because I would like to have – Susan's been listening to this interview. And I'd like to just bring you in and have your comment. It must have been obviously, a very difficult situation with your mother. Maybe – do you want to add something?

[FS] Of course, yes. I think growing up in London in the sixties and seventies, my mother was very, very ill. And my father had – he hadn't been really integrated into the London Jewish community. He had a very strong identity and was very proud to be Jewish and Czech. But apart from perhaps a yearly visit to a synagogue, we didn't really feel we belonged. We didn't have a – we didn't really mix with Jewish neighbours or have a community as such. And as my mother's illness progressed and as the years went by, we were basically very, very, very isolated. My father worked very long hours. [05:36:00] And my mother, physically and mentally was almost totally alone. So, things were very, very hard. And when she passed, I think it really hit my father very hard, her loss. But I think, perhaps, looking on it from the position of being a child who also went through a loss as well, I could see the difference when, in my own situation, I lost my husband. And because we were part of a community, I received so much support and care. And as an only child with a very small family, that was colossal, and it was ground-breaking for my children. I remember my father, you were very surprised, Dad, when you came to the shiva for my husband. There was- so many people, people were so kind. They didn't know him. My husband had been ill for a while and it really hit him.

So, he also had a chronic illness?

[FS] Yes, we also had – my mother had rheumatoid arthritis. And mentally, when I was born, she had a psychosis. My mother is from a religious family. And, when you leave Jerusalem, when you're called up, you're called *Aliyah*, when you go down, *Yerida*, to fall. My mother was what's called in Jerusalem, a *Yoredet*, somebody who had left Jerusalem. Her parents had been there, and her great-grandparents, and her great-grandparents. They'd known the Turks and they'd known the British. My mother spoke maybe five or six languages. And so, to come to London was very hard. But she was obviously an adventurer, she was excited to escape, in a way. But when she came here, when I was born, she was again on her own and

my poor father, without any real community. So, they spent many years alone. And I think coming here as a young child, my father hadn't learned how to be part of a Jewish community.

[LW] That's right.

[FS] And what that means. And I think for you, Daddy, although it was very hard, I know I'm sorry, Ian was very frum and it was a different way of living, but because he had been part of a community, and he was part of something called the Chevra Kadisha [Hebrew], they prepare people for their, for their burial – that sounds awful, but it's actually a very special – a very special – a good deed. A very special mitzvah, because you don't get thanks from the dead, but you treat them with dignity, you prepare them for their funeral.

[05:38:02] *And what was his background? Was he British?*

[FS] My husband was very English. He'd also come from a very dif – a very hard, a very difficult home life. He was – but he was very, very private. And he had motor neurone disease, before that, cancer, and before that, meningitis. He'd been really ill, and he developed a form of vascular dementia. So, emotionally, he was not a well person. And I was a lot younger, and I hadn't quite realised. I thought I could help him. When you're young, you're very optimistic, aren't you? So, we were very, very isolated too, but having that community is what picked my children up. I cannot emphasise the – enough, there's no such thing as a perfect world, but if people relate to people and see people, you saw the warmth and the care, and they never let us ever sit alone. And for my sons, who had never been out, to be invited out for a Friday night, to go to a table and hear voices and see people ... I remember when you came, Daddy, for the stone setting and you sat in my house, I'd never seen so many people in my house, full. They brought food and it wasn't the food, it was the human warmth and interest.

Where was this? Which community?

[FS] It's Kinloss, it was Kinloss.

Kinloss.

[FS] And Daddy was – I remember you used to come with Susan. You used to laugh, you used to open the fridge and say, ‘How much food can they bring you?’ But it wasn’t the food. Anyone, if you’re lucky, you’ve got enough money, you can buy food. It was the thought that somebody had taken the time to prepare something for my boys.

[LW] She got an enormous amount of support.

[FS] And I contrasted that with how you – we were alone when Mummy died. And Mummy’s illness was silent. I couldn’t tell people about Ian’s illness, because he was very upset to have motor neuron disease. And he didn’t want it known, he was a fiercely private man. So, we didn’t get any help when he was alive. And that was very – but I would have to respect that, it was his decision. But for the children, now who are young men who had a decade-plus of this, to have the warmth of a community. And maybe because we weren’t used to it, it meant even more. It was like someone throwing you a warm coat in the cold. And you saw that –

[LW] They were brought up, I’d say, to be fairly religious, observant. [05:40:05] And they had – they went to Jewish schools. I didn’t go to a Jewish school.

And did you find that difficult to accept?

[LW] No, I thought – no, on the contrary. For a long time, when they were – as they were very small, I used to go every Thursday afternoon to fetch them from school and take them home, all three of them. And I thought it was great, what was happening to them. They were – they mixed in with all the Jewish children and everything. Everything was very, very nice in that respect. It’s not that so much. What happened was that ...

