

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Archive
Ref. no:	RV278
Interviewee Surname:	Hajdu
Forename:	John
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	29 April 1937
Interviewee POB:	Budapest, Hungary

Date of Interview:	12 July 2023
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 32 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV278
NAME: John Hajdu
DATE: 12 July 2023
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[00:00:11]

Could you please give me your name and date of birth and where you were born?

My name is John Hajdu. I was born in Budapest, Hungary in April 1937 to a well-to-do middle-class Jewish family. Both my father and grandfather were in the insurance business.

That's tremendous. Thank you very much indeed for agreeing to be interviewed today for the AJR and it's a great pleasure to be with you today. Please could you tell us something about your grandparents and your parents and your family background?

Yes. As I said, I was born in Budapest, Hungary to a well-to-do middle-class Jewish family. There were about 430,000 Jews in Hungary out of which 200,000 lived in Budapest which was surprisingly 23% of the total population which is an amazing figure. Both my father and grandfather were directors in the insurance business and my mother was a bookkeeper, so we lived a relatively happy, peaceful life. We went to concerts, we went to opera performances, we met lots of friends both Jewish and non-Jewish. We were not an observant Jewish family but obviously of the Jewish faith.

Did you go to the synagogue at all?

Yes. Remember that that was a time when I was still quite young but I do remember that once or twice I have a memory of having gone to our local synagogue but I can't tell you more than that I'm afraid. It's such a long time ago. But I know they were serious about their religion. [00:02:02]

Did you go to a Jewish school?

Yes. When I got to age seven where we lived, immediately next to us was a Jewish school and fortunately I was able to go there and had a wonderful start to life. The teacher was fantastic. We had a group of about twenty of us and I was able to learn in peace and quiet.

Did you experience any antisemitism at that age?

No, I did not. At that stage because we lived in a part of Budapest which was quite obviously overwhelmingly Jewish, I did not notice or hear of any antisemitism at that time.

So did you grow up at that stage observing some of the Jewish traditions and Jewish festivals?

No, I can't remember that. I would have thought that we did not attend any festivities. We obviously observed the main events at home.

And did you have any non-Jewish friends?

Yes, we did. In fact, one of my best friends was a non-Jewish boy and we kept the relationship going for quite some time. There was no real feeling at that stage that you were Jewish or non-Jewish. We were friends with all kinds of families in the neighbourhood and we enjoyed playing football, table-tennis, go swimming, with a whole group of friends.

What were your earlier memories perhaps of Budapest and attitudes in a broader sense?

Remember that I was very young so therefore my memories are very vague or sketchy of that time of my life. [00:04:07] I remember having no restrictions, no limits as to what we could do or where we could go. We enjoyed going around from one part of Budapest to the other, to the swimming pool, to skating rinks, so no, I did not anticipate or didn't feel any restrictions at that time.

When did you start to feel any restrictions or perhaps sense that there was something wrong?

Well, the Hungarian government had a relationship with the German government and they were very closely following the German government's views and orders. And it was clear very early in the 1940s that the government will be much stricter against the Jews and that there'll be some rules and regulations which will be brought in to restrict the Jews. So it became quite clear around when I was four years old, maybe three/four years old – and this is just memories – that life is going to be much harder.

Did your parents speak to you about events or did they try to protect you from –?

I think at that stage nobody believed how bad things will get. And this is a general feeling of all Jewish families of that time. Everybody thought that this will blow over, there might be some problems but things will get better. So, protecting me in the sense that I was their child, of course. Remember I was the only child, I didn't have brothers or sisters, so naturally my parents were very keen to look after me and protect me. [00:06:02] But at that stage we still hoped that things will get better.

And what were your parent's names please?

My father was called György or Györg which is George in English and my mother's name was Livia which is a very unusual Hungarian name. It is a Jewish name in many ways.

On the birth certificate was it normal practice to indicate whether someone was Jewish or not Jewish at that time?

Yes, yes. Absolutely, yes it was marked like any other religion. You had to put down your religion on the birth certificate. In fact, I still have the birth certificates of both my grandparents, my mother and of course mine.

And what were your grandparent's called?

Ah no, that's a much more difficult question. I cannot remember – I know my grandmother was called Ilona and I cannot remember the name of my grandfather, which is very sad but unfortunately, I cannot remember it. Oh yes, I – no, I can't.

Don't worry. It happens. That's fine, that's fine. And could you describe the way in which the
–

In fact, I just remembered. His name was Bernat.

Ah, excellent, thank you.

And the reason I remember that suddenly because about ten years ago I decided to research my family tree and what happened was that I started looking at all the documents and the more I looked, the more I learnt obviously and the family all around the world. And that's how I suddenly realised what my background is all about. And it's quite fascinating to see how by doing your family tree you acknowledge your background and you become in a way more Jewish. [00:08:06] Because you see how your family is spread all round the world as a direct result of the war.

Yes, yes indeed. No, it's very important. Very important. Could you describe some of the changes that you became aware of?

Yes –

In 1939/1940.

It really started in 1941 when the Hungarian government in collaboration with the German government decided to restrict the freedom of the Jewish population. And that resulted in all kinds of things. And this was a gradual change and it started by closing Jewish bank accounts. It carried on by restricting Jews from going to the cinema for example, for taking trams and taxis, so eventually our lives have been extremely restricted and much harder. And then of course we realised that we are in for a very hard time.

Was the school closed, your Jewish school?

It carried on for a little longer but it naturally closed. Once persecution as we now call it started, the school has closed indeed. I can't remember exactly when but it must have been in the 1943/'44 period. Just before the war started.

Was there a point where your family was afraid of being placed in the ghetto?

Well, that came a little later. To look at the whole sequence of events what happened first that labour camps were established in Hungary for Jewish men. [00:10:01] That was one way of the government restricting lives of the Jews. So, what happened was that my father was taken to such a labour camp somewhere in the country –

Was that 1943?

1943. And so that meant that my mother had to look after me and our flat and the housekeeping all on her own with no support from my father. I remember that we did visit my father in the labour camp once or twice, giving food to him, taking food and small presents to him. Life in the labour camps was extremely hard. They were made working very hard and I know that quite a few of them got ill and in fact, one or two have died in these labour camps. The camps were all over in the country and they were employed to do building work and canal work and heavy labour.

How did you feel taking food to your father? How did you feel as a small boy?

Well again, remember that I was only seven/eight years old at that time. And that is a very interesting point because that is probably the first time, I realised that my father won't be with me for quite some time to come and as it turned out this was the case. And in a way I didn't really have a father to grow up with.

No. What happened to your father ultimately?

