

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Archive
Ref. no:	RV276

Interviewee Surname:	Planskoy
Forename:	Beate
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	4 October 1927
Interviewee POB:	Berlin, Germany

Date of Interview:	2 May 2023
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	3 hours 23 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV276
NAME: Beate Planskoy
DATE: 2 May 2023
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:07]

Today's the 2nd of May 2023. We're conducting an interview with Mrs Beate Planskoy and my name is Bea Lewkowicz. Can you please tell me your name, and where and when you were born please?

I've done all that.

No, but now we're on camera.

Oh [laughs].

Sorry.

[Laughs] So – what was the order?

Your name and –

My name. Beate Planskoy.

And your maiden name?

Frankfurter.

And where and when were you born please?

[Sighs] I've just told you [laughs]. I was – [pause] – I was born on the 4th of October 1927.

And where?

Still in Berlin. We moved out just after. I mean, Eva was already born in the new house.

Okay.

But my brother and I were born still in proper Berlin.

Okay. Beate, thank you so much for having agreed to be interviewed for AJR Refugee Voices.

Hmm-mm.

One second. I've very excited to talk to you because it's not many times that I meet a namesake with the same name, first name as me.

Well, there aren't many [laughs].

No, [laughs].

Not here.

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to us. Maybe can we perhaps start by – can you tell us a little bit about your family background?

I've told you my father's – what my father did. [00:02:05]

[Laughs] You've told me but you haven't told the camera.

Oh, I see [laughs].

So we have to – you have to pretend that you haven't told me anything.

Oh, I see, right [laughs].

The reason is that I can help you to ask the questions a little bit, that's why you told me a little bit before.

Yes, okay.

So pretend I haven't told you anything.

Right. Okay. So, I'll try it – replace myself so to speak. So, family background was that the family owned a large conglomerate which made shirts, men's shirts, and collars. Very important, in those days, they were very stiff and they were up here, you know. What else? And then I said one had to pass it down the family that every second generation they had to take over that factory and they had no choice. They didn't all want to do it but it was sort of part of the family thing and had to be done. And also, the name went with it.

And what was the name?

Felix.

Felix Frankfurter.

Yeah.

That was the name of the business.

The name of the business [pause] – I don't know.

And where was it? Where was that – where was the shop? Was there a shop? [00:04:00]

Well, more than a shop. It was a big building, very big building, and they had a lot of employees, and they treated them very well so nobody ever left. They paid them well, you know, and treated them well. If anybody was ill, they sent them to Switzerland to recuperate, and all this kind of thing. I mean, they were more like family almost. And in particular, there was a chauffeur. There was a car which was used for work but also when it wasn't being used one was allowed to borrow it. [Laughs] That was a big thing to have a car. And we had a chauffeur as well, but the chauffeur was paid for by the business, I mean, and – what else can I tell you about it?

And where was it? Where was it? In which area of Berlin? Where was this?

It was fairly central. I can't remember what it's called now but it was fairly in the centre. You could get there by bus, you know, you didn't have to have a car. I mean, very few people had cars.

And in which area – where did you live?

We lived outside all that because- we lived in a house that was specially built for us, and it's what my parents liked. They made the rules of what they wanted in this house and what they wanted in a big garden, and all this kind of thing. But I was still born in Berlin proper.

[00:06:00] Eva was already born in the new house and I was moved out to the new house when it was ready [laughs].

And the new house was in Dahlem.

Was in Dahlem. And there was – in Dahlem – I think you might find it interesting if you let me go upstairs and get you down a book which is very relevant to this – shall I just –?

Later, later.

Later.

Yeah, later.

Okay. Because there was a Jewish – Berlin – I've got a book on that – area which was being extended and that was right outside, you know, central Berlin.

Yeah.

It was a sort of place in front, but people all knew each other and they were partly “Berlinese” and partly – it was a very weird thing but it's a very, very good book, it's very interesting. So, it was just outside central Berlin, you know.

And tell us a little bit about your parents. What were their backgrounds? So your father was working in his father's business. What about your mother? Where and when did they meet? What do you know about your parents?

I know that my first parents, my mother who died, you know, which was my real parent, I mean, she produced me – where did they meet? [00:08:05] Ah, yes, yes, she came from a strange family herself, my mother, my real mother. She – I have a picture of her. Shall I get it down? No?

Not now, not now.

It's not important. Well, she was quite beautiful actually but she was also determined. She wasn't just beautiful, she had brains [laughs]. And her mother – they had five children and her mother said to her, ‘Just because you're a woman, don't let them get you down. If you want to go to university, you go to university and I'll back you.’ That was not done, you know, for girls to go to university. Yes, so she already had this thing which I also – doing

subjects that girls don't do, you see, it came from there [laughs]. And so – but she got cancer, my mother, very – they weren't married very long and she got cancer, and of course there was no treatment for it at that time, and so she was ill all the time. And we weren't allowed to see her because she wasn't well enough to be seen. She was in bed most of the time, and it was – we just – then my grandmother, her mother, took us over more or less. She came every day and she taught us things, before we went to school. [00:10:08] I mean, we could read and write before we went to school.

Who's we? You and your brother?

I – yes. But she came to look after us three, and she took us for a holiday but Eva couldn't go with that, she was too young. You know, she went with somebody else. And Felix and I were really the – we were nearer in age and so we did things together. And also, music, I mean, music was a very important thing in the family. And I could say something about my father who was also very obstinate, and he hated school. He loathed school. They were the sort of old-fashioned, Prussian where you had to say, '*Jawohl.*' Stand up when you talked to the teacher and all this kind of thing, and he hated that and wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. And my parents wanted of course, to – you know, his parents wanted him to go to university of course. He didn't want to go to university [laughs]. He'd had enough of all this so they had a big row about it and then my – they gave in, the parents gave in, and they said, 'Well, what do you want to do instead of going to university?' And so, he said, 'I want to see the world. I want to travel. I want to – but also learn how to do things in various places. [00:12:02] And I want to learn languages and I want to...' – all this. 'It's not university I'm interested in,' you know. So they gave in and he was parked in a – now, what was it called – the name of the place – wait a minute, it's probably on that – on there [laughs] – shall I stop and have a look for that? The name.

No, no, not now.

Not at the moment, okay.

So where was it? In Europe somewhere or –?

In Europe.

Okay.

No, not in Europe, not in Europe. He learned to speak Spanish but in another country which was further south than Europe and I can't at the moment think of the name and that's why I was going to look there, but it doesn't matter.

Okay.

Okay. But he saw the world all right, I mean, he learnt to be a very good person on a –

Horse? Camel?

Hmm?

Horse or camel?

No, people who went riding.

Horse, on a horse?

Yes.

Yeah.

Yes, on a horse. And he mixed with the people there who – because it was out in the open and, you know, he saw a lot of the world and he learnt a lot of languages, so his Spanish was perfect. And then when he'd done enough, they said, 'Well okay, you wanted to learn languages so you've got your one language, now you've got to go to America and learn English.' [00:14:07] So he was trundled off to America and he was given a job there. I

mean, my grandfather was very practical and he wanted his children to really know things, you know, so he organised it all. I mean, he got him a flat in New York and a friend of his to do things with him, so he got a job there and he learned about Black people. And they had a maid who was Black and he was – got on – she loved him, you know. She'd come in and make a fuss about him [laughs]. And then, not for very long all this went on because the war started. And they got the thing sent from Germany that of course, they had to be in the army because they were in the age group where people –

This is the First World War.

First World War. But you had to be in the army. You weren't asked about it. You were sent a piece of paper saying, 'We're expecting you on such a date.' So, he had to drop it all, and he was very upset about that but still, you know, you had no choice in those days so he went back to Germany and joined the army. And his brother as well. He had a younger brother who was already old enough to have to be in the army. [00:16:06] And both of them survived which was a miracle, but I mean, things got pretty bad anyway. Do you want me to go on? I mean, what –?

So, how did he meet your mother?

That was my mother.

That was your father.

No – that was my father. My mother had died by that time because she died when I was four, and I hardly saw her all that time because she was ill all the time and nobody could do anything for that kind of illness, you know. There was no – oh, I should have said something in-between which is part of this. That they had a child before she died, a little boy, and he also died. And there was a little grave for him in the cemetery and they took us there and said, 'He was your brother, he was the eldest,' – would have been the eldest if he'd lived but unfortunately, you know, so many of the very young children die. And of course, at that time

they were doing that, there was nothing to do, there was no treatments, you know. And so my father went there once a week and put flowers on the grave and took us along as well.

You remember that.

Yeah, I remember that. That was on a Saturday always.

[00:18:00] *Where was he buried? Where's that cemetery?*

Hmm?

In the Jewish cemetery? Where was that grave?

Yes, the Jewish cemetery. You know, the big one, very big one that all Jewish people were buried there.

What other memories do you have? What are your first memories of growing up in Berlin?

What are your first memories?

In Berlin proper or in our –?

In your life, what are your first memories?

[Laughs] Oh my God [laughs]. What were my first memories? Well, I remember the flat we were in before the house was finished building. And that was in central Berlin and actually belonged to my grandmother who looked after us afterwards.

What was her name? Do you remember her name?

Caroline. Yes, I do remember and I remember her very well. And I've got, as I say, a photo of her. And she was very good to us. And it was very hard going for her because she had – well, she had five children and she had to keep all that going, and then when the war started

two of them got killed in the war. But for some reason people didn't cry over that. They took it for granted that you were fighting for the country and that was okay, you know, for some unknown reason [laughs]. [00:20:02] So, these two – her eldest son who was her favourite, and two down – also got killed. And she had pictures of them everywhere and she had – with her first son, her first child, first who was a son, she had a little brooch made of his first tooth which she wore all the time [laughs], I always see this in front of me. But she loved – I mean, she was mad about her children, you know, but that's all, that women had in those days. They had no jobs, you know, and they had no –

So, it must have been hard for her to lose her daughter then.

Hmm?

Because then she lost her daughter, your mother.

Then she lost her daughter, and she had to put up with all that. I mean, she hardly ever saw her daughter. Nobody saw her daughter really because she wasn't in a fit state to be seen. I mean, she had one year when she was okay after she left school. And then she got this illness and that was just – she had lots of treatments for it but they were all completely useless.

And then your – but your father married again.

Well, he – yes, that was quite a business. He wasn't going to. They had a very happy marriage. Not for very long but very happy, and they knew each other very well, you know. And my father just didn't function after she died. [00:22:06] He went to work and he came home and had his dinner – I mean, we had a cook obviously, everybody had a cook, you know – and he had his dinner and he then went back to his office and went on working on his business. And he hardly talked to us at all. But my grandmother took that over and she took us to places and she taught us things and she took us for a holiday [laughs] by the seaside. [Laughs] It was freezing cold. I've got a photograph of where our hair stands like that [laughs], and the winds were – it was in the North Sea.

Hmm-mm.

It was very cold and very windy [laughs], but we didn't mind that. I was with my brother, you know. We held hands and our hair stood like that [laughs] but Eva went with another family member because she was too young to take part of anything that we did actually. And then, what went on after that?

About the second wife I asked you.