Be careful because this is a public recording.

I had to – yes, I was going to say –

So, don't regret what you're going to say, please [laughs].

I came from a completely different background and with completely different experiences, much more serious than anything that my son-in-law had ever known. Or his mo – or his family or my daughter. And so, they didn't understand me too well. So, I didn't approve of my son-in-law exactly. And, you know, my oldest grandson spent two years in a yeshiva in Israel. And I thought, oh, God, I didn't know even know what a yeshiva was, you know, and-

Yes, very different culture. Very different culturally.

Completely different. They were all – they knew more, they could read and daven, like rabbis and they were very brought up –

But Leo, your grandson, I think, spent some time with you going through your things and helping you scanning and faxing. And maybe let's talk now, because he was very involved in that, in this issue of compensation. And maybe I just want your daughter to introduce it and tell us a little bit about this compensation issue. What – you know, and how important it was in the family and your son helping your dad.

[05:42:09] [FS] Yes, yes, yes. We've always known about it. It's something that has – to be honest, it's tormented my father for many, many years. So, it was inevitable that the boys would find out about it. But in more recent years, my father was collecting information and wanted help scanning and talk – and also just to talk about it, to unburden himself, and with a new, fresh set of ears. And also, I suppose, with a new attitude, he was able to talk to the boys about it. And I think even the fact that they actually were in such religious circles, it meant they were very, very patient. I'm not saying if you're not religious, you're not patient.

[LW] They listened, they listened. They took it in.

[FS] But they were prepared. They're used – but very used to listening to people, very used to being with older people, very used to a historical dimension to their identity. And so, when my father was talking about it, it really, really clicked with them, in a way that it resonated with them in a very different way that it resonated with me, because my mother had been so ill. We'd had all these dramas, my husband... My father's trauma, I felt it. But there was so much going on just coping day-by-day, I couldn't always go back seventy years. But for the boys, this was something they understood. They'd been to visit the camps, they understood their history. And they understood that Saba's [ph] trauma wasn't over. They even said, 'Well, maybe Mummy, it's coming through to us', because they'd seen it, the anxiety. And I have to say this, it's really, I think, important, Daddy, when Mummy died, you were frightened of being alone. You have a huge fear of being alone.

[LW] Yes, that's right.

[FS] I can't express that – and this thing about compensation, it's not about a tangible financial thing. It's just a recognition of somebody who has been – had literally the ground broken up and swept from under his feet.

[LW] That's right.

[FS] Has had his sense of belonging and identity robbed. And my father has a huge, huge fear of being alone. And when he married my mother and she became ill, and then she passed away, it was terrifying for him to be alone. **[05:44:00]** I was very lucky, my stepmother came along very promptly and they had lovely marriage, thank God. But he has a fear, to this day of ninety, if my stepmother goes out, he will phone because he cannot be alone for a second. And that fear of loneliness, when you show the boys your history, and you talk about what you lost, the people, the places, the hard work that went into getting those homes that were then stolen, and the lives that were robbed, it's all from that fear.

[LW] It was impossible. I'll tell you what it was, it's quite right what she says. But I'll tell you something, is Susan was brought up in England. She didn't really know anything about any of these things. She'd maybe read about it. That's not the same thing as going through it.

It was impossible to convey to anybody I spoke to. And my daughter and my wife as well, they didn't understand. They didn't understand who we were. They didn't understand what we were, who we were, and what had happened. And how we had borne quite a brunt of what had taken place. And there's nothing on – equal on earth to that at all. It just – you just can't understand.

What do you mean, Leo? The loss of...? Just tell us, what do you mean by that?

Well, if you tried to explain to somebody what had happened to you, they would just sit and they would listen politely maybe sometimes. Or they would dismiss it like it was nothing. All kinds of different people I'd spoken to in the past, because I was all the time looking, shall we say to explain myself, my existence somehow? But it was impossible to explain it to anybody, you see, because it didn't – there was things about us, if you really knew who we were, we were quite different. **[05:46:10]** We were something – we were people to contend with. So, people have said –

And who do you mean by we? Who is we?