Afterwards he was able to come back from the labour camp and carried on living in Budapest and eventually, he managed to escape from Hungary to Romania. That is after my mother was taken to a concentration camp in 1944. The story of my mother is a very sad one in many ways. [00:12:03] After the Hungarian government in collaboration with the Germans had accomplished the restrictions and had the men transported into labour camps, it was the turn of the women and the children. So, what happened was that the Hungarian government's police force, the Nazi – the Arrow Cross Party as it's called –

Yes.

-went round from house to house from block to block and collected all the women and children in order to take them to various camps. And when they got to the house – by that time we were staying in a yellow-star house by the way –

I was going to ask, yes.

And just to backtrack a little bit, we were asked to move out of our home and we had to move into a yellow-star house. Now, the yellow-star house was a block of flats in my case where a big yellow star was attached to the gates, to the door of the block of flats. And what that meant that we were not allowed to go out more than a couple of hours a day and that was spent in queueing up for basic food because some items of food we were not even allowed to buy. So, carrying on from there, when we stayed in the yellow-star house and the Arrow Cross Party came round looking for Jewish women and children, they were all collected in the courtyard of our block of flats. We were on the third floor. We lived on the third floor in a flat which was originally used by my cousin who managed to escape earlier because they saw

what's happening and very cleverly, they moved somewhere else in Austria as it happens, so we had this flat for ourselves. And my aunt stayed with us as well. And when – you could hear the noise downstairs and it was obvious that the Arrow Cross Party members were going from flat to flat in all the floors. [00:14:07] First floor, second floor, third floor –

It must have been terrifying for people.

It was terrifying. And then it was our turn. But just before they got to us, my aunt had this wonderful idea which clearly saved my life, of grabbing me and taking me across the corridor on the third floor to a non-Jewish friend's home and begged her to hide us. Now surprisingly, he immediately agreed to hide my aunt and me in a cupboard. And obviously I was told to keep quiet and say nothing. As it happens, nobody knocked on his door because he was not Jewish and we survived. It must have been about half-an-hour maybe that I stayed in the black surrounding in quiet. It must have been a terrifying experience for me at my age –

Absolutely.

-to suddenly be incarcerated, if you like, in a place where I've not been before and to be told, 'If you say anything, it could cost your life.'

Yes and not to know what would happen afterwards.

Exactly. And so, when we came out, half-an-hour – I've no idea how long. It seemed like eternity. And as I say, it's my aunt who saved my life. We came out, my mother has already been taken with everybody else and we found out later that she was taken to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria.

What was your aunt's name please?

My aunt's name was Ibi, Ibi Farago. Farago was in fact the family name. Which surprisingly came from the name Freund but my grandfather thought that by changing the name from

Freund to Farago, it might help should there be a problem. [00:16:06] Of course, it made no difference at all.

No. No. No. That must have been absolutely devastating for you. First to have your father in the labour camp and then for your mother to be taken and disappear.

And that was just the beginning because the next step was that after then hiding – having come out of this yellow-star block of flats, we then had to hide somewhere. So, we found an abandoned – my aunt found an abandoned flat somewhere and we hid in there. And after a time it was becoming more and more difficult to stay in hiding and we had no choice but to move into the ghetto. Now, the ghetto in Budapest was just one of many hundreds of ghettos all round Europe and many in Hungary as well and it consisted of hundreds of blocks of flats in a restricted area immediately behind the synagogue, the great synagogue of Budapest –

Oh, yes.

And in each flat it was about twenty of us squeezed in. The area was guarded by the Arrow Cross Party. You were not allowed to go out naturally –

Which was fascist and brutal.

Which was – exactly. And we stayed in this- blocks of flats with hardly any food. I mean, talking about bread and drippings and probably water. We couldn't go out. In fact, you didn't want to go out because on the streets were shot at for no reason whatsoever and you saw people dying on the street from dysentery and all kinds of other diseases and so you stayed in the flat. And we stayed in this flat for quite some time by which time the Soviet Air Force was approaching Hungary. [00:18:03] They'd already liberated Romania and now they were approaching Budapest. And so, what happened next is that they started bombing Budapest.

Was that 1944?

Indeed it was. And what happened then is that quite often we had to go down into the cellar to avoid bombing. As it happens, part of our block has been bombed and collapsed. And I was extremely fortunate with my aunt not to have been, well, entombed if you like or killed by the falling masonry and bricks and the roof. And we stayed in this terrible situation for some time until the Soviet Air Force and the Soviet Army surrounded Budapest. And it's quite interesting- now that I think about it- that the ghetto was mined by the Nazis in order to blow everybody up. Imagine, nine hundred or so blocks of flats, hundreds of thousands of people. And they could not blow us up because they had to escape as quickly as possible from the Soviet Army.

They didn't have time to do it.

They didn't have time. So, my life and all other lives were saved simply by this quick action of the Soviet Army. So, in a way, it's quite strange that I had to be thankful to the incoming Soviet Army for saving my life, knowing what happened later. It was quite ridiculous really but they did save our lives. And then we came out and we found Budapest in flames. Houses were demolished or hardly anything left, people wandering aimlessly. Nobody knew what to do. [00:20:02] It was a bombsite. The bridges had gone.

How did – it might sound a futile question, how did you feel – can you recall how you felt coming out and seeing this devastation and wondering what the hell was going to happen to you next?

Well, in one way it was freedom. It was life. So we escaped death on several occasions. First when my mother was taken, then in the yellow-star house, then in the ghetto, then not being blown up and then the bombs fell on us. So obviously, there was relief, it was freedom, it was happiness. When you then looked at what you have seen around you –

Yeah.

As a young boy, it was almost impossible to comprehend that we are now living in a bombsite. And the question was, what happens next? And so again with my aunt, because my

mother wasn't there, we had to find somewhere to live and to start a new life. But what we have decided to do is to go to Romania. Why Romania? Because Romania was freed by the Soviets Air Force and Army before Hungary and that is where my father escaped and my uncle escaped. And so being our nearest relatives, my aunt felt that that would be the safest thing to do. How we got to Romania I've no idea but it must have been a hell of a journey. And when we got there – by which time my father and uncle started a little shop and they were living a reasonable life. Of course, we didn't know what happened to my mother.

[00:22:00] *May I just ask what was your uncle's name please?*

My uncle's name was Rezső or Rudi and a lovely man. And he was part of my life for quite some time while I was in Romania. So when we arrived in Romania in a way that meant that I could live for a little while a relaxed, peaceful life and went back to school in Romania. It was in Oradea in fact which was in Hungarian called Nagyvárad because it was part of Austria-Hungarian area but Oradea is the name of the town now. And I went back to school there and we lived a reasonable life there. Always at the back of your mind was, what happened to our belongings, to our flat in Budapest and above all what happened to my mother?