Oh, the second wife, yes. So, this went on for about, I don't know, two or three years and things weren't running very smoothly obviously without a woman in the place, and in the end some of the cousins said, 'We've got to do something about him. He's got to get another woman.' [00:24:05] So, they invited him with somebody they thought was suitable as another woman [laughs]. And sure enough it was – it might have been because she was musical, she had a singing – I mean, she wasn't a singer by trade but she had had singing lessons and she was very musical and interested in music and all that. So, he asked her for dinner and they said, 'Ooh, he's fixed,' [laughs]. So – but he couldn't bring himself to marry her straightaway. It was too big a step, you know. And so she was parked upstairs in the room where the visitors normally slept who came from abroad and all that, and he just saw her, you know, and they did things together occasionally. But in the end, she worked at it and she got away with it [laughs], and they decided they would get married. And they did. And she was a very different character from my first mother but she was also a very good person and she was very nice with us which would have been quite difficult in the situation, you know. Because she wanted children of her own and my father said, 'No, no way, because we don't know what the world will be like. The Nazis are getting in here. [00:26:00] Heaven knows where we'll finish up. No more children. Three children to look after in this situation is quite enough.' So, we finished up with three children [laughs], and my extra mother, she was a sensible person and we got on with her very well. She was very good with us, and so we just had an extra mother [laughs]. And in the end, it was almost like our own mother, you know, because she was there all the time, she dealt with everything, she made my father happy, she – so that was a very good step. But there were the Nazis in the background by that time and that was not so good. And one didn't know really where it would lead and it was the

very, very beginning. But it was – there was – it was uncomfortable somehow, you know. And I'll tell you something – I'll jump a little spot because it's really- has to do with that. Now, my father dealt with all kinds of people in his job, and he had people who came to him regularly and bought things and he knew them well, but they weren't friends or anything. [00:28:00] And there was one man who he knew quite well for a long time, and he said to him – when he came to buy a shirt or something – 'Don't go home this evening. I can't tell you why but just don't go home.' So, my father realised that he was in with the Nazis enough to know there was something fishy coming along, and so he said, 'Thank you, for telling me.' Although he didn't know what it was. And he was a man actually who had a winter coat with a lapel, and you could close it or open it. And when he came to see the Jewish people then he closed it, and if he went to see the Nazi types then he opened it and there was a Swastika on it. I think that's clever [laughs]. But as far as my father was concerned, obviously it was closed. You know, he didn't know what it was about but he realised he was obviously in the knew [ph] of something fishy and so he wouldn't go home. So, he let us know that he wouldn't be coming home that evening. He would go to another part of the family where there were only women because at that time they were after the men. They didn't bother with the women yet. That came later.

When was this? This was not Kristallnacht, this was before.

Hmm?

This was not Kristallnacht. Was this before Kristallnacht? When was this? When did this happen?

When did this happen?

Before Kristallnacht or on Kristallnacht? [00:30:01]

Sorry, I –

On Kristallnacht?

On Kristallnacht? Oh, I see –

Or before?

I see, I see, yes, yes.

Or was this on Kristallnacht?

Yes, it was connected with *Kristallnacht*.

Yeah.

You're clever [laughs], you can guess –

Well, because that's when many –

But we didn't know there was such a thing as *Kristallnacht*, you know.

No.

Of course.

No.

Because – so he just wasn't coming home and she was – one knew that they would leave the women alone at that stage. So – how did the rates go? Yes, the *Kristallnacht* of course was not in our area. It was further away where they smashed everything and there was glass everywhere, you know, on everything. But we were further away. Our house, our whole area was a bit removed from that so at that point we didn't realise that, you know, that came – we found out later about that. And in – but what did happen was – I was ten years old then. The [pause] – a large car came late at night into our area and rang our doorbell. [00:32:02] And I

opened the door and he said, 'I want to speak to your father.' So, I said, 'He isn't at home.' So, she said, 'Well, what do you mean he isn't at home?' I said, 'No, he's gone out.' They asked, 'Where has he gone?' She said, 'I've no idea.' She knew of course, very well where he was. And so that didn't go down very well so he said, 'I don't believe you.' He said, 'Well, he often goes out in the evening after dinner and meets friends or something, but he doesn't always tell me where he's going. After all, you know, he's got a private life.' At ten years old I thought afterwards, I thought of all this then and there which was amazing [laughs]. And so, then the man said, 'Well okay, I'll go and search the house.' I said, 'Please, help yourself.' So, he spent an hour or so looking everywhere. Under the beds and everywhere. And then he said, 'Well, we'll be back,' and left. And the reason apparently – I found that out afterwards – that they came so late always when it was dark, was because on both sides of our houses there were houses of people that we were friendly with. Not bosom friends but we had very good relations with them. And they didn't want them to see that they were coming with their, you know, thing, and so they always came after it was dark. **[00:34:03]** It's very odd but that's what happened. And so, they did come several times more but it didn't get them anywhere because I always said, 'I don't know where my father is,' and, you know, 'you try and find him if you can because he's obviously not around at the moment.' And then because they always came late at night I said to my father – he was worrying about us of course, in all this – and I said to my father, 'Look, they never come during the day. Why don't you come and visit us during the day and then at least we see each other and, you know, we have a family life of some sort.' And just at that moment they came during the day, the first time. And because my father has enough here what he did was he just crossed the road. He was walking along the road coming to us, and he crossed the road as though the whole thing had nothing to do with him, you know, and walked away. So, they didn't catch him. And I always thought that was very quick in the uptake to think of that. And they probably also didn't think of him as being Jewish because he was blonde and he had blue eyes, and these sort of idiots think all Jews, you know, are dark and have dark skin and dark everything. **[00:36:07]** It never occurs to them you can have blue-eyed [laughs] Jews, you know, walking around. That's how I interpreted it but anyway, he got away with it. He wasn't caught. But what we had found unfortunately in the meantime, we were in the suburb and there were a lot of our other families also had moved to the same suburb, having a house built and doing the same thing, you know. That was the fashion at the time. And they'd caught them and they'd take

them all off to the concentration camp. There were three uncles we had who lived in that area and they took all three to the concentration camp. And they got away with it – shall I say what happened to them as well?

Yeah.

Yeah. They got away with it because they had been – all of them had been in the army. They were all in that age group, you know, and we played with their children and, you know, all that. And so, they had a bit of a get-out because the Germans at that stage still wanted to be thought of as good people. That all disappeared later. And so, they kept them in the – there and of course, they came back in the end but with shaven heads and the usual thing.

[00:38:10] I can't bear to look men with shaven heads since then [laughs]. And they had to sign a document that they'd been very well-treated and, you know, the usual schmooze and all that. And they said to their face actually, 'Now, we want you out. We don't want you in Germany. Now, you've got to get out of Germany by hook or by crook, however you do it, whichever way you can, and then that's finished as far as we're concerned.' And of course, they all tried to get to other countries. I mean, they were queuing up, every possible country, you know, with their passports and everything but no country wanted them, you know, it was like that. No more than the Nazis wanted them but they all managed it somehow, with help from rich relatives from somewhere else and, you know –

They emigrated?

Hmm?

They emigrated.

They emigrated. They emigrated. And then – what was the next step? I mean, we were already in England and we had – there was some reason why it was all right for children to have one year in England. I don't know why this was but that became a law, but you had to clear out after a year. **[00:40:00]** I don't know why they let you have a year. That's in their heads, you know.

On the Kindertransport?

Hmm?

On the Kindertransport?

On the Kindertransport, yes. It was probably connected with that, that they had to leave when they left, you know. I guess. But we didn't really understand all that and of course it didn't happen because the war started when they couldn't leave. They couldn't leave after a year so

–

The children, yeah.

That settled that.

But before coming to your own emigration, I just want to go back a little bit because you haven't told us anything about the schools you went to and your experience of going to school and then changing to Jewish schools.

Oh, I see. Okay. Well, what happened was that the Jews of course started their own schools. There were no Jewish schools that I know of before all this but once Hitler – oh yes, what I should say – did I tell you what our nice teacher said?

No, tell me about your teacher and about your –

Yes, we had this nice teacher.

That was the non-Jewish school?

That was in a general school.

So primary school in Dahlem.

That's right. That was the ordinary school for everybody.

Yeah, and tell me about the teacher.

That's right. And we had a very nice teacher and she came in every morning and said, '*Guten Morgen Kinder, setzt Euch hin. Heute lernen wir so und so. Aber redet nicht unter der Zeit. Ihr müsst ruhig sein und wirklich arbeiten und schreiben usw.*' [Good morning, children, sit down. Today we learn about so and so. But be quiet and work and write and so on.]

[00:42:00]

Okay.

So that was all, you know, [laughs].

Yeah.

And you know enough German for that –

Yes, I do.

Yeah [laughs]. So, that happened every morning and we were all quite happy with her and we learnt a lot and it was fine. We learnt to read and write properly and we were happy. And then – and of course one didn't have school uniforms and all that rubbish that you have here. I mean, you [laughs] were expected to come in your ordinary clothes but clean and tidy and, you know – but not like you have here with all that stuff. And you didn't have to pay. It was paid for by the –

Government.

And that was a big thing, you know, because we were very well taught. But after two years of this, one fine morning she came in and instead of saying, '*Guten Morgen Kinder,*' she said, '*Heil Hitler.*' And I and my cousin who was next to me, we looked at each other, you know, said, 'This is the beginning of the end,' you know. But of course we didn't move, as you can imagine. So, we put up with it and went home and told my parents and they said, 'Well look, it's very near the end of term so don't show anything, just go on until the end of term and then you won't go back there. [00:44:03] And we'll try to find a Jewish school because they're beginning to build them.' So that's what we did and then we went to the first Jewish school we went to. And – I'm just trying to think which one was that 'cos we went from one to the other because the government kept closing them down, you see. Just trying to think [pause]. The first school wasn't any great shakes, first Jewish school that we went to. I mean, they had only Jewish teachers of course and everything was Jewish, which we didn't really – we didn't have this thing about being Jewish, quite honestly [laughs] that so many people have, you know.

What do you mean by that?

Hmm?

What do you mean by that?

What?

What do you mean by that? What did you think –?

Well, what I mean – [sighs]. There are people who live by being Jewish and they don't want to have much to do with anybody who isn't Jewish and they go to the *shul* and they do all that, but we didn't have that at home. My parents were Jewish and so what, you know, [laughs]. It wasn't a big deal [laughs]. They were just Jewish. I mean, they could have been Black or something, you know, as far as they were concerned [laughs]. [00:46:02]

Was there any religion in the house? Was there anything religious in the house, in your house?

What was there? There was a bit but there was – yes, there was a bit religious. But it wasn't Jewish religious.

Hmm-mm. Like holidays, did they celebrate –?

Yes.

The Jewish holidays?

Well, that was a difficult situation because two of their children, the two girls, of course weren't allowed to work but they were sent to be educated. So, they sat there being educated with nothing to do, waiting for people who would marry them, you know. That was their only way out really.

That's your mother's sisters? Your mother's sisters.

My mother's – wait a minute, I'm getting confused now [laughs]. My mother's sister.

Sisters. Who was waiting to get married?

Hmm?

Who was waiting to get married? Who were the two? You said two girls.

Yes, but they were – no, they weren't my mother's sisters necessarily. They were two – I mean, my parents – my father had four children. One died and three were left.

Yeah.

There was my brother and me and my sister.

Yeah.

And we all stayed alive.