My family. We were people of some importance. You know, we had made a big contribution to our society. A big contribution. And suddenly, we've come to – we went through the depths of what you could have, it's the only way I can describe it. You can't describe, you can't explain to somebody who'd lost their – you know, like you've got no relatives. You've got no uncle, no cousins, no nothing, no nothing. And even today, I had a – it's very funny. I had a funny incident that happened just a few weeks, months, about two months ago. I had been doing for the last few years, I've been doing my family tree. I discovered a lot of things I didn't know, also because I came from a huge family. One of my great-grandfathers had thirteen children. And my great-grandmother, her name was Emily Wurzel, she had three brothers. All four of them, when they got married, they produced ten children each. And all that generation produced another huge number of children. In fact, there's one branch of my family, they're called – their surname was Wurzel. Anybody who came from Moravia, or even perhaps part of Galicia, southern – south – part of Galicia, who had the name of Wurzel, was a relative of mine. **[05:48:03]** There were so many of them. And they were – and the

other thing about them was, a lot of them were very successful in all kinds of ways. Like the Wurzel family, they produced about fifteen doctors of medicine, some of them eminent. Got to know – for example, one of them passed away about two or three years ago. His name was Richard Wurzel. Richard Wurzel was a consultant specialist in paediatrics. He organised in Ostrava in 1986, the first international conference on infectious disease. Another cousin of his, Pavel Wurzel, was one of the leading cancer specialists in the whole of Czechoslovakia. So –

Yeah, so they were an eminent family?

Very eminent. And they were also eminent in business, because another branch of the family, the Hupperts, were very good at business. They had a chain – three of my great-uncles, starting with one grocery shop, which they converted to a butcher shop. Had a chain of ten butcher shops and also, a factory, which employed fifty or sixty people processing meat. They supplied half of the town of Ostrava with meat. They were very wealthy, they became – and even today, there are people like that in my family.

But Leo, your daughter just said you have a fear of being alone. Would you agree with that?

Yes, I would say – not – well, it's interpreted by Susan as a fear. It's like a feeling of being completely failed. **[05:50:04]** Failed, perhaps, or unable to hit the success that I was looking for.

[FS] No, Daddy, I think it's not.

[LW] Or perhaps that's not right.

[FS] No, it's nothing to do – I'm sorry to interrupt.

[LW] No, maybe not, not.

[FS] Nothing to do with success, and no offense to the eminence and the business sense, all the best to them all. Forget all that. It's a human need to belong.

[LW] Yes, that's right.

[FS] And you feel not – you don't feel a failure, you feel abandoned.

[LW] Abandoned, that's it.

[FS] It's nothing to do with failure. Forget the money, forget the degrees.

[LW] It's the right word.

[FS] I'm sorry, it's all rubbish. It's –

Abandoned.

[LW] That's it.

[FS] Abandoned, abandoned.

Abandoned by –

[LW] Abandoned. I was abandoned by every – I was even abandoned by people who are related to me, some of them. Yeah.

[FS] No, but what I'm saying, Daddy, that because of what happened to you and to anybody who's been displaced, and literally thrown out ... One minute, you're in a lap and you speak about how used to have such a big house with so many people. It's not the house. It's the people, it's the life, it's been wanted. Holding your grandpa's cold hands. That's what you've lost.

[LW] That's right.

[FS] So you – it's not about the success, Sweetie, it's about being abandoned. Because when you're alone, I hear it in your voice, very together, strong person, very strong ...

[LW] I still feel like that.

[FS] It's like a baby.

[LW] I still feel like that. I'll tell you what it is. We were an old Jewish-Czech family. We weren't the people who came – the ultra-religious who came from the synagogue in Prague, you know, not that kind. We were the kind of Jews who moved to what was Czechoslovakia, from Galicia and Hungary and places like that. And we, through enterprise and long hours of hard work, they worked like people that nobody works today, in this kind of way. My grandfather worked twelve hours a day, it was nothing to him, you know. [05:52:00] He had – didn't have an education. Oh, so he taught himself to read and write. You know, he learned everything he had to and he became the boss. He was a nobody, he was an orphan. He had nothing, but he made himself – and he – everybody around where he lived, they knew who he was. Oh, they were somebody of importance. And all – and I still have people in my family who are important. Some of them, they're not – they didn't come to England as refugees, they went to other places. And I can – if I describe to you, you would be surprised what the – some of my – you know, one of my second cousins is a judge in the United States.

But Leo, what you want to say is the impact of this is very much still felt – you feel it today?

I was completely lost.

So, what I want to ask both of you, how this impacted on your lives. Also on you, Susan, the impact of this history.

[FS] I think it's a very heavy, heavy impact. I know for my father, he's going to feel different to me.

[LW] Yes.

[FS] Obviously, I had different things to contend with. So, I wasn't thinking about what was happening in Ostrava in the thirties, because I had a mother who was very, very ill. And then, I had a husband who was very, very ill. So, you know, you don't look – but I'm being very honest, the impact long-term, I can see on myself and on my children, is that my father who is, on one hand, a very intelligent, together, strong person, is also very vulnerable, very weak, very needy, because a sense of belonging has been denied. I don't say it lightly, it burns through me. I feel really strongly about it, that the biggest thing a person can have, is not a family, sometimes people don't have families, but a community. A sense of belonging, knowing there's someone who thinks about you, that you're worth something, that you're a human being. And I think my father has had that robbed from him. His whole life he's felt like he's been blanked.