How did you discover where she had been taken?

I didn't until one day she appeared on the doorstep. And it was an absolute miracle and we had no idea how she found – what I found out later that she was taken to Mauthausen concentration camp and she stayed there. And obviously she was beaten, her hair fell out, her teeth fell out, her back suffered and if she found some snails to eat she was lucky. People all around her died but somehow, she survived until the American troops have approached the camps in Austria and freed her. She then was taken in a terrible state to a hospital where after some weeks she recovered enough to allow her out and of course, she went back to Budapest. And what did she find? She didn't know where the family was, she was not allowed back into our flat by the occupier. She was not given back any of her belongings and was simply told to go. **[00:24:06]** Now imagine, she'd just come back from Mauthausen and she finds herself homeless and didn't know where the family was. So, the next step was that she was searching

for us in Budapest, which was in ruins. And eventually she found a friend or a relative – I never found out – who told her that we have gone to live in Romania. And somehow she managed to trace us and arrived as I said at our doorstep. Now, you can imagine the feeling – no, I don't think you can imagine because I can't even remember the feeling of suddenly confronted by your mother in front of you when you thought that she was lost.

Yeah.

Because obviously, we thought that there's no way that she could come out. She was only one of 5,000 who survived in Mauthausen. Out of the hundreds of thousands who died. Now, how and why I've never found out. And just a point here to mention that she never talked about her life in the camp, which is quite normal for those who have been in camps and maybe I should have asked more questions. But I never did and unfortunately I never found out more. So anyway, she appeared at the doorstep and we couldn't believe what we're seeing. And it was a miracle. It was a wonderful thing to happen. But by this time my father who thought obviously that my mother is not coming back, started a relationship with a local woman. And I can't blame him for that because that's life. And my mother after a few hours found out that my father is now in a relationship with another woman. [00:26:00] She immediately turned round, took me and took me back to Budapest. So, another part of my life had to start all over again in the ruined town of Budapest where my mother had to find somewhere to live and some work.

That couldn't have been easy.

Well, none of it was easy.

To say the very least, no.

If you think of all the –

But especially in those circumstances.

If you think of all the sequences. To have been bombarded by the – a young boy like me, at that stage I was nine/ten years old, it is impossible. And when I give talks to schools and we can talk about that later, kids always ask me this question. ‘How did you survive? How did you manage? How did it effect you?’ And of course, it did. Anyway, so we went back to Budapest and we started a new life under the Soviet regime.

Yeah. A new life but [laughs] not a happy one.

Well, it’s interesting because I thought that we will now have a reasonable life. No more bombs, no more killings and I went back to school and suddenly again step by step we realised that we are living under a regime which again restricted our lives. How? Very simple. You were not allowed to say anything against the government. You were not allowed – the newspapers were restricted in what they wrote. You had to be careful what you say. And by that time I was sixteen/seventeen years old, I joined a college, the Railway Technical College. And for example, one of the teachers was reporting back to the government on our activities. [00:28:00] And if there was anybody in the class or in the whole school whom he felt was anti-government, anti-Communist is the word I should use, it was reported back and that person could disappear. In fact, people disappeared from one day to another never to be heard of again, if it was found that they said anything about the government. And what we need to say here that the government was a Communist government which was effectively a government very – restricting our lives and it was not a difficult way to live. It was quite hard because you had to watch every step you made.

Yeah. At that point did you again experience antisemitism?

Yes. Not to the same extent but in fact I could have gone to university but under the Soviet regime because I was of middle-class background – after all, my father and grandfather were directors of an insurance company, that’s as bad as it can get and I was of Jewish background, very simply I was not able to go to university. The door was not open for me to go to university and that’s how I ended up in the technical college. And even that, only because we knew one of the teachers. I’m not sure what would have happened if that wouldn’t have been the case. But anyway, I then stayed at this college and it was a

reasonably happy life with fellow students. We went swimming and we went on tours and my mother by that time started working again and we had a small flat. I shall always remember the small flat we had, which was very near the parliament building. It was just one room which was both the bedroom and the sitting-room and a very small bathroom and the kitchen. [00:30:04] And the kitchen of course had an icebox because there were no fridges at the time and so whenever we wanted any ice we had to go down to the local market and take the ice blocks back to the block of flats and place it upstairs on the third floor as it is, into our kitchen, into the icebox. And the same with heating. We had to go and get our wood and get somebody with a horse and cart to bring the wood back and again store it in the cellar and then take it upstairs. So that was not an easy life either.

No, no. What about food? What was available or not available?

It's not so much what was available. Obviously, restrictions in the sense that it was a poor country, it was governed by the Soviets and even though the farmers supplied a reasonable amount of fresh food it was expensive and we didn't really have much money. My mother really didn't earn so much.

No.

And so we had basic food which resulted in an unhealthy way of living. And in fact, I was quite fat at the time simply because there was no way of eating healthy, nutritious food.

And under the Communist regime everything was centralised. The economy was centralised –

Talking about the Communist regime –

and not supply and demand.

Exactly. And talking about the Communist regime, for example what we had to do to show our alliance with the Communists, to show our obedience if you like, is every year to march on days when the Communists decided that we must show how glad and happy we are under

the regime. [00:32:01] Every year there were certain anniversaries and we had to march in the street.

Like May Day.

May Day, that kind of thing and you had to march. If you didn't go on a march, it was a black point against you and it would have been made a note of. That was just one of the restrictions.

Did you feel very resentful about it?

Well, all students in Hungary and in particular in Budapest started to feel that this way of living won't be a future for us. That the restrictions and the resentment is getting worse and worse, that we could not imagine living under this Communist regime. Having come out of the Nazi occupation now we're living under the Communist regime. While it was a dictatorial regime, obviously it wasn't as bad as the Nazis but our life is still restricted to a great extent.

At this juncture were you going to the synagogue or was the synagogue open at all?

Good God, that's the last thing you wanted. You don't want to be seen to go to a synagogue. That's a black mark against you. I'm not even sure that the synagogues were open.

No, 'cos a lot of the churches were closed also.

I would have thought that not- but in any case, you did not want to demonstrate that you're Jewish. That would have been another black mark against you. And these black marks could eventually escalate to a state where suddenly you're taken away and interrogated. And by the way talking about the interrogation, there is a building in Budapest today which is called the House of Terror. And that was used by the Nazis to interrogate mainly Jews or those – gypsies as well and those who were anti-Nazis. And after the Germans left the Soviets used the same building for interrogation, again mainly those who were against the regime, so history repeated itself. [00:34:09] That building is available to look at as a tourist attraction

if you like – it's a strange word – but it certainly opens a tourist's eye as to what we have been through twice.