Yeah.

[00:48:00] [Laughs] And we had Christmas certainly because that was what everybody had.

Yeah.

And we had other religious things, but not with a sort of thing like that. But –

It was open. Open.

It was open but what made things more difficult was the two girls married Jewish husbands. And they were Jewish-Jewish [both laugh]. They came from somewhere else, a different country where you were Jewish-Jewish, you see?

Right.

While in Germany, a lot of people weren't. They had Christmas as well as whatever was on the books.

More assimilated.

That's right.

Yeah.

So, we had to keep them happy as well and my father wasn't so keen to go to all their – candles and all their things, and seeing [inaudible], you know, all that kind of thing.

For Hannukah.

[Laughs] And so my father made himself private and he said he had too much work and he'd work at home. But the children went. We all went so we learnt quite a lot about the Jewish things because of the uncles, you know, the new uncles [laughs].

So, when you went to the Jewish school it wasn't alien to you. It wasn't strange. When you changed to the Jewish school –

Hmm-mm.

It was familiar. It wasn't a strange environment.

No. [00:50:00] No, I mean, we took it in our stride. We did whatever we were told to do and we had cousins there who were more Jewish who knew more about it, and they told us about it and, you know, so it all sort of worked all right [laughs].

And for you, did you feel any antisemitism? Did you feel something change in those years for you personally as a child?

No. No. Nothing really changed except that those two new uncles who married my aunts were sort of – did some slightly different things. And they sang all the Hebrew stuff and my father didn't turn up [laughs]. He was busy with lots of other things and made that clear to us that we should go and do whatever they do, and he would do his own work.

And what about your stepmother?

[Pause] I'm just trying to think where she comes in [laughs]. It may be that she only appeared as a stepmother later.

Okay, okay.

I have a feeling, yes.

Okay.

Hmm-mm. She appeared later. And she was sort of halfway, I think. I don't know honestly.

Don't worry about it.

It's all too difficult [laughs].

But just coming back to the schooltime and so first being in the German school, then going to a Jewish school, and in that time in the thirties, did you ever feel scared? [00:52:02] Were you ever scared? Did you understand what was going on as a child?

Yes. Well, because we realised, we had to leave our school where we'd been and where we were happy, you know, and where there were a lot of other children. And we did find out there were only four Jewish children in that school at the time. But the teacher had been just as nice to the Jewish children as to the others, you know. She was obviously bullied into saying *Heil Hitler*.

Were you upset that you had to leave that school? Were you upset that you had to leave?

We were upset by the whole attitude. By the whole feeling of – that people didn't like us and – I mean, there were only four Jewish children and they were on the whole thirty-odd children, you know, so we weren't very noticeable actually because we didn't make a fuss about us being Jewish or anything, you know. But I think my parents were right saying, 'Don't make to-do. Wait until the end of term and then you just disappear.'

Was your brother in the same school with you? Your brother.

No. They were all separate schools. They weren't – boys were in one school, girls were in another school. There was never any mixed anywhere.

So was his experience similar to yours? Your brother's.

Hmm?

'Cos he was a bit older than you.

He was older.

Did he have a similar experience to you or was it different, in the thirties in Berlin?

I'm just trying to think what happened to him. Yes. I mean, he also then had to leave and go to a Jewish school but the Jewish schools were boys and girls together. [00:54:05] So nothing arose, you know, from –

So did you end up at the same school, the two of you?

Well, no. I went to a school that was for younger children.

Okay.

Because obviously you had a different syllabus, you know. I mean, our school only finished when you were old enough to go to senior school.

And he was already –

And that was a separate school.

Okay. And he was already in senior school.

He was already in senior school, yes.

But when did you hear the first time about – first of all, you didn't tell us how the story ended with your father, that he wasn't arrested on Kristallnacht. But what happened to him afterwards? Did they let him go? Could he come back to your flat – to the house? Your father.

Yes.

After Kristallnacht, did he come back?

He did come back and they tried a few times more and then after that he wasn't important enough.

Hmm-mm.

You know, he wasn't a special person where they could show off to their Nazi people that they'd done something special. I mean, he was just another person.

And did he try – do you know what – did he try to emigrate? What did they try to do, your father and your mother?

My father, what did he – yes, he did. But no country wanted you. They queued with their passports, you know, like everybody did for miles around but they never got anybody who wanted them [laughs]. And that was true of all the countries. [00:56:00] There was only one place that I remember where you didn't have to have a passport and all that stuff, and that was a part of China. You remember there was an area, big area, where everybody went who couldn't find anywhere else to go [laughs].

Shanghai.

Yeah, that's right.

Shanghai.

Yeah, that's right. So – but apart from that, the ordinary – actually, my father could help his brother because he had been out of the German thing, you know, made such a fuss, and went riding and doing all these things. And he had contacts in that country where he learnt Spanish, and he managed to get his brother and his children with him to be tucked in there which was very lucky. Very lucky. So, they stayed there until they were old enough to not go to work any more, you know, and then they went to Israel.

And what happened to your father? You said they tried, your parents. And when did you first know about the Kinder Transport? When did they tell you, 'There's a possibility that you might go by yourselves?'

Well, we of course, as I said, went in advance of my parents. And my stepmother was very, very practical and she said to herself and to us, 'Look, when you get there, there won't be any money. [00:58:08] So I have to buy as much stuff as possible now, so I'll buy you X dresses and X this, and X that, that you'll be all right for years with your clothes,' and she did. And at that stage you were allowed to take a fairly large suitcase. And she packed it full of clothes which we'd grow into. [Laughs] That was very clever of her actually. So, that was okay, but of course the idea was that we'd only stay there for a year, you see, and then find someone else. But of course, you couldn't find anywhere else because the war had started, and so we had to stay where we were. And the way my parents got out was a miracle, quite honestly. They – now, where did that start? Just a minute [pause]. They obviously tried to get out, you know. Anybody in their right mind did, but he – I think it was partly that my father didn't leave some other people behind. It was something like that. There was something in the background there [pause]. [01:00:01] Oh yes, yes, just a minute. Yes. This was an important point and I mustn't lose it. They'd also been queueing, you know, at every possible place.

Hmm-mm.

Like everybody else, and never got themselves anywhere. But – something –

Who helped them to get a visa? They must have got a visa to come to Britain.

Hmm?

They came to Britain. They must have got a visa to come here.

Yes, I mean, that is what I was coming to.

Okay.

[Laughs] Because that's now a very interesting thing which has nothing to do with Jews in itself.

Okay.

It's an extra bit on the outskirts [laughs]. But they – I mean, they realised they had to get out somehow, by hook or by crook, and they tried getting a stamp on their – and they couldn't get it of course. And then they realised they've got to go now because it was the beginning of the war and once, you're in the war, that was it. And there was some shooting. Not with England yet. It was with – [01:02:03]

Poland.

Poland, that's it. So, they realised there was very little time, you know, to get out. And my stepmother who was quite a determined person said to my father, 'I'm going to take your passport and my passport and I'm going to go to the people who are now packing up to go home to England.' Because they were all getting ready – the English people wanted to get to England while there were still planes to go on, you know. So, my father said, 'Oh, don't be silly,' you know, 'it won't do you any good.' She said, 'You just leave it to me. Give me your passport.' So, she took the passport and her passport and she went to the embassy, the British

Embassy. And they were all packing up. They'd already shut the doors and they had packages there and everything on the floor, and all that. And my stepmother just marched in there to the first person she could see and said, 'Look, our children are abroad. We'll never see them again unless we get there now. You've got to help us. Put a stamp on my passport.' And the man did. On both their passports. She put them in her pocket and I'll tell you why – that comes later [laughs]. And she rushed home and there were just two seats left on the last plane that hadn't been booked, and my aunt who was also very active, booked them quickly. [01:04:01] And they got on to the seats and they left on that plane. And the reason for why they got these things you'll hear in a minute. And of course, they couldn't let us know that they were on the way because everything was opened up and looked at and, you know, so they waited until they arrived in London on the airport, and they rang us up. And they said, 'We've just arrived in England.' And we said, 'What? Don't believe you,' [laughs] you know, but it was true. There they were. I mean, of course they were only allowed to take *zehn* [ten] Mark which gets you nowhere, and they were allowed to take an overnight suitcase. That was all. But they managed all that. And then having had a cup of tea together with us [laughs], they said, 'Well look, we'll now have to find somewhere to sleep and somewhere to live. You stay where you are because you're well looked after here and we'll try and see what we can do.' So, they went off to – this was outside the centre of London, you know, in –

When was – when did they arrive, Beate? What was the date of their arrival?

The date? [Pause].

When was that plane? When did it fly?

I don't know. It was the last plane that left Germany. [01:06:08] When would that have been?

The last commercial plane, a commercial plane.

Yes, the last commercial plane.

Could have been on the 1st of September. Could have been.

Yes, it must have been.

Because I think the last Kindertransport train left Berlin on the 1st of September.

I see.

That was still going on the 1st.

Hmm-mm. It probably was, yes, yes. I mean, it – I can't tell you exactly all the details of all that. I mean, I do know that they arrived without being expected and then realising they had no money, they had nothing, except the pyjamas of the girl [laughs], a suitcase full of that, but they'd have to somehow find a way of surviving, you know.

But why do you think they got the visa? Why did they get it? You said – why did they get it? Why did the British diplomat give them the visa?

Well, that comes later [laughs].

Okay.

I only found this out after the war was finished. When I went to Israel I found it out [laughs]. You may not know this [laughs].

No.

And your husband behind you also. But what we found out that the man who was in charge, the head of the English place in Berlin, saw what was going on round him and he didn't like it. [01:08:10] But obviously he couldn't do much because if he tried to stop them, then they would have chucked him out, you know. So, he didn't. He did all the normal things that people did but he – wait a minute, how can I explain it?

He gave visas. He gave extra visas.

He couldn't give anything at that time because – I mean, he would have lost his job immediately if he'd said, 'Yes, you can all come to England,' you know, 'it's perfectly okay.'

Okay, yeah.

They didn't want them, but he was a clever bloke and he sort of went round the corner a bit and he – in the end when my stepmother came with their two passports, gave them the stamp that they could get into England. And nobody else knew about this. You know, it was chaos there and they said, 'Oh yes, all right, all right,' and that was it. It was pure luck that he was aware he was doing but he couldn't let anybody else know because you wouldn't have had a job, you know. [01:10:02]

Was it Frank Foley or –? Frank Foley, was that his name?

I forget the name, but when I went to Israel, I went to the – you know, there's the big –

Yad Vashem.

That's right. And I looked at everything and I saw there was this man's name there.

Hmm-mm.

Which was only for the people who looked after the Jews.

I understand.

And his name was there and everything. Apparently, he never talked about it, he never made a fuss about it. He just kept mum but he did it, you know.

He did it for your parents.

That's right.

So Beate, tell us a little bit about your own emigration, which was about six months before, yeah? Before your parents left.

Yes.

So, what do you remember of that, of the Kindertransport.

The Kindertransport?

Yeah. Your own leaving Berlin.