[LW] That's right.

[FS] And they say *lashon hara* [Hebrew], to talk evil about somebody, the worst *lashon hara*, the worst bad things you can say about somebody is nothing, because you're treating them as if they're dead. [05:54:06] And my father has had that. And that goes back to having been thrown out and being placed – there wasn't – they weren't able to plan where they put people, where they settled and where they were raised. So, my father was in the middle of nowhere, in a lovely place, Taunton, it's a great place. But for somebody like that, with such a different view of the world, and it's never left him. And that I've been raised in.

[LW] That's right.

[FS] And I have to say, I'm embarrassed to say, the things you do sometimes... I get hysterically anxious, have I locked the door? Have I left the soup on? Have I done this? I know a lot of people do, but not from a very early age. Running back to check if everything's okay. Running back, I have a fear of not having seen things through because my father has that fear. A fear of one day being completely – I also get frightened about being abandoned.

It's a terror, it's a fear. There's no one, no one will help you. No one will look at you, you're dead to the world. And it's a really strong fear and I think my father has had that since a young man.

[LW] Yeah.

[FS] I have it a little bit and I think my sons do, because I am middle of the road religious. My sons are more than me, especially my eldest. They want to belong. They want to feel their place in the world.

[LW] Yeah. It's all – it's quite right.

Thank you.

[LW] It's difficult to – you see, I'd still put it another way. When I was a small boy, I lived in the lap of luxury. I had – I was – you name it, I got it. I had everything. I was surrounded by loads of people who made a big fuss for me. And I had everything you could possibly want or need, right? And suddenly, I lost everything, right? And I was so down to the point where my father couldn't – he didn't know how to earn anything, a living even. He didn't know what to do. One minute – the same thing happened to my father, really. [05:56:00] He was – one minute, he was a partner in a large law office. He had people working for him. He had – he mixed with the top society in Ostrava, he moved in luxury. There was nothing he couldn't afford, that he wanted. And he lived like a, you know, he lived like a well-off man, person. And a contented person, you understand? Suddenly, in one stroke, in a matter of hours, everything was gone. And we got to a point where you're wondering if you're going to have something to eat the next day. This is how it was. Whether you have any clothes to wear the next day, whether you had a pair of shoes to put on your feet or –

And that stayed with you? That stayed with you, that feeling?

Yes. And not only that, but you see, it's also social. I've learned when I meet people, I do it with everybody, I don't have to think about it, I think of my – I've got a super sense of

deciding what kind of person I'm talking to. What kind of person they are, who they – what kind is their background, what kind of – how they look at me and how they approach, what they think of me. I can see from their faces, they look at me, I decide in my own mind, what they – and I don't say I'm right every time. But I'm right a lot of the time. Do you understand what I mean? I'm always suspicious about everybody I meet. But I don't let on. I'm nice and polite to everybody. I don't do anything wrong. I don't owe anybody anything. I don't steal from anybody. I don't pull tricks on anybody, nothing of that sort. You know, but I'm always aware that people do that to me. And they do.

You feel judged?

They have, it's happened time and again and again, this has happened, you know. All kinds of things. [05:58:01] I could tell you, so you just won't... You know, I've known – put it like this, in English in the London English society, you know, I've known some of the very top people, you know. And I've also known them years later, they walked past me, they didn't know I existed. Well, did they recognise me? Well, maybe some did, some didn't. I think most of them did recognise me, but they just didn't want to let on they knew me or something of that sort. You know, I know how to react to those kind of happenings, you see.

Leo, just – your daughter has to go. Just to finish...

Yeah.

You talked about this belonging. So again, both of you, do you have a sense of belonging now today? Do you feel you belong somewhere?

[FS] I feel very, very strongly I belong, because I need to feel that. I don't want to let it go. I've cultivated it. I don't think it's natural, because the way unfortunately, that – what my father went through and the home that we created, there was a lot of love. But there was a lot of isolation and intense loneliness. I think my mother's physical illness was nothing compared to her mental illness, which was compounded by loneliness and isolation. And to have my father to see that with his wife and being unable to help her, he didn't have the

ability to think, maybe let's join the local community. Maybe let's get active, because it wasn't something he could instinctively turn to. So now at this old age, yes.

[LW] No, it wouldn't have –

[FS] I think it – I think very, very strongly –

[LW] Yes, my – I just felt, you see, in fact, I still have that feeling to some extent, my local community, they might – some of them, even if they're sympathetic, they actually – they don't understand anything where I come from.