[Pause] Could I just go back one step please?

Of course.

When you were in the ghetto and the restrictions – and then the yellow house – the restrictions about buying food or what little was available –

Yeah.

Were there set hours that you had to go as in some other countries?

That's very interesting. I should have mentioned it earlier. When we were in the yellow-star house we were given two hours at a certain time and if you didn't get back in time you were in trouble and could be taken away. And of course, the Arrow Cross Party were marching on the streets, patrolling the streets, looking for fun and beating everybody up –

At your expense.

For no reason at all. But especially if you were late and the curfew expired, you were in bad trouble. So yes, we had only two hours to go out and buy food. In the ghetto there were no shops of any kind and it still puzzles me how we survived on bread and drippings and who supplied this. But there must have been somebody within the ghetto. Maybe there was some – there was a supply of basic items of food but unfortunately, I cannot remember.

No, that's fine thank you.

So now we're back to the students if you like and clearly life couldn't go on much longer the way it was. [00:36:02] Students were getting fed up with life. There was no freedom and clearly something had to happen. And we are now in October 1956 when – the end of

October around the twentieth the students started very quietly, clandestine operations, getting together and finding a way to oppose the regime without the Communists getting to know. And this culminated in the famous Hungarian Revolution, the October Revolution, when the students had enough and marched to the radio. And that was a huge group of students. We're not talking about twenty/thirty, we're talking about thousands and thousands of students who marched the radio and presented a sixteen point manifesto asking to be broadcast and for the government to take note of all the changes and also, to change the regime. And that of course, meant that an immediate confrontation with the government.

Were you – did you march?

No, I did not march. I must admit I could not take the chance.

No.

And I was probably – maybe I was afraid, I don't know but I certainly didn't march. I was following the events but I did not march. And so what happened next is that the government felt that they have to somehow find a way because they realised that this could be a serious attempt at overthrowing the government. And so, the students carried on marching and they carried on and eventually this became the October Revolution on the 26th of October.

[00:38:03] And it looked that Hungary will be free again because the Soviet Army has withdrawn temporarily but of course we knew that this was only temporary and our hopes would be dashed as indeed they were. So, on the 23rd of October as I said, the students have marched to the radio station and they asked – they presented a sixteen-point manifesto. One of the points was they demanded a new government, a new prime minister and new laws. Now, this was very closely followed two days later on the 25th of October by about 200,0000 people – not just the students – marching to Parliament Square. And I lived very near Parliament Square, a few minutes away and I went as well. And the idea was to meet the new prime minister, Imre Nagy and also to show/demonstrate the solidarity of the new government who by this time was sworn in. And about an hour into this demonstration, I heard some shots and I didn't know what that was but since I was at the edge of the crowd and very near home I decided to go home, which actually saved my life. What happened was

that the surrounding buildings of the Square were occupied by the Soviet Army on the rooftops and they saw what was going on and at a certain time the command was given – the order was given to start shooting.

Yeah.

And they started shooting at the crowd and obviously there were terrible results and this day became known as Bloody Thursday. [00:40:01] And about 300 people actually died there and even the day after when you went back to the Square you could see blood, abandoned shoes and clothing everywhere. It was a terrible, terrible day and clearly showed us that there is no real future for the Hungarian students or Hungarians who want a life, a future, in Budapest or in Hungary. So, despite the initial success of the students, the initial success of the Hungarian Revolution and the initial success of the new government, unfortunately, the government has fallen. The prime minister Imre Nagy took refuge in an embassy and eventually even he was persuaded to come out of the embassy. He was then – tried to escape but he was taken away and killed. So that was the end, terrible end of the Hungarian Revolution and it was quite clear that for me in person the life cannot carry on the way it has so far.

Did you feel totally disillusioned by then?

Oh, completely. All of us. Not just Jews, not just students. The Hungarian middle-classes for example, there was no future for us. And there had to be answer but what really happened was that the Soviet government made life even more restrictive and made life even more difficult and you had to live under even more difficult circumstances. And that is when a rumour started going round that some people are escaping. Now, nobody – I didn't think about escaping and I said, 'Well, what's going on?' [00:42:00] Apparently, people were escaping into Austria and eventually, one of my schoolfriends told me that he was told that a very good friend of his has just escaped, why don't we consider doing the same? So, I discussed this with my aunt and my father who by that time lived in Budapest with his new family. I had a very good relationship with my father at that time for a very short time and that was by the way the last time I saw my father who died very soon after we escaped, from

cancer. But to go back, we couldn't talk to them on the phone because the phones were watched and listened to and if somebody would have picked up that we were planning to escape, we would have disappeared without any doubt. So eventually we decided – my friend and I – that we have no choice but to escape. And at that stage my mother said, 'Well, if you're going, I'm coming with you.' Imagine. That's a hell of an undertaking for a woman who has just been through what she has been through.

Yeah.

To undertake a journey into the unknown. So, we decided to escape.

And that was 1956?

Fifty-six, November.

Hmm-hmm.

And my friend – well, both he and I worked on the railways which meant that we had free tickets on the railway. Now, my friend's family lived very near the railway station, the other side of the Danube, from which we would have to take the train towards the Austrian border. And so my mother and I had to decide to leave everything behind, close the door of the flat, take a small bag of food and my teddy, which we can talk about later, which I had with me since I was three or four years old and so we went over the bridges. [00:44:00] And by the way, to go over on the bridge you had to be careful because they were manned by the Soviet police. And if they would have seen you with a suitcase, they would have obviously known that you are doing something illegal as they would have said.

Yeah.

So the answer was that you couldn't take anything big with you. So, we spent the night at this friend's family and the next morning we took the train towards Austria. We then decided to take the last but one stop on the train going to Austria and we then found that there were

several other Hungarians doing the same. So, there was a quite a group of us who decided that we have to try to escape. And it was a very small station, there was no police, no supervision, so we had the freedom of moving forward. But of course, we didn't know which way to go.

No.

And the Hungarian peasants then came forward and said, 'Okay, we will show you the way. All you need to do is give us some money and jewels and so on.' So, they did very well out of it but they did take us towards the border. And that is another event which I will never forget because we had to do this through the night, through the minefields. We had to do this through the searchlights with the tanks and the army marching by, looking for escapees. Because by that time they realised that there's a whole stream of escapees going towards Austria. And we had to climb over various canals and streams and this was in the middle of the winter. It was icy and very cold. So, after marching about twenty-five kilometres we got near the border and that was the canal separating Austria from Hungary. And now there was a watchtower immediately ahead of us which we had to go past in order to go on the bridge into Austria. [00:46:04] We could see the searchlights from across the canal, which is the Austrians showing the way to escape. And as we – well, we had to take a chance. We had to go past that watchtower. So as we got near the watchtower a miracle happened. That watchtower was not manned. Why it wasn't manned, nobody knows but here was another time when my life was saved. Now, it's worth mentioning that many people on this route have either been shot or taken back to prison and some actually fell in the water, in the canal and died. So we were very lucky to escape into Austria.