Well, just that I knew a lot of the people quite soon, quite well. Of course, that was a strange mixture of people too in there. That they weren't all Jewish. There were two very nice people who hated the Nazis and emigrated because of that to help Jewish people find a home, you know. So- we knew them. They helped us too with things, you know, and all that. And there were some good Germans who went to the – far enough to leave Germany, although they weren't Jewish, and see what they could do to make things better for Jews. [01:12:08]

But what about you? What do you remember? Do you remember the journey at all of leaving? Do you remember the journey, taking you from –?

Which journey?

On the Kindertransport from Berlin coming to England. And did you go with your brother and sister?

Just a minute, just a minute.

Okay.

Let me think.

Okay.

Do I remember the journey from where to where?

From Berlin to England.

To England [pause]. Vaguely. But that was above board. I mean, that wasn't done undercover or anything.

No, it was –

Because we had a thing that for one year we could be in England, you see.

Yeah.

On our passports.

Yes.

And we would have been but of course because the war started so suddenly, all that went by the board.

Yeah. But were you together, your sister, and your brother, and you? Did you travel together?

Yes, we did.

Do you remember the train, the journey on the train?

Yes, I remember the journey. The journey was from Hamburg, from where everybody left. All the children left from Hamburg on the big boat, very big boat, which was an American boat. But it stopped, it stopped in Le Havre overnight, and then it stopped again on the English – on the next English thing. And so we got off there. [01:14:02] And we were being sort of watched for not doing anything stupid by one of the Jewish teachers but she was English. She had a British passport and so she was collared by my stepmother and said, ‘Look, keep any eye on these kids. Heaven knows what they’re going to get up to,’ you know, ‘and as you’re going to England anyway,’ you know, ‘it’s no bother for you. They’re good children,’ and all that. So, she was with her British passport, got off the boat in England–

On the same boat?

On the same boat, but that was the American boat, you know, that went on to America after that ‘cos America wasn’t in the war then.

So, it was a commercial boat, a commercial boat.

It was a commercial boat, yeah, and you had to pay for it. But we paid for it in Germany, you know, so that was all right. We didn’t need money for that.

And were you with other children? The three of you, were there many other children?

Oh, yes. It was absolutely jam-packed [laughs]. I mean, with children without parents, you know.

And your sister was quite young at the time. How old was your sister?

My sister was tiny. [Laughs] She was – I don’t know. How old was I? Then I can tell you. I was ten, that’s right, ten or eleven –

Twelve.

That sort of thing and no, she would have been – no, no, she would have been about seven or eight, so quite adult [laughs], relatively.

Did you feel it was quite a responsibility for you?

Oh yes, I looked after her. **[01:16:01]**

Yeah.

I mean, I saw she washed her ears and I did all the things that a mother usually does, you know, [laughs].

You had instructions.

Yes, oh yes. Oh yes, I mean, we got on very well always. There was never a problem with us.

So where did you – after you disembarked on the boat when you arrived –

Yes.

Where did you go?

Oh, that. There was a cousin of my stepmother's who had lived in England for quite a long time 'cos he had a job there. He worked for one of the money people, you know, and so she had got in touch with him and said, 'Look, we're coming on this boat, will you come and collect them? The children.' So, that's what he did. He came and took us to have a meal and delivered us to the other – where we were going, you know.

That was a special school you were going to.

Hmm?

A special school. You were sent to – where were you sent to? Was it a school in Haslemere?

Haslemere, yes.

Yeah, that was a special school for –

That's right.

Refugee children?

That's right. And we were put into that.

And that was arranged by who?

I can't – I have no idea. It was done behind our back. One doesn't tell children everything 'cos we might have objected, you know, [laughs].

But there were only refugee children in that school?

There were only refugee, yes. I mean, there were two schools of that type. [01:18:03] There was this one and there was another one which you may have heard about. She had a lot of publicity later, who opened it, Jewish school for children that came in that sort of way.

Yeah. Bunce Court, was it?

Hmm?

Bunce Court?

Yeah, that's right. That was the –

That was the other school.

Yes, that was the other school, yes.

Yeah. What was the name of this school?

Hmm [pause]. It'll come back some time [laughs] but –

Don't worry.

Just a minute [pause]. I know really [pause]. Of course, we were there a long time [pause]. It won't come at the moment [laughs] but it'll come.

Okay, don't worry. And there were only refugee children. Who were the teachers when you arrived?

[Inaudible].

And the teachers?

But they did different things. I mean, some did ordinary schoolwork, we did ordinary schoolwork. Some did work in – they had a place where they had animals and had milk and all that, you know, and some of the older children worked there and got trained in that way. It was sort of a hotchpotch, you know, everything got done there [laughs].

And Beate, what were your first impressions of England? Do you remember your first impressions, arriving?

We had been warned. We had been told about it, you know, what to expect so – [01:20:06] I mean, we were just worried about our parents quite honestly at that stage. Because we realised if they don't get out now, it's never. So no, we weren't too bothered about us.

Hmm.

We had been told enough about what would happen and that we were prepared.

Did you speak some English when you came? Did you have any English when you came?

Not really, no. We had a smattering which we'd learnt in Germany still from an English teacher, and of course, the person who took us on the boat, she had an English passport and she was English basically. But we came in touch with people like that.

Hmm-mm. What was her name? Do you remember her name, the teacher?

No.

No.

We didn't have enough to do with her so –

It was just for the journey.

Just for the journey, yes. I mean, she had been a teacher in one of the Jewish schools and in fact, the head teacher in that school, she was very clever. She made sure that all the children in her school learnt perfect English because she said, 'It's their only chance to get out of here and they can only do it if they know the language.' And so, you know, it was done that way.

Okay. Beate, I think we should have – because we've been going on – let's have a little break.

Hmm?

We should have a little break now.

A break [laughs].

Yeah, exactly. And then –

[Break in recording] [01:22:00]

Yes Beate, you were telling us about your school in Haslemere.

Haslemere, hmm-mm.

And it was Stroatley Rough, that was the name of the school?

That was Stroatley Rough.

That was Stroatley Rough.

Yes.

The school was Stroatley Rough. So that is [pause] –

I think so [laughs].

Okay, it doesn't matter. Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it. What other things do you remember from that school?

[Sighs] Lots of things. Lots of things. Well, we were in different rooms. I didn't share with Eva any more. I did usually everywhere, you know, but they went by age very much and each age had one sleeping room. And so, Eva was with the babies so to speak, and I was with the middle people, and then my brother was very bad-tempered about having to share a room because at home he had his own room, being the only boy, you see. We didn't share with him. And he had to share with three other boys I think, and he did not like it [laughs]. And he

complained bitterly the whole time [laughs], and I told him to shut up, that he was lucky that he was alive and out of Germany, you know, [laughs]. But –

How did your sister deal with the separation? How did your sister – because she was younger –

Yes, she was younger.

How did she deal with the separation from your parents?

[01:24:00] [Pause] I don't know. It's hard to say.

But you were okay with it? You said you were worried about your parents getting out.

Yes. Oh yes, but I mean once they were out you could close down that bit.

Yes, but for about half-a-year you were by yourselves. Your parents were still in Germany.

Oh, yes. Well, we weren't too bothered because we assumed they would get out, for some unknown reason [laughs].

I understand.

We were sure we'd see them again, you know. And there were so many other things to worry about and what to do, and all these strange surroundings, and suddenly being in England among English people. That was very difficult. I mean, they weren't all very friendly, you know, you realise [laughs]. I mean, the thing that annoyed me most was that every time – I mean, they had a place finally where they lived and if they wanted to go further than five miles from that place where they lived, they had to go to the police and get a written permission to go more than five miles. I mean... [gestures in disbelief]

Because they were considered enemy aliens.

Yes, they were enemy aliens.

Yeah.

They must have.

So where did they settle when they came, your parents? [01:26:04]

They – well, that was very difficult because they had no money and you always have to pay if you go somewhere, you know, [laughs]. So, they found a place where – let me get this right – which was relatively cheap and it had one big room- and they just more or less – I don't know how they did it, but – I mean, my father never complained about not having money which was [inaudible] 'cos he was used to earning a lot of money [laughs], you know. I was just – in my mind's eye I'm just trying to think how it looked. It was one big room where they did everything. I mean, they eat and they slept, and my father did experiments because he had ideas that he could not have the things that he had in his factory because that was getting out of date, and he wanted to think of something new. And so, he did experiments all the time with all kinds of stuff you do experiments with in a laboratory, you know.

[01:28:00] He had one very funny experience [laughs]. He tried to make the things a bit stiffer but not so stiff as they had been in the past. And so, he made experiments how he could do that, and he – we each had two school outfits and he got my sister's, one of her summer dresses, and put it in his [inaudible]. And it came out so stiff that she couldn't sit down and she had to go to school with this – [laughs]. There were all kinds of funny things like that, you know, that one could laugh about which was good. I mean, one could get a laugh every now and then. But they just had this one big room and then eventually we got another room next door to theirs and the three of us lived in that room, which was of course – as usual my brother had the best bed [laughs]. He always got their first, you know. Yes. And there was a settee in their room and so my sister was small enough to fit into the settee, so she slept on there, and – oh yes, I slept on a bed that one could fold up and put under the settee. So, that came out for the night when the bombs came and – so we each had somewhere to sleep anyway. [01:30:02] That was in the room next to my parents.

And where was this? Where?

It was in the side road of – I know exactly where it was. There was a side street, what they called – that became a joke. I'm just trying to think. Oh yes, there was this big road and it was entirely full of refugees, and they built up as though it was at home, you know. They had the food that was at home, they had these – everything like it was at home. And the man who called out where they were getting you, he said, – [pause] – he put that in, he put – he learnt the German words and shouted them out when people wanted to get off, you know. I mean, it was a big joke, the whole thing. But it was okay. I mean, they just took over part of London [laughs]. That part.

Finchley Road.

Finchley Road, yes. *Finchleystraße* they called it [laughs].

And your parents lived near there in Belsize Park.

Hmm?

They lived in Belsize Park, yeah, your parents?

My parents lived in Belsize Park but they went down there to meet their friends every day and had tea with them or whatever it was they had.

Do you remember the restaurants? There were two that were quite famous.

They were famous restaurants. **[01:32:00]**

Cafés and restaurants, do you remember them?

Yes, but they were mostly from – not so much from Germany, yes, they were from –

Austria.

Austria, that's right. The Austrians were much better on that.

Yeah, there was Cosmo, the Cosmo.

That's right.

And the Dorice.

What's the second one?

The Dorice.

No, I don't remember that. The first one I remember.

Did you ever go there?

Not very much. I mean, they weren't like the German. They were like the Austrian which were different [laughs].

And Beate, did you start going to school then nearby?

The school was very nearby.

Which school did you go to?

Yes, but then of course we were evacuated.

So which school did you go to?

The one that everybody went to. The girl's school.

South Hampstead? South Hampstead.

Yes, it's still here.

And you got – did they give you a free place? Did you get a free place?

I have no idea. I don't – I mean, they're a very expensive school but obviously we couldn't pay for that so I don't know who paid for it. We were never told.

Hmm-mm. And then the school was evacuated.

The school was – a lot of it was evacuated. There were some parents who refused to let their children go because you never knew where the bombs would fall, you know, and they wanted them at home. And so what they did was they shut down the big school and they had the little school for the youngsters and that was then used for everybody who hadn't gone away.

But you went –

We weren't there.

You were evacuated.