[FS] I'm sorry, but –

[LW] I don't actually – I'll tell you something. I'm not really – I can behave like – because I mixed with – in Taunton, I mixed with all non-Jewish people. [06:00:02] I know everything about non-Jewish people, because I mixed with him. I was friendly with them, I was friendly to them. But never mind, at the bottom of it all, I am still an outsider.

You're still an outsider?

That's right. I was – I felt an outsider, they chose and they regarded me as an outsider. There was nothing –

They?

They were still the same.

[FS] But also, he's an outsider in the Jewish community.

[LW] It's still the same. And also, I am an outsider of the – unless there's somebody had exactly the same kind of background as me, which I don't think, I've only met a few people

like that, very seldom. Most of them don't have any – haven't got an inkling of how I feel.
Do you understand what I mean?

Yeah, it's a feeling.

It's a feeling.

[FS] It is a feeling.

[LW] It's a feeling. Look, I – put it, you know, I'd say it's –

I understand.

[LW] I've got a photo I'll show you of my grandfather. He always wore a bowler hat in his business, you see. And that was his signature, you see. He was the boss. When he said something, it mattered. And he – everybody who he spoke to, they didn't regard him as a horrible boss. They all loved him.

I understand.

He was very, very popular everywhere he went, he was well known. Nobody talked about him or pointed a finger at him and –

And that was natural? And you feel you don't have that natural authority or is it...?

Yeah, well, in my own business, I did have for a short – very short time. I don't say anybody loved me, because I was very – I was a bit more frum.

[FS] [Laughs]

[LW] I didn't make so many allowances on people. But the point was that I behaved – I've got the same kind of DNA in my system, let's put it like that, you see.

Okay.

I'm always – how shall I say? I'm always looking for some way to, not exactly to retrieve my sort of situation, which I think it might or should have been, if things hadn't happened to me.

[06:02:13] I'm always looking for improving myself in all kinds of ways, to make up for my losses, if you know what I mean. It's not – it's something like I'm weighing up what things have gone against me, situ – life, fate, whatever you like to call it, has gone against me against what I'm hoping to get on this – as a resp – in response to what has happened.

Okay. Your daughter has to go. Just the very last question is, do you have a – what would you wish for your father? What would you tell him and vice versa, in regards to...?

[FS] What would I give you advice...? You are loved. You do belong. You have a family that loves you. But not only that, Daddy, you don't realise something. You go into a room of people, doesn't matter if they're Jewish or not Jewish, where they come from, you'd be amazed how many people – it's not the same story. It's not the same story, but they've been pushed out, they've been hurt. They've been abandoned, they have those feelings.

[LW] Yeah, maybe.

[FS] You speak to anybody who's had to run away for their lives...

[LW] Yeah, maybe.

[FS] And the people they've lost, the memories they've lost, the buildings, the cuddles, the hugs, the love, the emotions, everything. You see – I've seen it, because I don't think it's an accident that the people, I'm closest to as friends, a lot of them have that background. A lot of them are people who fled and it's irrelevant where their roots are. It's a feeling, it sounds crazy, of displacement. And the whole thing, why this thing, my father's made his life history about the compensation is, it's not just the physical compensation, it's mentally, he's trying to compensate for what was taken from him.

[LW] Yeah, yeah, that's right. That's right. But do you see, what is...?

Leo, because –

[LW] Yes.

[FS] I've got go, Daddy.

One second, one second. Have you got something to say to your daughter?

[06:04:00] [LW] Well, just one last word is that, yes, I believe what you say. But the fact is, nevertheless, nevertheless, you'd be very hard to find somebody who came from anything like the background that I came from originally. You will be very hard to find someone. You might find some very important people and very successful people. But in spite of whatever you say, you would be very hard... Because I tell you, even today, even today, of people who are a part of my family, right? But unfortunately, we've been spread all over the earth. We're all over the place. There are few survivors of my family. Each and every one, except me, funnily enough, has been enormously successful. So how shall I say to you? There are - in my family today, I would say there are about six people who earn more than a million pounds a year. There are several who earn more than a billion pounds a year, still.

[FS] But are they loved?

[LW] Well, I don't know. I've spoke – they've been here and they've spoken to them. Some of them like me, some of them don't.

[FS] But are they loved by their family? Do they have people they can count on?

[LW] I've no idea, I've never asked that question.

[FS] That's worth more.

[LW] I've never asked that question of them.

Okay, I think, Leo, your daughter has to go. [Inaudible 06:05:30]

[LW] [Laughs] All right, dear.

I just wanted to say thank you, Susan, for joining us.

[FS] Thank you.

*And thank you, Leo, for having this little conversation. We will continue now the interview.
Thank you so much.*

[FS] Thank you. Thank you very much.

[LW] Right.

[MS1] Who is in the picture?