Could I ask how did your mother cope with this?

Amazingly well. She was a very, very strong woman which comes out later in her life. She was unbelievably strong. She must have had this in-built strength as a result of surviving Mauthausen I presume. But so we got across the border and looking back as I tell my story many times in schools, it's about four times that I escaped death. It's an absolute miracle that I'm here talking to you.

Yeah.

Having gone through the ghetto and the escape from Hungary. So here we were across the canal with a huge group of helpers. The Red Cross, the Austrian government, various organisations welcoming us with food and drink and some clothing. And then we had to queue for transportation. Lots of cars and buses taking us on to camps to help us survive and help us on our new lives. And my mother, my friend and I were queueing up to get on various transportations. [00:48:05] There was a bus and lots of cars. So, I said to my mother, 'You go ahead and we'll follow you.' What I didn't know that when my mother got on to the bus, the bus was full and they went without us. And so we stayed behind. And we thought, well, never mind, we'll go in the car following. But we didn't go the same way and that resulted in about three weeks of unknowing where each other were. My mother was taken straight to Vienna and she eventually – because she spoke a bit of German – started working for the refugee committee there. And the first task she had was to try to find us but the camp we were taken to in Upper Austria, in Solbad Hall near Innsbruck, was not yet registered as a camp so she couldn't find us. And we were looked after very well. Remember we came with nothing. We were supported, we were helped and we were trying to integrate into life. The locals were very nice and in fact, my friend eventually decided to stay in Innsbruck and he's still there now. And so we lived in a camp for some time. Eventually my mother found the camp and she got tickets to come up. She collected me and took me to Vienna. And that's when really the next phase of my life starts because then we had to decide what to do next. And we had to decide, do we stay in Austria, do we go somewhere else? And if yes, where? Now, I had a bit of English because my mother had the foresight when I was little to give me private tuition of English. It was not a very good English but it was some English. So, we decided that we should go to an English-speaking country. [00:50:02] I did not want to go too far out of Europe and so we decided not to go to America, Australia, Canada and so we decided on England. And therefore, I queued outside the British Embassy who were giving away permits for those Jews – Hungarians, not just Jews, who wanted to settle in England. And after a few days of queuing I had one of the – my mother and I had one of the few last permits to allow us to come to this country.

When you say the few last, was there a limit?

Yes. Yes, there was a limit. I don't know what the numbers were but there was a limit as to the number of people who could come to this country. Many thousands have come to this country and we were some of the few. I don't know how many but we were told, 'Right, what you do now, you collect your baggage, whatever you have, go to the railway station and a train will take you to Ostend and you're then taken across by boat to England.' So, we did that and on arrival at Ostend we were transported on to – transferred on to the ship and the ship took us across to Dover. Now, you must understand here that I'd never seen the sea before. It was an amazing experience to suddenly see this vast expanse of water which was unimaginable. And what was funny, that the staff found out that I speak a bit of English, so I was asked to report to the captain and translate various rules and regulations. You can imagine, my English must have been atrocious. What I said I've no idea but I did help him anyway. So we got across to Dover and again, welcoming committee and we were transferred from there into north – north of England, into Staffordshire, into Cannock Chase. [00:52:09]

Did you have any regrets, or your mother, during the journey to Britain?

Not at all. We were looking forward to new life. We couldn't have had any regrets because all we left behind was misery, despair and terrible way of living and death. So no, the answer is we were delighted to start a new life. We knew that it's not going to be easy but we had to start a new life and it was easier for me than it was for my mother. So we got to this camp in upper England and we stayed there for quite some time. And because I spoke some English it was my duty at that stage to welcome Hungarians arriving in trains at 5 o'clock in the morning twice a week and take them round the camp and show them the facilities and the offices. That helped me tremendously in learning better English and also in understanding the way the system works.

Where was the camp sorry?

In Cannock Chase in Staffordshire.

Ah.

It's actually called Hednesford. Hednesford, Hednesford. And so we lived for a little while and because I was involved with the offices I found out that there were some spaces available in a stately home in Sussex near East Grinstead and I asked to be transferred there with my mother. And fortunately, that was allowed, that was given to me and so we were transferred to East Grinstead and we then lived there for a little while. And that was a wonderful place to start a new life, to recover and to start to understand where I am and forget the miseries and terrible way of living before. [00:54:04] This place was about an hour-and-a-half from London so I had to decide what comes next.

Was it a hostel or what was –?

No, it was a stately home which was run by a religious organisation and they opened it to a very select number of Hungarian refugees. There was about twenty of us there.

But it wasn't a former stately home converted into a hostel.

No. They were amazingly hospitable and helped us by just – they opened it up to about twenty of us. So I had to decide what to do next and clearly I had to go to London because my life must continue in London, I thought to myself. And I took several trips to London and you can imagine what it must have been like to arrive in London. Huge city, which I've never seen before. And I then found my way – there was an organisation called the Hungarian Jewish Refugee Committee and I was directed to go to them. And without their help I don't think I would be here now. They were an amazing group of Hungarian Jews who came out in the '30s and who set up this office to help newly arriving Hungarian Jews who specifically escaped in '56. And they arranged for me to have a weekly salary, a wage. They arranged for me to stay somewhere and they looked for some schooling for me where I could then continue my life. But just to give you an example of how lovely these people were, they all had a list of things they wanted us to have, among which was a suit. [00:56:00] And so they took me to Burtons which was then of course one of the largest department stores and bought me a suit and to give me my dignity to help me in appearing in front of people in a better

way. And that was just a small item which I shall never forget. So having then arrived in London, they found me a small room in Cricklewood in fact, where I lived for a little while with another refugee, another Hungarian refugee. And then I went back to school. And school, I decided to go and try my luck in the hotel and catering business. So I went to school in the Hendon Technical College which is now the Middlesex University and went on to the hotel and catering course which is a two-year course. You can imagine studying and attending school in a language you're not familiar with and still having to pass exams in those circumstances.

Yeah.