We were evacuated because the headmistress was very definite about this to my stepmother. [01:34:04] She said, 'That's the thing to do. I mean, it's the safest thing because here they're not safe and I think you must let them go.' And so, she did.

And how did you feel about that, again, to be separated at that point?

I wasn't asked [laughs]. In those days you didn't ask children, you just did it [laughs]. But I – I'm just trying to think how I coped with the language difficulties because of course I knew

German but I didn't know English. I knew little bits, smatters of English but not school English, you know.

But by the time you were in South Hampstead you probably spoke English quite well.

Well no, I wouldn't say that.

Because you had – you were in Haslemere before. You had already half-a-year.

Yes.

Yes.

But that isn't very much.

No.

[Laughs] Not to be able to really express yourself and feel at home in it. No, the thing that – one of the things I remember that really annoyed me was that the headmistress – I mean, nobody was married- of the women. Because they had of course, lost the generation of men who were marriageable from the time before. They were all elderly spinsters and therefore rather – not very nice to have around [laughs].

In which school?

In this school.

In the – in Haslemere or in South Hampstead?

South Hampstead.

Hmm-mm.

[01:36:00] And the teachers weren't very good because the young ones all went into the army or into one of the things. They liked to have uniforms and [pause] – so they didn't really come near the school very much at all. So there weren't any young teachers. And of course, there was also a law that once you were married you couldn't be a teacher, you realise. It was a different world [laughs]. But I had a bit of a problem with my sister because – I mean, I was fully in charge of her for a lot of the time and, you know, I had to wash her hair, tidy it up, plaited it, and got her to wash her ears [laughs]. It was all not very easy but on the whole I managed her quite well. I mean, we got on very well really. But she really already at that stage in her life didn't want to do anything except paint. And I kept telling her, 'Look, that's all very well but if you're going to paint, you have to go to a painting school and they only take people who've passed all the subjects. They won't let you in otherwise, so for heaven's sake do your arithmetic homework.' Waste of time. I mean, she said, 'I want to paint.' Never mind. So, I couldn't cope with that at all but I realised I was right and she needed to do all this. [01:38:07] So, I went to – they had one very nice teacher who always taught the people who weren't very good at it. And she had success. And I got her anchored there which was easier [laughs], and she passed all the five subjects just about by the skin of her teeth and got into the school, you know, and could paint. I mean, we have some paintings of her which she did as a child of the staff there in the school. I mean, there's one very good one of the person who did the – like, what you're doing there, what they did in the garden, and she got him absolutely spot on. I've got it hanging in the – on the staircase.

When did she start painting?

She started painting almost as soon as she could stand up [laughs]. It was as though God had wanted her to, you know, [laughs]. And she was very good, there's no question about it. It was her gift, you know, and she could see things in people which she could reproduce at a very early age. It was very interesting. So, obviously I didn't discourage her from that because I realised that was her calling in life. I mean, I like painting and I wasn't bad at it, but I couldn't compete with her at all [laughs]. [01:40:01]

And did she draw –

If you like, you can go upstairs and you can look at one of the pictures that she did at that stage, you know, and you can see it's the gardener. I mean, it couldn't be anybody else. So, that was that.

And did she draw – at that time did she draw things relevant in terms of the emigration and the Kindertransport? Did she have some drawings of that?

No, I think she was too young when we left. She hadn't really cottoned on to it yet. You know, she wasn't –

Conscious. Quite conscious.

No. It wasn't the real thing in her head.

Right, so only later.

She was too young, yeah.

Yeah, hmm-mm.

That came later when we were at school.

Yeah. Beate, what happened to your father and your mother? Did they start working?

They stayed in their one room and because they had to have these stupid police bits of paper, they couldn't come very often.

And could they work? Could your father work?

My father – my father did his experiments and they soon had results. He was very clever my father. He had lots of good ideas and he had the patience of a saint when it came to that kind

of thing, and he chose things where the material didn't cost very much. I mean, later on I helped him, you know, when we could go back to London again. [01:42:02] But he always had good ideas in everything. I mean, he was a wonderful pianist, he was a very, very good musician. He composed a lot of stuff which got published but not in Germany of course, because Jewish things didn't get published in Germany. But they got published in other countries and played on the radio and, you know, he was very, very good. And he had these two things. I mean, music – and that's one of the reasons he married my second mother, you know, because she was a trained singer and she was very good at music. So, that fitted quite well.

So you said he was successful. What did he do in London then workwise? You said some of the ideas –

Well, believe it or not he started another factory. A big – which finished up very big. But he was too old by then to run the whole thing and so he hired a young refugee who wanted to extend himself a bit and have more freedom to boss other people around [laughs], and he was the sort of day-to-day manager, and he himself was the ideas man.

And what was it – what sort of factory? What was it?

It was the next step from what he'd had in Germany. [01:44:00] He always saw how one could use things and have new ideas about that. And of course, during the war there was a lot of possibility for that, and he had a lot of very good ideas which he then passed on to the new factory and they used it for whatever was necessary.

But was it still menswear? Menswear? Clothing. What was it?

Was it – what – let me think. No. He'd gone off clothing actually by the time – there were other things which were very useful to have in the war because they were imported and they didn't come, being in the war. So, he had to think up things he could think up by himself, you know, and he did that. But they were really things mainly to help with the war work.

Was he interned? Was he interned, your father?

Was he what?

Was he interned? Interned.

Interned?

Yeah.

No, because he was lucky. He was ill when they came. He was in bed and he was quite ill and they went away and never came back again [laughs]. I think the older people weren't interned as much. It's more the younger ones.

And tell me, so now you finished up in South Hampstead. You came back to London and you finished the school, yeah?

I finished the school.

And then what did you do from then onwards? [01:46:01]

[Sighs] What did I do from then onwards? I did a lot of different things, anything I could get because the thing is I needed the money and by being imaginative you could find work anywhere almost. I got all kinds of ghastly jobs [laughs]. One thing I got which wasn't ghastly – it was interesting because I love different languages. In particular, I love French and I thought, well I can only learn French in France, proper French, you know. I knew a lot of people in Paris but they usually spoke German or English or whatever, not proper French. So, I saw an advert for a family living in the depths of France in the country, saying they wanted somebody to teach their children English and look after them, you know. Because they think English was the future in the world and they didn't know any. So, I went for this job and I trotted around with the boys [laughs] and made them notice things and try to teach them English. But I learnt more French than they learnt English I'm sorry to say [laughs]. But the

older one was a bit cheeky. I didn't take to him very much. He said rude things, you know, but the little one I was in love with. [01:48:03] He was three years old and very intelligent and noticed everything. And so one day – he asked me the most terrible questions which were difficult to answer so, one evening he asked me, 'Why does in the waterfall, the water always fall downwards? Why does it never move upwards?' What do you say to that to a child of three, you know? So, I didn't quite know what to do and I sort of muffled but in the evening, I had to go and say goodnight to him and say prayers. They were very, very Catholic. And so, in the middle of all that he suddenly said, 'You know Miss,' – they called me Miss, you know, 'You know Miss, I have an idea. The water could also flow upwards.' And I say, 'No Patrice, I've told you it never, never flows upwards.' So, he said, '*Mais si, les petits si je veux.*' [laughs]. I thought, well that's a dirty one so I thought quickly how can I get that out of the way and I said, '*Well, il ne veut jamais.*' So, that was finished. But, you know, you have to be quick on the uptake with children [laughs]. But I missed him.

Was this after the war had ended?

Hmm?

When was this? After the war had finished when you went to France?

When I went to France?

Yeah, with this family.

Yes.

It was after the war had finished.

Half the..?

After the war.

Oh, after the war, oh sure, sure, absolutely. [01:50:00] You couldn't have gone during the war.

No, sure.

I mean, that wasn't possible.

Yes.

No, no, it was just after the War.

And Beate, did your family or you – when did you go back – did you go back to Berlin at all?

No.

Anyone go back?

No. Well, my father went back when it was all over because he wanted to get some of the money.

Yeah.

You know, [laughs] I mean, we needed the money.

And did he?

Oh, yes. Oh, my father, he got what he wanted [laughs]. He didn't get the full amount obviously, but he got enough to make it okay. He spent – he probably spent three or four months there just hanging around the right departments of everything and, you know, making a fuss about things. And my stepmother went once and she said she'll never go again.

Did they ever consider to go back?

No. No, none of them ever considered going back. In particular, my aunt Vera – have I mentioned her before? She was the younger daughter of Nina. And she– but she was a very different character. She liked women, she didn't like men [laughs], and she was very – how can I put it – she was [pause] – she was good at many, many subjects but not sciences. They were all things to do with Greek – she taught Greek among other things, so she taught us all about the Greek gods and that kind of thing, and she had that side of things, you know. [01:52:17] And she was determined to go back to Germany when it was over and, you know, when she saw what they'd really done she said, 'No, I can't do that. I mean, they're just not human any more.' You know, it's – so she stayed in America. She went to America. She got a thing where she could go to America but not to England, for some reason. I don't know which, I don't remember. But she taught in America all those years. And then she was determined at that time to go back to Germany when it was all over but once she'd seen what they'd really done she said, 'No. It's impossible. I can't go there.'

And what happened about your – you didn't tell us – to your grandmother, what happened to her?

She still died in Germany and she's buried in the German – our part of the German thing. I've got her picture there.

Yeah, we'll look at it.

Yeah.

So, she died before – when did she die?

Hmm?

Before the Holocaust? When did she die? In the wartime already?

No, no. She died before. Towards – fairly near the war. But –

What about any other family?

Hmm?

Did you lose any other family? Any other family who stayed behind in Germany?

Sorry, I'm not with you. **[01:54:01]**

Did you lose any other family?

Oh, did we lose any other family? I don't think so. As far as I remember we were very lucky. And they all managed to go somewhere, you know, when they went.

Okay.

No, none of them was actually on that terrible thing where they just got everybody and killed them, but there was one person that Vera loved who had been her teacher when she was younger, and who was again very upmarket for – and she was killed in – you know, in the worst possible way. And she was an old woman. I mean, there was no thing. And that was the last straw as far as Vera was concerned because she loved – I'm just –

Not now, not now. We'll look at it in a second.

Hmm?

Not now. We'll look at it in a second.

Yes, I just want to show you this.

Not now, not now because –

Oh, I see, of course [laughs].

In one second.

Okay.

Let's just find out – so you did this job in France and then what next? How did you end up studying in Birkbeck?

Well, I studied at Birkbeck in the evenings but I had daytime jobs to earn money because you didn't get money that way, you had to pay money [laughs].

And what did you study?

What did I –?

Study at Birkbeck.

At Birkbeck, well my main job was to study – as I said before – what's the word? **[01:56:02]**

Physics.

Physics. I wanted to do physics because I felt that physics was at the basis of all science which I still think it is. And on the other hand I didn't know any, you know, [laughs], and to start from scratch is quite difficult. But on the whole, I was all right because I was the only girl doing it so I was very noticeable and so everybody made an effort for me, to help me. And we always worked in couples, and so I had one man – there were only men – and me as one couple, but it was at a time when a lot of the men came back from the front and they wanted to – well, they felt they had to just go over the stuff because they couldn't remember everything and all that. So, I had that man who did all the work and I watched him, and then asked him questions about it, and that was all very nice and very easy. But on one time he couldn't come, he was ill. And there I was with all this gadgets of electronic stuff and – you

know, everywhere. Not having the first time what to do. So, they had sort of pictures where they told you how to put all things together but, I mean, I tried but I had no idea really. And suddenly, I felt a hand on my shoulder and a deep voice said, 'I would not switch that on if I were you,' [laughs]. [01:58:03] So I looked round and there was one of the old teachers who was due to retire soon, and he saw that I was completely out of my depth. And after that he always came and made sure I was all right, you see, [laughs]. So, being the only woman in the whole thing made it easier in that way in that I was very noticeable and everybody was trying to help.