[LW] That photo is of my great-grandfather. My – he was my maternal great-grandfather.
His name was Abraham Heinrich Huppert. [06:06:03]

[MS1] And where and when was it taken?

[LW] That was taken during the First World War.

[MS1] Do you know where?

[LW] No, I don't know. It –

[MS1] Yes, please. Who is this?

[LW] This photograph is my great-grandmother, maternal grand – on the maternal side. She was the first wife of Abraham Huppert and the picture was taken somewhere in Ostrava, I would say, when she would probably be about her late twenties, or something like that, of that sort of age. She died in 1929.

[MS1] So, roughly when was it – had been taken? 18...?

[LW] 1870, 1880, something like that. This is the original pub of my great – paternal great-grandfather, whose name was Leopold Schnitzer. You see the name on the front of the building is *Gasthaus* in German and *hostinec* in Czech, which is the same meaning for a pub. A place where you can rent a room to sleep for the night, and a place where you can have a meal.

[MS1] And is your great-grandfather in the picture?

[LW] No, not that I know of. This is the trouble, I haven't got any photos of him or anything. I've just found the place where he was, because unfortunately that is a common name [laughs].

This is a family photo of my paternal grandfather, who had the same name as me. **[06:08:02]** He was called Leopold [Loebi] Wiener. Loebi being, I think, the Yiddish name for Leopold. And his wife, Augustin Kessler Wiener. And in the photo is my father, the smallest boy, Josef- Bubi- Wiener, and his brother Adolf, known as Dolfi Wiener. And the two girls of the family was Josephine, known as Pepi Wiener, and her older sister, Ernesta Wiener.

[MS1] When was it taken?

[LW] I would say it was around 1906, 1907, something around that time.

[MS1] And do you know where?

[LW] That was taken outside the *Gasthaus*, in Oderberg. Or to use its Czech name, now known as Bohumín, which was a frontier town. Yes.

This is the photo of the Wiener family, or Wiener family is the correct way of talking about it, sitting in the beer garden of the – what was the Grand Hotel.

[MS1] And this was a hotel owned by your family?

[LW] Which was owned by the family.

[MS1] And do you know when it was taken?

[LW] I would say it was taken around, I don't know, 1914, something like that. [06:10:04]

That is the wedding picture of my maternal grandparents. Julius Faerber and the eldest daughter of Abraham Huppert. Her name was Therese Huppert and she became known as Resi, Resi Faerber.

[MS1] And where was it taken?

[LW] That photo was taken in Ostrava.

[MS1] Do you know when roughly?

[LW] Yes, I think it's around 1904.

That's a photo of my grandmo – maternal grandmother, Resi Faerber, and her daughter who was my mother, Stella Faerber Wiener.

[MS1] Do you know where and when?

[LW] Oh, I have no idea. I should think about 1920 maybe, perhaps a bit earlier, I don't know. Maybe about 1918.

[MS1] In...?

[LW] In Ostrava.

This is a photo as I knew him, my grandfather, Julius Faerber, who was known as Julek by his customers. And a later photograph of him after the German occupation took place. And also, there's a postcard, they managed to get posted from Terezín to our address in Clacton-on-Sea, when we'd reached the UK. [06:12:12]

This is a photo of a postcard. My grandfather managed to send to us in England already, Clacton-on-Sea, he had our address, under my nickname Poldi. And he writes on the postcards, 'To my beloved Poldi, I wish you many happy returns on your birthday, and wish you a good fortune and a great future in all your prospects. Always listen to the words of your beloved mother and father. And remember them for all your life.' He was sent to his death about two or three weeks after this postcard was sent. He meant a great loss to me, I was very, very close to him. I always think about him even now, so many years later.

[MS1] Did he – was he killed in Terezín or...?

[LW] No, no, it was Auschwitz.

[MS1] Thank you. This was...? This, please tell us.

[06:14:01] [LW] This is a photo of my grandfather's *Gasthaus*, or pub, which had existed from about 1880 from my – inherited from my great-grandfather. And after my father's death, passed to my father, who had it rebuilt, completely rebuilt. And it was then called the Grand Hotel. And it had, I don't know, about sixty rooms, I'm not sure exactly how many rooms and it was a wonderful building. But unfortunately, it was forced into bankruptcy, because the railway lines had their gauge changed in Russia. And a lot of the

traffic which stopped in Oderberg or Bohumín, as it was known in Czech terms, caused it to lose a lot of its customers. And after, by 1935, it had been forced into bankruptcy.

[MS1] And who do we see in this picture?

[LW] The original picture is about 1914, I would say.

[MS1] And who is in the picture?