I was very fortunate because I had friends there who supported me and helped me and after two years I ended up very near the top of the class. And as a result of that, the head teacher of the school said, 'Look, you obviously know what you're doing. Why don't I recommend you to start with one of the largest hotel companies in this country?' And he recommended me into a hotel company which was then called the Grand Metropolitan Hotel, which eventually became something else. But anyway, I started work there in the cellars as a kitchen help, as a porter and I think I stayed there for a little while and I realised that this is the kind of business, the kind of life I would like to follow. [00:58:06]

But it gave you that initial – [coughs], excuse me – work experience. And did it help to give you a sense of security also?

Yes, indeed it did and – by this time by the way my mother, just to put it in context, also had to work in terrible ways like an *au pair*, in kitchen help, because she had no English. So how she survived is again unbelievable. The strength she must have had to work in conditions, in places where she wasn't treated very well unfortunately. She was almost like a servant in many places but she survived. And so yes, it helped me in understanding life in this country and as a result of that, I progressed very quickly in the hotel business. Having been a waiter and a porter and a kitchen help, I then became a receptionist and a reception manager and eventually I decided to go into the sales office. And that is how my life in the sales business started. From the sales office I became sales manager and worked for different hotel

companies. And following that, I then became international director of sales and travelled overseas a total of 160 times to encourage tourism into this country. And I was then presented with a medal by the British Tourist Authority for achieving this and I carried on my life in the sales and marketing business.

[01:00:03] *And how long did you do that for?*

I stayed in this business until I retired. I stayed in various hotel companies. I had offices all over the world and travelled all over the world as I said. When I stopped working for the large group of companies, I then became a sales consultant and helped people start in their business. When they purchased a hotel, I moved in to tell them how to run the business, how to get tourists to stay with them and I stayed in the sales consultancy business for quite some time. And I retired about seven or eight years ago completely from the hotel sales business.

Did that give you a lot of satisfaction and a sense of fulfilment after all that you'd been through?

Yes, it did give me several things. It gave me satisfaction, contentment, courage to live a new life, a new way of – strength, if you like. A new way of living, strength of showing people that I know what I'm doing, that I can survive and it helped me in many ways. I became director of the London Tourist Board. I've done so many different things. I was Director of the Sales Manager Association and at that time I joined a local Jewish group and I became chairman of the group. It was a local group to Golders Green in fact and we organised outings and events and that is how I met my wife in fact. When in the '70s – it was in 1970 when I organised a party. **[01:02:01]** And that party was also the – as I later found out – when my wife, who later became my wife, had her birthday party and that's where we met in January 1970. And then what happened after that, just to talk about my wife for a minute, she was working in Canada at the time as a registrar in a university in Montreal and she was only home for a visit to her parents who lived in Wembley. And she then told me that unfortunately, she has to go back to Montreal for another year. So we then started writing letters to each other which were quite formal to start with, so for one year and she returned to this country at the end of the year and we met again and I thought, well wonderful, this is it.

And she said, 'I'm sorry but I'm going back to Montreal for another year.' And so, we carried on writing and the odd telephone calls which were very expensive at the time and the letters started to become slightly more friendly and she said, 'Okay, well look, I'm coming back at the end of the second year and we'll see what happens.' And when she did come back, we decided that this is more serious than we anticipated and that's when we started courting and that's how our life started together. It might be worth mentioning that my wife's parents escaped from Berlin in the 1930s and eventually came to this country and her parent – her father started a scientific business which when he retired the money he put into a scientific foundation and he received a CBE for that. And that scientific foundation is now run by my wife and my daughter is also involved.

And what is your wife's name please?

My wife's name is Foulkes, F-o-u-l-k-e-s. Obviously started from Fuchs.

Yes.

The German Fuchs but if you look up the Foulkes Foundation you see exactly what that wonderful organisation has achieved. [01:04:05]

And what's her first name please?

Maureen.

Maureen.

So that's what happened and I then got involved in various local organisations and what is so important now for me is to try to give lectures to students on what I have gone through and to try to make people understand that what happened must never happen again. I am working together with two organisations. One is the Holocaust Educational Trust and the other one is the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. The Holocaust Educational Trust works mainly with students from age thirteen up and I am sent out to schools and I talk to them about my life

and I talk to them about – I always say to them to start with, ‘I’ll tell you about my life under the Germans, followed by the Soviets, followed by my escape after the Hungarian Revolution and then my life here.’ And just as an example, it took some time for my son and daughter to understand what I have gone through because it’s so confusing, so many things happened. So, when I give my talk, I try to make it as clear as possible. And the questions I receive after my talk are wonderful from these children who suddenly are confronted by living history.

Yes.

And they are amazed to find out that it’s possible to go through so much. And so, I’m delighted to be able to do that. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust on the other hand mainly works with adults. Not just adults but just as an example I gave a talk at the House of Commons to MPs and all various organisations, various synagogues for example and so it’s slightly different but the same aim. [01:06:04] And this I do regularly and it is something which I find the most important thing now in my life and I try to do as much of this as possible.

You feel that that’s very worthwhile.

It’s absolutely worthwhile and it’s something which I am able to teach people. Because after all, let’s think about what I do. I tell them about what the Nazis have done. And there’s two things to say here. When I give my talk there are two slides in my talk about the dead bodies at Parliament Square and the tanks. And I stop there and I say, ‘Look at the news today and see what’s happening in Ukraine and you see exactly the same happening there by the same people who did it to me under the Communist regime.’ And I think that gets home to them exactly what is going on and what was happening to me at that time.

And these days with television, it’s there.

Exactly.

It’s right in front of you, yes.

Exactly.

Yes. Speaking of your own children, how many do you have?

Right. I have a son called Nicholas and a daughter called Georgina. They both have two grandchildren. My son has two sons, still under ten, just under ten and my daughter has a son and a daughter, again under ten. We're very fortunate, they live very near us, both twenty minutes away one way or the other and so we see them regularly. To talk about their involvement in all this is very important. As I said, my daughter is involved – both my son and daughter are involved in the Foundation but I took them back to Hungary several times. [01:08:03] And the story about going back to Hungary is again a very strange one. I didn't dare go back to Hungary for quite some time until I think in the 1960s, I decided that I want to become a British citizen so I applied after five years to become a British citizen, a British subject. And that was granted to me. And then I renounced my Hungarian citizenship and then I felt safe for the first time to go back I think in the early '70s. I have some cousins still there and they took me round. I wanted to see the synagogue, the ghetto, the places I lived in and where I studied. It was still a depressing place in the '70s. And then I thought well, now that I've seen it, I shall take my family back next, together. And having done that I then took my son back on his own and then my daughter on her own, just to try to put everything in context. Because it's not easy to understand what I have gone through. And fortunately, now that I have written the book, they have some tangible evidence of what I have done. And talking about the book, I wrote that in 2012 having spent three years – and interestingly enough it was my wife who said, 'You must write the book to have this weight off your shoulders.' Having done the family tree – and the point here is, that I started writing the book and how could I have all these documents? Well, it's very simple. When we left the flat in Budapest in 1956, my aunt who stayed behind went into the flat and collected all the documents and photos. And again you see, my aunt did something important in my life. Not only did she save my life twice but she collected these documents upon which the book is based. [01:10:02] So the book came out in 2012 and it's on the web free of charge and I always tell the kids in schools to use it as a way of teaching or learning about the Holocaust

or Communism. So, I wrote the book partly for the family obviously but also partly because it's now in the Holocaust Museum, it's in various Jewish organisations, it's in –

When you say the Holocaust Museum, do you mean the one here in London?