And studying physics, what was your aim? What did you want to [overtalking 01:58:41]?

I wanted that as the basis for life, which in a way it is. Well, not so much now because there's lots of other things that one knows about but one didn't then.

And you ended up going into radiology, yeah?

Radiology was one way in which one could learn things about it, yes. But there were other things too but I wanted to do something also that would be useful, you know, and that obviously was very much used. And I finished in the end being in charge of that department in a hospital, big hospital.

Which hospital?

Hmm?

Which hospital?

They've just closed it down now. The big hospital – what's it called – they sold it because they needed the money [laughs].

Middlesex, Middlesex Hospital?

Middlesex, that's right. Some people called it *Yiddlesex* because there were so many Jewish doctors there, [laughs].

So you were heading the – what, the radiology department? [02:00:02]

I was head – but that was only part of my work. I mean, I learnt a lot about medicine as well and I learnt a lot about lots of things. I made a point of always finding out, you know, in every department.

So, you were a trailblazer as a woman in –?

Hmm?

You were a trailblazer as a woman in physics.

Oh yes, there was no other women doc – well, they were just beginning to have women doctors trained. But they weren't sort of ready yet.

And so what advice would you give to any women listening to this in their careers, based on your experience of being an only woman?

Oh, I see. Well, they were already aware that one could make a way if you were the only woman if you were competent and you made the main field sufficiently important [laughs]. It's true. You had to do it. It's all – the psychology is just as important as the rest [laughs].

You think it's still the same today?

Not to the same extent. In fact, in some ways the men feel hard done by now because women have taken over so much. And they're always complaining about it, you know.

So tell us, in the same time what happened to your sister please because that's when her painting career took off, didn't it? What happened post-war to your sister Eva?

She went to the school, you know, the school that was there for doing that, and she wasn't very impressed because she said they had different aims from her. [02:02:08] She was interested in the human beings that you were drawing and painting, and they were interested in what colours you were using. And she said that wasn't the point, you know, [laughs]. And so she didn't really – I mean, they all liked her there in the school but she didn't have the same aims and that always makes it more difficult of course. And so she went there to the end of the – she passed the exams and did everything that was required of her, but then she said, 'Right, now that's finished, now I can do it my way.' And then she started going to the other parts of London, the poor parts, and having a look at the people there. And she said, 'Well quite honestly, when I go back to Hampstead after having been there I...' – how did she put it – she had a very good way of expressing that, how different it was, you know, that you couldn't imagine that it was the same world. And of course, in that part where she was there were a lot of Jewish people, poor Jewish people, you know.

The East End of London.

Not the same with big houses and – you know. And she tried to help everybody who needed help and – for instance, these people – she helped a lot of the Black people who arrived and had nowhere to go because they were given the wrong impression that if they went to London everything would be open to her, you know. [02:04:07] But of course when they got there, there was nothing.

So she moved to the East End? She moved to live there, your sister?

She lived there.

Did she find – how did she find a room?

Yes, she – well, the first – she was in a – I wouldn't call it a room, it was underground. It was black and there weren't any windows and all that, and the man who went around and looked at all the places there were said, 'This is no good. Get out of there, this is not for living in.'

So she changed and stayed in the same house. She got on with the people who owned the house and went two floors up and stayed there [laughs]. And of course, that place didn't have a bathroom, didn't have – but it didn't worry her, you know. She had the baths in the place where – it was for the poor people, but that was clean and decent and she had that once a week and she was satisfied with that.

And what did your parents make of it? Or you, that she was – made this decision to – quite courageous decision to move to –?

Well, I said that she's now as good as grown up, she's looked at all the different functions that one can have as a grownup, and it's not my business to tell her what to do. Which I still think. But what we did arrange was – she then got this job – she got a job at Lyons' Corner House where they finished work just before twelve o'clock at night. [02:06:10] It started in the late afternoon, the shift she did and so she had the whole day to paint in. That's what she was really interested in, and the rest gave her enough money to just get by, you know. But she also found it very interesting, the different types of people she met there. Because there were lots of people who came from other countries and came through London and – how can I put it – she could meet all these different types of people whether they were from wherever, you know. They were very often Coloured and she found that very interesting. I mean, all these Black people who had been promised work when they got there –

Yeah, the Windrush generation.

Hmm?

Windrush generation.

Windrush, that's right. They came on this big boat, you know, and they were promised all kinds of things, and when they arrived there nobody even wanted to say hello to them, you know.

And she –

So she tried to help them and she found – I mean, she saw that this woman was pregnant and she was tottering around, you know, pregnant with nobody to help her, and so she got her a doctor and she got her everything that she needed, you know. And then she had the baby [laughs]. And she was with this guy in the hat who was an absolute pain because he was very likeable in that he was funny, but he didn't do a bit of work. [02:08:04] I mean, she did all the work and looked after the baby and everything, and he just went and played games and enjoyed himself, you know. And she had him for I think about three years, and then she got fed up with him and gave him the boot. And then she had somebody else. And she had two children with him and then she got enough of him. He did nothing for the children.

*He was a friend of your – we're going to look at it in a second, but she was a friend?
[Overtalking 02:08:45] in the painting was a friend of your sisters.*

Oh yes, yes. Oh yes, I knew them quite well, you know, and I gave Eva things. I gave Eva clothes for the woman and –

Did you find it interesting, the East End, did you find it – what did you think of going to Whitechapel and the East End?

Well, I just felt that [sighs] I can't put the world right, I'll be obviously helpful and nice to anybody I have contact with, and if it helps my sister then it helps her. So, that's the view I took.

But then she also – she went travelling. She went to Israel, your sister.

That was much, much later.

Okay.

Much later. I mean, she first had to earn enough to go to Israel [laughs].

And did she think of staying in Israel? Did she think of emigrating?

No. She found Israel interesting but she didn't like the way they were too pleased with themselves. [02:10:03] Because she got there maybe at the wrong time when they were having – they were marching along the streets and singing songs of 'We are wonderful,' you know, and all that, and she didn't like that at all. And she said, 'I'm not surprised if the Arabs who are the other side of the wall, if they come to see – that they come and start shooting into the crowd,' but they didn't, so she was lucky in that one. But she had quite a few friends in Israel by that time and she found it interesting, you know, and she painted a lot. And all her paintings got stolen, all the ones she did in Israel.

What happened to them?

Hmm?

What happened to them, the paintings?

The paintings, they were all stolen. Because she got an empty room to paint in so if it was messy it didn't matter, and somehow some evening or very early in the morning somebody must have broken in and all the paintings had disappeared. That's very annoying [laughs] but, you know, she wasn't careful enough. She should have put a lock on the door or something. No, she wasn't – she didn't think ahead sufficiently, you know, she didn't think as a total. But she has helped – she did help a lot of people who needed it so, you know, it's – I mean, she – and, you know, I'm not sure that she actually committed suicide. [02:12:08] I have a feeling she didn't. I have a feeling that there was something that was there, that got in the way. I mean, there was – I mean, I had arranged a flat for her and I talked to the owner of the flat and I said, 'Look, I'll pay you in advance for that many months,' you know, and all that, which she was happy about, and – [pause] I tried to make – get her this nice flat in London, not – so she wouldn't have to live in that sort of thing. And she seemed quite pleased with that. And I got her some furniture. I mean, not posh but furniture, and I don't know why it went so wrong but what happened was that somehow – I think there was a mistake somewhere. I didn't judge things quite right because she shouldn't have done that, and I'm

not sure that she did it. That it wasn't something that happened, that there was – because there was a lot of problems at that time with gas and it could have been that it wasn't on purpose. [02:14:01] I have a feeling it wasn't. Because what happened was that the neighbour from underneath, an elderly lady who had my keys of that flat, she rang me up and she said – she told me about that she'd – she was ill, you know, and could I come? And, what's more, the – you know, that people who worked in hospitals, if they thought somebody had committed suicide, they hated them. They weren't kind about it. They thought here we are trying to get people healthy and they just kill themselves, you know. I mean, they went around saying that. And then of course I had to tell my parents and take them to the hospital, and I must say that I admire my father's courage. I mean, he adored her. And he talked to the doctor and he said, 'Do you think she can come round?' And he said, 'Yes, there's a possibility she can come round, but if she does, she'll be mentally...' – you know, forever. And so, my father said, 'No. That's no good.' So, he said, 'It's better she dies than get into that state.' So, that was that. But it was very, very hard for everybody. And it could have been gas. [02:16:03] I mean, there was gas there, you know, in that room and it could have been that that actually – because a lot of people had problems with gas. You know, not being healthy. And so that was that and –

I mean, do you –

So after that I took over all her stuff and her – made sure that everything got published and paintings on people's walls, and –

So you took over the legacy of –

Yeah.

Of her.

That's right.

Of the paintings.

And so that was that.

But Beate, did you feel – I mean, you don't know but do you feel her emigration – that she had suffered from this displacement? I mean...

[Pause] It's hard to say. She was too young to really think of things rationally, you know.

You know, a small child can pick up things.

I mean, she cared for the fact that we got a new mum, you see. That was the important thing for her [laughs]. Not the fact that – these other things, they were too far away I think. She was too young to think in these terms.

Yeah. So, for you, when you took over her legacy what was important for you in terms of –?

Well –

The paintings and her own work?

Yes, I wanted her paintings to be understood, like this for instance, and there were – yes. [Sighs] I can't quite explain it but I felt I had to do something, you know. [02:18:07] I just couldn't just leave it and so I thought well, the best way I can do things is to make people appreciate her paintings and understand what's at the bottom of them. Helping poor people. And they're good people as well. They're ordinary, you know, but just as good as she and I are. Just because they've got a Black face and no money doesn't make them worse people, you know. So, I tried to push that, that people understood from the pictures. But of course, things never finish up the same way as you think [laughs]. I mean, this picture I haven't given to anybody else, you know, they're not allowed to take it off the wall [laughs]. And yet she has one or two better pictures which were – I mean, these pictures wouldn't speak to everybody. They would speak to some – a certain type of person, you know, but not that. I

made a book about her work, about her and her work, which I've got a copy of which you can have if you want [laughs]. And that was a lot of work that book [laughs]. What else?

And do you feel she got the recognition she deserved today?

Hmm?

Do you feel she got the recognition she deserves today? Do you feel she got the recognition?

[02:20:04]

It's not she deserves it, but – it's very hard to explain that. It's all I could do for her. And I loved her. And I thought she was a good person. And so I felt I was doing the right thing, you know.

But do you feel that, let's say, the museums in Britain, they took an interest in her work?

Not at the time.

No.

Not at all. They do now. Now they fall on the floor just to get a glimpse of it, you know. But

–

So what changed? What changed?

Hmm?

What changed?