[LW] In the picture, in the front are all my family. That was my grandparents, paternal grandparents. That's Leopold and Augustin Wiener, with the two boys, Adolf and my father Bubi Wiener. And on the left are the two children, Pepi Wiener and – Pepi Wiener and, oh, God, Ernesta Wiener. **[06:16:10]** And then, there are three ladies who are adopted by the family, because they were daughters of another great-grandfather, who had married three or four times. And the people in those – those three girls, ladies, one of them is Josefa Kassler, married name was Mendel, owner of a very large factory. And Frieda Kassler and Josefa Kassler.

[MS1] This?

[LW] That is a fixed picture of my father, Josef Wiener. He had a nickname, he was called Bubi because he was the youngest child in the family. And he was very well-educated. He was a Doctor of Laws in the Czech Republic and he also studied in Frankfurt, in the German language. And had a degree of Doctor of Laws in Germany, in the German language. And also, he was a Doctor of Political Economy. And he had written a thesis about the alcohol industry in Czechoslovakia, which in 1928, was a quite an important document.

When was this picture taken, Leo?

[06:18:01] That picture would have been taken about 1928, I would say.

And where?

I would say that was taken in Ostrava.

Okay, thank you.

Oh, this is a photo of my mum on holiday in Italy around 1928, I would say.

Thank you.

That is a very nice photo of my parents, must be a few months before they got married. I would say about 1929 in –

That's a photo of my mum taking me to see my grandparents in – who lived nearby, in Ostrava-Svinov.

When?

Ostrava-Svinov.

But when?

This, oh, I would be about two years old maybe.

[MS1] What year would that be?

[LW] 1934.

That's a holiday photo of my parents and myself in Mariánské Lázně, Marienbad, in Czechoslovakia. Must be about 1936.

That's myself in our garden in Ostrava-Svinov. It was a huge garden, it was about 1500 square metres. [06:20:00]

That's myself, again, it's with my very favourite toy car.

[MS1] Where was it taken?

[LW] That would have been taken at home in Ostrava-Svinov.

We arrived in England at Tilbury Harbour, and we were taken to Bayswater. But after a few days there, in a school building where there were hundreds of refugees, we and a party of about fifty or more, I can't tell you how many, exactly how many, other Czech refugees were bussed to Clacton-on-Sea. And these are the photos of our arrival in Clacton and also my first visit ever in my life to the seaside, with –

And who put those photos together, Leo?

Which ones?

Who put them together in the album like this?

I did.

You did? Okay.

[Laughs] Well, it was –

Now, we're going to look at individual pictures.

My pe –

[MS1] Yes, please.

[LW] That is a newspaper cutting from the local newspaper in Clacton-on-Sea, where a group of Czech refugees arrived in the town to be put in lodgings. And we were probably the first foreigners ever to arrive in Clacton-on-Sea [laughs].

[MS1] And are you in the picture?

[LW] Yes, I'm the little boy standing right at the front. There was only one other boy of my age in the group.

[MS1] And what date was this?

[LW] This was – I would say it must have been about June 1939. [06:22:04]

Leo, here?

[MS1] Yes, please.

Yes, please.

[LW] That is the – a print of the photo that was shown in the news – local newspaper, with myself right in the front standing with my mum, of the Czech Jewish people who are arriving in Clacton-on-Sea.

Can you remember this photo being taken?

Yes. Yes, I can. I still had a broken arm, my arm was in a sling.

Thank you.

That's on the beach in Clacton-on-Sea.

[MS1] Yes, please.

[LW] This is a photograph of my first visit to the beach in Clacton-on-Sea, where I had a very nice holiday for a few months. Not going to school, just being on the beach all day long.

And what do you think about your parents' expressions here?

Oh, well these photographs are showing the stress under which my parents were feeling now, when there were already rumours of what was happening to those members of our family, including my grandparents, under the occupation.

Thank you.

That's a photo in Clacton-on-Sea, with the owners of a cafe or restaurant, standing together with my mum and another Czech refugee, who was married. **[06:24:06]** She was married to a relative of mine. And both my mother and this other lady, were actually the dishwashers, working in this cafe surreptitiously, for just ten shillings a day. Working all day.

And when?

This was – must have been about 1941, something like that.

[MS1] Yes, please.

[LW] That's the two daughters and me, with the Lyons family, daughters of the owner of the cafe, where my mum and another relative of ours were the dishwashers, in Clacton-on-Sea. On – very near to the front of the seaside.

Thank you.

[MS1] Yes, please.

[LW] Oh, that's on the beach in Clacton-on-Sea, in the section that was allocated to Czech-Jewish refugees. And from which people who lived in Clacton-on-Sea before we got there were excluded. Nobody spoke English on that beach.

Yes, that's a photograph, which was taken in Dorking, where we stayed at a house. I can't remember the name. But I seem to think it was owned by the family of a composer, British composer. Had this huge house and grounds. And refugees were lodged there after we'd been in Clacton-on-Sea. [06:26:03] And the boys with me all Kinder – were all on the Kindertransport, except for myself.