Yeah, I'll tell you about that as well. It's also in the Wiener Library and various other places. And the other reason I wrote the book was because Hungary is only a small country with ten million people and people usually talk about what happened in Poland and Germany but very few people talk about what happened in Hungary. And I always say to them, 'Look, Hungary suffered just as much from the Nazis or under the Communists as any other country and so this book helps you in understanding.' And the third reason I wrote the book, because I want future generations to understand what I have gone through and that this shouldn't happen again. Now, going – sorry, go on.

Sorry. If I may interrupt you just at this point – but please don't forget what you wanted to say –

No, no, carry on, I'll remember.

How did your children respond first of all to being involved in the fund but that was presumably as adults but how old were they when you took them to Hungary and how did you feel the very first time you went back?

When I first –

Did you feel that – were you looking over your shoulder all the time?

Okay. When I went back the first time, I had this feeling of looking back, seeing, even though it's supposed to be free and easy to walk around. [01:12:01] I did have this terrible feeling walking in the ghetto and I have a photo, one of my slides is the house, the block, where I was in the ghetto and I did go inside and took a photo. Of course, it's been tarted up. And I did go to the synagogue and I did go to the yellow-star house. It leaves you with very strange

contrasting feelings and when I took the family, my wife and then my son and daughter separately back, I tried to explain to them the feeling I had. And it's very difficult for them to understand and they keep telling me, you know, 'Give us time,' and hopefully that'll become clear. My daughter has in fact – both my son and daughter have appeared – has attended my talks so they know what I give and so they understand what I've gone through and they've got the book and they read the book. So they now understand more clearly and of course, they have spoken to my mother. Talking about my mother, just an interesting point. She lived into her nineties and she never talked about what happened to her. She would never discuss how she survived the camp and my son and daughter were extremely good to her in visiting her, even later when she was in a home. And she was part of the family. But to go back to the Holocaust Museum, there's a very interesting story here. When I wrote the book, I said to myself, well who should have this book? And I thought well surely, the Holocaust – the Imperial War Museum is planning a new gallery called The Holocaust Museum. There was one but not a good one and they were planning a brand-new museum. So, I got in touch with the person in charge and said, 'Look, I've got the book, are you interested?' [01:14:00] He said, 'Not only are we interested, we want you to come and see us.' And I went to the Imperial War Museum and they said, 'Well, we have got a box of Hungarian stuff, we don't know what it is. Would you help us translate it?' And then I said, 'By the way, are you planning a Hungarian section in the museum?' And they said, 'Well, yes, there'll be some Hungarian reference.' I said, 'Surely you should have more than just a reference. There should be a section devoted to the Hungarian atrocities.' And that actually happened. If you now go to the Museum, immediately under one of wagons there is a whole section related to Hungary at which you'll see my mother's picture, photo, my own photo and at someplace else my father's photo. But to go back to these Hungarian items. I looked through these and eventually ended up with about ten items and it was – I think the Museum decided that they have no space for that many and we ended up with two. And one of them is exhibited at the Museum with my translation. And that was by a mother who was clearly going to the concentration camp. It was in the wagon and she was writing to her son saying, 'Dear son, I don't know where I am, I don't know what's happening to me. I hope you get this. I wish you a good life,' something like that. And she must have put this card through the wagon wall, somebody must have found it, somebody must have posted it to her son. That son must have

eventually sent it to the Museum. And then I saw it and when I looked at that card I saw that the stamp on it was clearly on the border going to Auschwitz.

That is amazing.

Can you believe this?

That is just amazing. My goodness.

So these coincidences and yet it's a wonderful story. It's a terrible story but it's there, immediately next to the wagon. [01:16:03]

That's tremendous. And Hungary is acknowledged and – but that's just amazing.

Yeah.

Life is so strange [overtalking 01:16:15].

It is. So, some people ask me about antisemitism and I always say, 'Well, antisemitism is always there.' There are over 2,000 antisemitic incidences in this country every year. Today, now. And unfortunately, there's antisemitism all over Europe and in particular Hungary is no exception and life in Hungary is not good. It's a government which is not a government you want to live under. Jews are not happy. Antisemitism is rife and it's very similar to Soviet regime. There's no press freedom and there is no freedom to talk.

No. No.

So that in a way I hope explains to you my life.

Indeed. But it must be heartbreaking for you to see now after all your experiences what's happening in Hungary all over again. Well, perhaps not to the same extent but it's not as you would wish.

No, it's a terrible way of living. Well, it's not as bad as under the Nazis or under the Soviets and life is supposedly free but the economic situation is terrible, living conditions are terrible, wages are terrible and it's a sad way of living. And I sometimes speak to my cousins and they say, 'Don't even ask. It's best not to ask. Life is not good.'

Could I ask about family members who perhaps didn't survive that you got to hear about maybe years after the War even? [01:18:06]

No, I have not – I've only heard of one distant cousin who did not survive who was hiding in Budapest at one stage and he looked out of the window and he was shot. But I have no real hard evidence of what happened to him. But fortunately, I have no other news of anybody who did not survive as a direct result of either the Nazis or the Soviets.

And in terms of integrating here in Britain –

Hmm-hmm.

You have a British wife. Do you still observe any Hungarian traditions?

Absolutely not. I have nothing to do with Hungary. I do not want anything to do with Hungary. I do not read Hungarian papers. I do not watch Hungarian television. I don't read Hungarian books. The only fun element of that is that I do come across some Hungarians who live here, younger people who are here on a temporary basis and I speak to them in Hungarian with an English accent. And of course, it's always a bit of a laugh because some of the words I don't even understand any more, as –

The language changes.

The language changes.

Yes.

But I do speak some Hungarian now and again with my friend who lives in Austria who escaped with us. I speak to him and I can hear his Austrian accent in his Hungarian and he can hear my English accent in my – Hungarian accent in my English.

[Laughs] Yes. What other groups have you become involved in like AJR for example?