Oh yes, but that happens very often.

So that's partly because of your work because you –

Oh, yes. Oh, I think it was necessary to do that, you know, but – absolutely necessary. I mean, I – even in her lifetime some of her paintings were borrowed for exhibitions, you know, but temporary ones. And I helped her with that in a way but they were – it wasn't that nobody liked any of her pictures. It wasn't like that, but it was not the standard to which it was and how much feeling there was in them and all this kind of thing. There were exhibitions all over the place, you know, and they always asked to borrow this picture or that picture or – and I had to give it to them. [02:22:10] And there was a lot of paperwork to do which, you know, was a fulltime job. And then while it wasn't being shown at any place in particular, I had it upstairs in my loft, and I kept it in a very good condition and wrapped it up with things, and they look as if they were done yesterday, you know. And they're still there and they get borrowed every now and then. Now those people borrow it, you know, and I told – what's come over them suddenly, you know, what's happened? And now they make it sound as if they've always been like that, you know, they always thought they were – it was wonderful [laughs], but it wasn't.

And did she see herself as a British painter? How did she – or – because it's interesting. Is she a British painter? A German/British painter? How would you classify her? Or how did she see herself?

How did –?

How did she see herself? Did she see herself as a British painter, German/British painter, Jewish painter?

She didn't think about that. She wasn't particularly interested in that aspect of things.

And you? How would you – when people now describe her, are you bothered by this?

I am just trying to think what I think [laughs]. It's not something I sit and think about, you know. I think all this, which country it's from, is of no interest as far as I'm concerned.

[02:24:07] What matters is the picture. And whether you say she's a German painter or an

English painter, it's all of absolutely no interest as far as I'm concerned. What matters is the picture is like and what it tells you and what – you know. Do you understand that?

Yeah.

Yes, yeah.

Yeah.

Good.

Some people like to see themselves in a tradition of, you know, you could say.

Hmm?

Well, some people probably would interpret and say it's sort of – it could be expressionist or could see some links or –

Yes, yes.

I don't know, but –

Yes, but from her point of view that was neither here nor there.

Yeah.

She thought of humanity, you know, and not – and whether they were Black or not and needed help and – I mean, my parents found it quite difficult to see her living in such a state because it wasn't necessary. We had enough money, you know, they could have made it easier for her. But she didn't want it.

She made a choice.

She didn't want it, no. She wanted to share their way of life.

Their fate, yeah.

Yes, and of course she earned enough money – she did the evening shift so she finished at twelve o'clock at night, but she started late, and so she had the whole day to paint. And that in itself was very important to her.

Yeah. And now coming back to you Beate, tell us about – you got married, you married.

I married, yes.

Yeah, and who was your husband and how did you meet him?

[Laughs] Oh, how did I meet him? **[02:26:01]** [Pause] I met him through work. I met him at one of the jobs I had. He was a much more senior person there than I was. I was quite young but it was a job, you know, and quite interesting actually. And I met him there. And he was always very nice to me. I liked that [laughs]. You know, he didn't just treat me like this stupid child but if I produced some good work, then he congratulated me and he was nice. He understood that – [laughs] and on one occasion we always took turns to work Saturdays when officially one didn't work. But there was a certain job that needed doing six days a week. And I didn't usually function in that very much but on one occasion he couldn't do it and so he asked me, was I prepared to come in on a Saturday morning and deal with this problem. So, I said, 'Yes, of course.' So [laughs], I came in and I did everything and then later he came in and – oh no, he – wait a minute, was it – he – oh yes, I know. He put a very nice looking apple on one of the gadgets that I had to use, and so I said what was this apple doing, you know? He said, 'Well, I didn't want you to feel lonely,' [laughs]. I thought that was very funny [laughs]. I mean, he had little idea of what all this meant, you know, but he did think of other people, you know, he cared about other people. **[02:28:04]** And to think – he thought me, poor little girl having to come to work on Saturday morning, you know, when she works all the week, and so he put an apple there [laughs]. I mean, he was strange in some

ways but he didn't have any children so he couldn't sort of see, you know, what he should have done [laughs].

And what was his background?

His background from home?

Yeah.

Well he –

You said he was –

He – as I say, he was Russian and he came from a well-to-do family, and very much into art and – I mean, they kept going to concerts and to all kinds of exhibitions and – you know, he was trained that that's a very important part of life. And so, he thought for a bit that he would become a painter. He was good at painting. He had painting lessons from a painter, and he thought he'd become a painter. And it was only when he was here and he saw the really good things, he said, 'No, it's not...' – his standard isn't up to that [laughs]. I mean, he was quite self-critical. And his family were – well, they were rather different from him. He had a younger brother, much younger, and while he was much into art, his brother was entirely into making money. [02:30:02] But not in a nasty way. He gave a lot of it away to poor people or other things. But it gave him pleasure to make money [laughs], and he bought us the house so that was quite good. We couldn't have afforded it.

So when did you move here to Highgate? How many years ago?

Into this house?

Yeah.

[Pause] Well, houses weren't finished actually so it's a long time ago.

In the fifties or – when did you get married, do you remember?

I've lost –

Okay, don't worry.

I've lost time [laughs].

It doesn't matter. So, you've lived here in Highgate for a long time.

Yes, I've lived here for a long – but it's changed completely here. It used to be much nicer, from my point of view. The people we had were much nicer, much friendlier. When I first moved in, we had – again, once all the houses were occupied, the men were nearly all people who built houses and the women made the thing work. And there were three of us, three women. We each had a job to do here, to make sure everything ran perfectly and went well. And we were very friendly and we went out together in the evening for dinner or anything, you know, but there were no – now, what are they called – the things that you can't live without now. [02:32:04] Everybody has them now except me.

Telephones, mobile phones?

Hmm?

Mobile phones, mobile telephones.

No, no, but you're getting nearer.

Computers.

Computer. You can't live without a computer now. Well, you didn't have computers then. You were – you had personal relationships with people, and nowadays you don't because –

You don't need to any more.

You understand what I mean?

Yeah.

Yes. But the first sort of years when I was – for instance, I was – I had to make sure that the roads were done properly here, I had to get people in and find out how much it costs and I did the whole thing. And then the other lady who lived the other end, she's dead now, she was very good at money affairs and she dealt with all that side. I told her, 'It's going to cost that much, can you see if that's all right?' And she dealt with all that. You know, it was a personal relationship.

You had a community here, a little community.

A community. A proper community. The men weren't so much involved. They all had their jobs and they were the people who built the houses, but there was one who got quite famous. He came via Germany and he'd never actually built anything. But he learnt at the school that he went to how one build things, and he came here and he was going to build everything, you know. And he was a funny little man, and he built things in a way but not the English way. [02:34:05] I mean, not the German way, he had his own way of building things but they weren't really – I mean – sorry, I'm –

Yeah, don't worry.

It's very difficult to explain. You may have come across his name because he got famous later.

What is his name?

Not while he was building things here. He never built them, you see, he just learnt on paper how you build a house. And so –

Because they're quite modernist? Modern – they're quite modern houses?

That's right. Quite.

Yeah.

And so he thought he knew all about it and he was a specialist and he was going to this, that, and the other. And we didn't think so [laughs], and so we stood against him. And so, he took us to court and so that was quite ticklish. And so, my husband represented us all on the court and won. Just about, by the skin of his teeth, and the judge said, 'Well, you've been lucky, you got away with it this time but be careful. It may not happen the second time,' you know. But my husband was good at making people laugh. He was very good at – if you make people laugh in court then you're doing very well [laughs], and that's what he did. They were laughing.

So this one man wanted to change the houses or he wanted to build another house or what?

No. He – oh yes, well he – his wife had died and he had a little boy, and he was going to marry another woman who'd offered. [02:36:01] And she had seven children already [laughs], so the house wasn't big enough. They each needed bedrooms and bathrooms and everything, and so he said, 'Well –,' he was the person who made the drawing for it and it's his business what goes on after. And we said, 'No, what the hell? I mean, we've paid for these houses and bad luck. Find yourself somebody else, somewhere else,' and so that started this fuss. I mean, we wouldn't have gone to court but he was, you know, one of these sort of very aggressive types. A small man. When they're small they're more aggressive usually [laughs]. And anyway, so in the need he had to go but he did very well out of it because he started himself a new career. You may have seen the books that have come out, I have them, where he now helps people who build their own houses, but they need help. And he of course, can do that. And he has ideas about how to improve this and make that better. He

doesn't have to do it, but it's – he can see it from what he's learnt, you know. And so he's become quite famous and there's all these books that he publishes, you see, so I don't feel bad about having chucked him out.

So this is your – you consider –

[Break in recording]

Yeah, so we were talking about living in Highgate. So, do you consider this your home here?

[Pause] I don't know [laughs]. [02:38:00] I don't know. In a way not because the people aren't friendly, you know. I mean, I have one or two that I've – I mean, [inaudible] you saw, he's very nice, but again he has to get on with all the other people and, you know, so he has to do this, you know. He likes me but, I mean, we have a common background as he only came to England when he was grown up and he went to one of the colleges, and then from there married and stayed so he's on two planes. I have one very good friend who funnily enough turned out to be completely Jewish but never told me. [Laughs] I found out by myself that she was 100% Jewish in every possible way. She only ate kosher food, her children were in Jewish schools –

But you didn't know that.

Hmm?

You didn't know it?

I didn't know it and I felt always there was something peculiar about her, but she never let on. Very, very strange. And I don't know why she didn't, but I think she thought there was nothing special about it. But now I know, you know, it's –

And Beate, in terms of Jewish identity is that important for you today? In terms of Jewish identity, do you –?

Yes and no. [02:40:01] I mean, I – much less important to me than it is to some people I come across to whom it's the centre of the world. It isn't. I think there are other good people in other parts of the world and they're no worse as people, you know. So, I'm not so single-minded about it. Obviously, as I am Jewish, I like being Jewish [laughs], and I like helping Jewish people when I have money and they haven't and all this kind of thing, you know. And also, in teaching them things which they're keen to learn, but I know and they don't. And they're all kinds of – it's not a straightforward thing, but certainly I'm not one of the Jewish people who think only Jewish people matter. And there are plenty of those around [laughs].

Hmm-mm. And how would you describe yourself? In terms of your identity today how would you describe yourself?

I've never thought about describing myself [laughs]. I don't describe myself.

I mean, do you consider yourself British?

[Pause] No. But I don't consider I'm German either [laughs]. I'm not anything. I'm just a person who lives in the world [laughs].

You don't like labels. You don't need any labels.

No, I don't think so. I think I go by individual situations. [02:42:02] And if I like people, if they're Jews or not Jews, that isn't the point. I like them and I think they're decent people, and so that's that. And if they happen to be Jewish, that's fine, and I'm pleased that there's nice Jewish people about, and if they happen not to be Jewish it's all right too.

I mean, you didn't find that you were – for you it – you were drawn to other emigres or other refugees? Did you find you were in your life in terms of friends or – that you were drawn to other people with a similar background to you? I mean, you said your parents lived in an area where there were lots of refugees.

Hmm-mm.