And how long were you there for?

Six months, I can't say exactly how long I was there for. And that's where I saw Erich Reich. Erich Reich was in that same place. He – I don't think he's on that photograph. Can I just take it? I'll just have a have a look.

Yeah, yeah.

I don't think he's on the picture, because he had two – he had a couple looking after him. They weren't – they were – I'm not sure whether they were Czech or whether they were Austrian. But they were not Jewish. But they were – how shall I...? Refugees who are fleeing, because I think, I've got a feeling they were well-known supporters of the Communist regime in Austria or something of that sort. And they saved him. And they – as his – when his parents were murdered, I think they were murdered, his mother and father were killed in front of his eyes. I think that's what happened. And after, he couldn't speak. That experience, he stopped talking.

That's a photo which was taken in our back garden in Taunton, when my parents had living with us, the daughter of my father's oldest sister, who we managed to save, so to speak, because she had been in Vienna when her parents were arrested and sent to their death. [06:28:01] And she had come under the protection of another refugee who married her. And she and this – her husband ended up in Nyasaland [present-day Malawi], but – where he had

a very good job. But unfortunately, she was very unhappy in the marriage. I think partly, because he was much older than she was. Although he saved her life, and she wanted to leave, she left him. And we paid for her to come to Taunton in Somerset, and she stayed with us for a few months.

That's a photo I remember taking myself of my dad, standing outside our cafe in Taunton, the Czech Cafe. And it was the cafe of one of the leading lawyers in the town of Ostrava [laughs].

That's a photo of my mother and father in their café, at the counter with some of their staff, and I think it's one of the customers as well. They were working 'till eleven, twelve o'clock at night, seven days a week, not for a very large reward. But they managed to get their heads above the water, so to speak.

[MS1] What's this?

[LW] That is a school photograph of, I think it's the first or second year when I was a pupil at Huish's grammar school. [06:30:08] I had been very, very fortunate. I had won a scholarship, not the eleven-plus scholarship, I had won a special scholarship, which was awarded by the school itself, which was a foundation scholarship, where there was one place. Just one place in the whole year, where a pupil could go to a grammar school without having to pay. At that – in those days, the parents had to pay four pounds a week for every boy who attended that school. But my parents didn't have to pay because I'd won the foundation scholarship in that school.

[MS1] And where are you in the picture?

[LW] I'm in the last row at the end. The second on the left, in the – from the right, second from the right. You can tell that is me, it's the one with the chubby face [laughs].

That's a photo which was taken during my National Service. It was in the first few days of my national – I can't tell you, it's probably the second or third day of arriving in the army, in

my army uniform. And with the only other two phar – qualified pharmacists, as I was at the time, who were in the intake of that year for pharmacists. But I wasn't a Private for very long. [06:32:00] A very short time after that, I was in charge of the pharmacy of the main hospital of the British Army in Aldershot, the Cambridge Hospital. And I was promoted to be a sergeant. I got paid eight pounds, eighteen and six pence a week. And I'd bought a car which enabled me to drive home from Aldershot to London. And I had a very good experience there, considering it was my first job and because I walked around shoulder-to-shoulder with consultants, who are lieutenant colonels and the top men of the – in the medical corps of the British army.

Thank you.

That's one of my wedding photographs of Ruthi Offner and myself, taken after our wedding in Jerusalem in 1965. We were married for thirty-two years, when she sadly died from a tragic illness at the age of only fifty-six.

Thank you.

[MS1] This one here?

[LW] That's a photograph of myself and my wife, Ruthi, with my daughter still in the hospital where she was born in 1965.

[MS1] [Inaudible 06:33:58]

Yes, please. Who do we see on the photo?

[06:34:01] [LW] Oh, right.

Yes?

That's a family photograph of my daughter, Susan, Susanna, which she likes to call herself now, and her husband, Ian Ross. And their three boys, Joshua, Gabriel, and Daniel.

And when was this taken roughly?

Oh, it must be, oh, about twenty-five years ago. It must – oh, a bit – it must be twenty-five, maybe twenty-seven years ago. This was taken when they'd already bought their own house in Hendon.

Thank you.

Taken me in.

[MS1] Yes, please. [Pause] Yes, please.

[LW] Oh, that's a photograph of my second wife and myself. Yeah, we were on a cruise. Must be about three or four years, maybe five years ago. Can't remember which one it was, cruise it was. But we obviously, were enjoying our holiday.

And how long have you been married, Leo?

We'll be married twenty-five years in March.

Okay, so thank you. I'll say thank you for the time being. We're finishing the photo section. This is the last photo and see what happens next. Thank you.

[END OF RECORDING 06:35:54]