[01:20:00] Well, we are members of AJR partly because of my wife's background and partly because of me and the two organisations I mentioned, the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. And apart from that, we belong to Upper Barclay Square Synagogue and we go there when possible but we are not observant Jews. And this is another interesting point. People always ask – students always ask me and what I always say to them is that – and what I taught my children is that the first and most important thing in your life is to be a good human being and not what religion you are. And to me that is absolutely vital and that you teach that to your children as well. Obviously, the next point is that you've got to be a good Jew without being overbearing about it and that you remember the traditions.

Would that be your message to your family or do you have another that you'd like to –?

Who am I to say what is right and what is wrong? I mean, all I can say is that I'm trying to explain to people what I have gone through and how I changed my life and that it is possible to survive with strength and how I've managed to succeed in life. And this is why I received the MBE from the late Queen in 2020 Honours List. And that I live up to what others have achieved and I try to live up to a certain standard. And this is the message really, that my family hopefully will understand what I have done and that they will pass on my message to their children.

Do your grandchildren take an interest?

Not yet.

Do they go to synagogue? [01:22:00]

No. They're less than ten years old so it's much too early for them to be educated in the religion or indeed in anything to do with what I have gone through. I'm hoping that I'll still be here when they get older and then we can start talking about this. And I know that both my son and daughter are fully aware of what I'd like to be the future, that the history should be passed down and that they will eventually talk to them about my book to start with and then the story of my life.

And is your book online?

Yes, the book is online, free of charge and it's available to anybody. I didn't write the book to make money out of it. I never sold it. I only printed a few copies for family and organisations like the Imperial War Museum or the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Wiener Library and the Jewish Museum, which unfortunately it's closing.

It is, yes, unfortunately.

Which is a very sad situation but they also have the book in the Hungarian Museum and one or two – the Wiener Library and one or two other places.

And what is it called please?

The book is called – let me show you. Is it all right? Sorry to have stepped out. This is what it's called. *The Life in Two Countries*. And it's based on my life and it's available on the web free of charge.

Tremendous. Is there anything that you would like to add or that you've perhaps thought of saying earlier on but then moved on to something else?

No. Maybe the only thing worth mentioning is my teddy.

Yes.

Which is a very strange story in itself. [01:24:00] It's a teddy which I have had since I am three years old and I managed to keep him all along in my pocket. How I did it I have no idea and I carried him with me everything I've gone through. And it now sits on my desk and I take it with me whenever I give a talk to schools.

Is it like a mascot?

I don't know if I'd call it a mascot really. It reminds me of things, if you like.

Very precious.

It's very precious.

Indeed.

It's part of the family, you know.

Does he have a name?

No and everybody asks me that. I never bothered to give it a name.

But it's precious, nevertheless.

Of course. He's getting a bit worn now.

Can you show it?

Is it all right if I just get up? [Pause] There we go. As you can see, he's getting a little bit worn now.

But he's a survivor too.

He's definitely a survivor, yes.

He's come through it very well.

Well, inside you can still see the original colour but I'm getting a bit worried, taking him along to schools because I've got to take him out of the pocket every time and I think it's probably best if I'm not taking it around. Because I've got the slide of him, so I think that'll be enough.

Tremendous. [Pause] I think we've covered a great deal of ground.

Are you happy with what I've done? Is there anything which I should have done and didn't say?

No, I think that's tremendous. I can't think of anything further offhand.

Are you happy? As long as he's happy.

[Laughs] So –

Well, thank you for asking the right questions. You helped me greatly in putting my story in sequence.

Thank you so much for sharing that with us. [01:26:00] It's a tremendous story and I think you have every right to be extremely proud of all that you've done and achieved and come through as a human being without becoming bitter and resentful, which you could have done.

That is indeed the case. Thank you very much for asking and as I said, my strength comes from what I have gone through. And my understanding of life comes from what I have gone through.

Yes. On behalf of the AJR it is my privilege and pleasure to thank you wholeheartedly.

Well, thank you for coming to interview me.

Thank you. [Pause].

What you see in front of you is a part of my family tree which I researched many years ago. It consists of over 100 names and in front of you is my grandmother and grandfather, my father and my mother and my wife and I. The family actually goes back to the 1870s.

[Break in recording]

This is a photo of my grandfather, Bernat Freund, who later changed his name to Farago.

Do you know roughly where and when it was taken? Don't worry.

Can I take it?

No. Just a decade roughly. [01:28:02] Twenties –

Well, it's probably on the back.

[Break in recording]

This is a photograph of my grandmother, Ilona Wiederkehr, which must have been taken at the same time as my grandfather around the turn of the century, 1900 or so.

This is a photo of my other grandmother, Ida Janowitz, with her son who in fact is my father and it must have been taken in around 1910.

This is a photo of my mother taken in around 1930.

This is a photo of my aunt, Ibi. The photo was taken in Budapest in 1960. She of course saved my life under the Nazi persecution.

This is a photo of me, John Hajdu, taken when I was just over a year old.

Which year was that?

1938. Do you want to say it again?

This is a photograph of me, John Hajdu, at the age of six, before we had to move out of our home under the Nazi occupation, wearing a yellow star.

This is a picture of my mother, Livia Frank, taken in the 1960s in London.

Yes, please.

This is a photo of me, John Hajdu, in a waiter's uniform when I started working in the hotel and catering business.

This is a photograph of my wife and I when we got married in 1972.

Where?

Upper Barclay Street.

In London?

Yeah, at the Upper Barclay Street Synagogue in London. [01:30:02]

This is a photo of my mother, my aunt Ibi and my uncle Rudi or Reszö taken at my wedding in 1972.

Yes, please.

I was awarded the MBE in the late Queen's New Year's Honours List and this is the photo on the day I received it.

When was that?

In 2020, January.

This is a photo of my family. My wife Maureen, my son Nicholas and my daughter Georgina, taken in 2022.

This is my birth certificate which I was fortunate enough to receive because my aunt collected it from our flat after we escaped in 1956, November. [Pause].

I'll just do the front cover quickly.

I was just going to say I think it's worth doing that. [Pause] Yeah.

Not many people will have that.

[Laughs] No.

Did you have documents like this from everybody you interviewed?

No.

Some people have. I mean, some people have good collections of documents, some people have nothing, some people have a variety of things. [Pause] If you could just- this is the front cover of my school –

This is the front cover of the school report from the Jewish school in 1946.

This is my identity card from Communist Hungary issued in 1956. **[01:32:02]**

This is the Hungarian rail pass issued to me by the Hungarian Railways for whom I was working and which helped me to escape in 1956, November.

Thank you very much.

[01:32:23]

[End of transcript]