But for you, was that important at all, in your life to meet people – let's say for example, you know, some years ago they started the Kindertransport reunion. Was that something you would be interested in? To meet other people –

I have friends who were on the *Kindertransport*, in fact we telephone quite a lot. She's too far away to actually come and see me now because she tends to fall over, but – in fact, we phoned yesterday and she was – I mean, she lost all her family in – they were all killed by the Nazis, and she came on her own, you know. She was on that transport. And she came to school with me, so she's a good friend. But it's not because she's Jewish or because –

Yeah.

You know, I mean- I like other people too [laughs]. [02:44:01]

And Beate, is it something – did you talk about the past with your husband or with other – you have a niece – with other people? Did you talk about –?

Well, it depends with whom. But the interesting thing is that in my family nearly everybody's born here. I'm so old, you see, that I don't fit into the pattern. And they don't know any- not a German word. And that I find a bit irritating because I like the German language and I like the German poetry, and I like – you know, it's – I mean, English one too but I don't forget German poetry for instance. When I'm lying in bed it comes in my head, you know.

Really?

Yeah.

Like what, like what?

Well, we learnt all that from the school of my aunt who had this – she started a Jewish school, you know, after one had to have a school, which was quite a small school, but she was completely enraptured by German poetry, by German music, by many German things.

And this stayed with you, the poetry.

Yes. As well.

Yeah.

Not – I mean, as well. I mean, the world is a bigger place and there are more people with different ideas, and you ought to encompass them all if they're decent people.

Yeah.

And if they produce wonderful work like [02:46:03] – I don't know, like – I have to laugh about that one because I'll show you their picture. It's not a picture of –

Not yet, not yet.

Hmm?

We can't move yet.

Oh, [overtalking 02:46:20].

Soon, soon.

Well, there is – that white piece there is the time when all Bach family were musicians. And it's that number. They absolutely – and yet, one only knows about the one. And I especially cut that out because I thought that's very, very strange, you know, that it's only one in all that hundreds of the people who do music. So, I kept it as a sort of joke, but it's true. I mean,

nobody thought anything of Johann Sebastian Bach when he was alive. He had a terrible life, really difficult life. And yet now, if you just say the word, you know, then everybody goes like that [gesture of veneration].

Yeah.

Things change.

But can you remember a poem you can recite, a German poem, anything?

Oh, I probably do but I have to lie in bed for that [both laugh].

We won't follow you upstairs.

[Laughs].

Anything comes to mind now?

Well, I do remember some of the poetry that we learnt in the German school. It was a Jewish school but – [02:48:02]

Yeah, come on, anything you can think of now?

Oh, I can't. I can't do it now because I need to think about it.

Yeah, don't worry.

I learnt a lot of poetry but I can't –

How about your German? Do you –?

Yes, in German. German poetry.

How is your German today? Do you use it? Do you speak German?

Sometimes when I lie in bed. If there's a poem I particularly like, then I say it to myself. But all these things are never seen or viewed by or thought about by anybody that isn't me in bed [laughs].

I understand.

I don't discuss it with other people, you know.

No.

No, I think you can't forget your early life. And if you're lucky, you remember some of the good things about it, but you can't forget it completely. And so I think your first life stays with you like I remember my first mother. You know, she was beautiful and intelligent and she loved my father and they loved each other. You know, they had a wonderful – we did the wedding – we went at the back of the wedding with little – you know, and that was a wonderful thing, you know, because there was – the weddings now, they're terrible. Do you know – have you been to any? And do you like them? They give me the creeps [both laugh].

Beate, I wanted to ask you, so in terms of what impact do you think did your experience have on your life? The experience of leaving Berlin.

I have no idea. I think it's 50/50. [02:50:01] Certainly, German things had an impact, without any doubt. And some English things too but, I mean, I wasn't happy to move into a house that didn't have any heating for instance [laughs]. One couldn't relax, you know. I mean, they're all kinds of different things and I love those trees with the green and that poor – in the winter it's completely bare and I can't bear that. I become happy when this greenery is in the garden and flowers and things going on. Nice things.

Yeah.

Does that mean anything to you?

Yeah.

Have you seen my garden? Through the window.

Little bit, yeah.

Yes. I love my garden. Love my garden. And I can't do everything myself obviously but I do most of it although I haven't got the strength, you know, now. I am very old [laughs], and people don't believe me. They say, 'But you can't walk if you're that old,' you know. I say, 'Well, what?' [Laughs] You know, go by facts rather than fancy ideas you've got.

Yeah.

I mean, for instance, I hear all this stuff about the money I give to the people who sent me the things. [02:52:02] It's all- I mean, every time they write me a thank you letter which is completely unnecessary because I have it every time, but for some reason one's got to write a thank you letter, you know. And that money is used – apparently, they tell me – for old people like me, old people who eat kosher food that gets moved round, you know, on trolleys, and as if that is in itself a reason to live. But to me that isn't. There's a lot more to it than that.

Beate, do you sometimes think what would have happened to you if you hadn't had to leave Germany? Do you sometimes think what life would have been if you'd stayed in Berlin? If Hitler hadn't come.

Well, that is assuming there'd be no Nazis.

Yes, assuming –

Oh, that you can't –

Yes, assuming [overtalking 02:53:16].

Yes [laughs]. Well, I think my Aunt Vera and my second stepmother who's- her older –

Sister.

Sister – have done pretty well until the Nazis came. I mean, they were fully German in their attitude –

In terms of your profession. Do you think you would have become a physicist?

Perfection, yes. That everything had to be done properly.

No, profession I meant.

Profession.

In terms of your profession. [02:54:03] Would you have become a physicist do you think? In Germany.

Did I or didn't I? I'm not sure [laughs]. No, I like to understand things always and my father was like that too. And that doesn't really matter whether you're in England or in Germany. Physics is physics, you know, [laughs].

So you think you would have chosen a similar career path?

I am more similar to my father I think. I've also practised violin a lot and although I had no need to but I love playing the violin and I played all kinds of things with other people there and I played all over the place. And I think I have a lot of my father. And I'm also as obstinate. I wouldn't – I mean, like he didn't want to stay at school when he hated the school. I'd be the same. But I wasn't in schools that I hated on the whole, so it didn't arise.

Okay. Beate, I know you wanted to add a story which we didn't touch upon.

Hmm?

You wanted to add now one story you told me, about the lady who married Goebbels.

Oh, yes, yes, yes.

So let's do that now because we're at the end of the interview.

Yes. I mean, it's complicated, long – there was a lot going on there. So, the person who married Goebbels – well, it's a long story really. You won't want to hear the whole lot but – how can I make it short and sweet? **[02:56:04]** She lived more or less with my family, with the females in my family. There weren't any males at that time. And she was nice and she was very good-looking, and she got all the clothes that my family grew out of and it was good quality clothes and, you know, she had the best of everything because of us. And she appreciated that. But then something very strange happened. When she was – it was considered adult but she probably wasn't adult up here [points to her head], she felt she ought to leave us and go out into the world. So, she tried to find somewhere where she could make that true. And she – there was a man who had lost his wife and he had two sons, and he was looking for a woman for the household. And she applied for that, and it all seemed perfectly fine until Goebbels turned up in the household and fell for her. And she didn't really fall for him. She just went on doing her job. **[02:58:01]** And he sort of kept on at her, you know, he kept on and on and on and on. And then Hitler got involved because he felt that Goebbels ought to have a wife because he wanted to be able to have people from abroad that he could entertain. And he of course didn't have a wife and would never have one and so he thought Goebbels would be a good person if he had the right wife and could entertain and so on and so on. And she for some reason was stupid enough to fall for this because they made a big fuss about her and, you know, she was very young and – so she fell for it and married him when he asked her. And she came to hate him afterwards, absolutely loathe him, but Hitler wouldn't allow that they divorce 'cos it makes a bad impression on the outside, you know.

And so all she did at first, tried to keep in touch with us, and she always as I said, sent flowers to my mother. My sister's birthday she remembered every year, and wonderful bouquets of flowers, you know. And obviously Goebbels didn't like that and in the end stopped her. She did it for several years and then of course she came to hate Goebbels and Hitler and the whole lot of them. [03:00:04] Of course, she was fairly intelligent, you know, when she grew up but it was too late, she was stuck in it. And the thing I found so sad which I saw on the radio, when they all killed themselves, you know, in the end, she poisoned her six children and then poisoned herself. I thought that was terrible, really terrible.

And you knew her.

Hmm?

You knew her. You remember – you knew her.

Oh yes, but we didn't in any way have any business with her any more. I mean, that was finished. We didn't see them, they didn't see us.

I understand, but she grew up with you – is it your stepmother? Who did she grow up with, this woman? With your stepmother?

Yes.

You said with your family, who exactly? Who was she with? You said she lived with your family.

Oh yes, when she was still a girl, you know, when she wasn't yet grown up. And she wanted to go to a good school and so she went to the same school as my family, and she got their clothes that they'd finished with because they'd outgrown them.

Was she an orphan or was she a refugee, or what was she?

No, she had a very unhappy life. She – oh yes, and one of the people was Jewish in this, which everybody hated [laughs] because he was – they tried to get rid of him and find him a job to go somewhere else, and – I don't know. [03:02:07] There was a whole palaver. I can't really do it in a few words, you know, it was a very complicated situation. I mean, it was – when the Germans marched in there, anybody German had to get out and so she was with the German mother and so they had to get out and they had to go to Germany.

In the First World War?

In the First World War, yeah. And – yes, First World War, that's right. And the whole thing was very complicated and I don't think you need it in your thing [laughs].

No, we don't need it but what an interesting story.

Hmm?

What an interesting story. This is a very interesting –

Oh, oh yes, oh, there's lots more stuff. I mean – and the way she came to hate Goebbels, you couldn't have hated anybody more, you know. And he didn't care as long as she stayed with him.

And they had six children.

He liked to have a lot of children and so he made it up – he made it – he was around and made her have children, more children than she wanted actually [laughs]. And then in the end, she had to kill them all, you know. I mean, the whole thing was ghastly, absolutely ghastly but, you know, there are people who make life ghastly and the Goebbelses of this world and the Hitlers do it. And in a way- they're not all at fault because what – in the First World War what they should have done is to have been generous with having lost, you know, and given them something instead of leaving them in this complete – they were starving, you know. [03:04:19]

Yeah.

I mean, my father said what they had to do, is they gave them bread which was wet in the morning I think, and something in the evening, coffee in the evening or something, because it would have been already gone otherwise. And they were starving, the Germans, literally. And they were asking for it. Hitler promised them things which he didn't keep [laughs], but they believed him, you know.

But speaking of politics, do you have a message for anyone who might watch this interview? Do you have a message based on your experiences?

I don't think so because I think my experiences are not typical, and nobody else could make use of them. To start with I'm different from everybody else [laughs], but not only, my life has been so different from everybody else and my age is so different from everybody else. Still doing things. I'm sort of a person of one, you know. It wouldn't work with anybody else.

Okay, but two just last minute, do you still consider yourself a refugee?

Sorry?

Do you consider yourself a refugee? You, today, would you still consider yourself a refugee?

That's a good question. **[03:06:00]** I don't know [pause]. I think sort of half [laughs]. One can't have it as a – I am a refugee, without any question, but I've been here long enough now and have made enough friends and relationships and schooling and everything else that I can't be all together a refugee, you know. I'm a half refugee [laughs].

And my very last question, I have to ask you this because you have my name with Beate, you never thought of changing your name because obviously Beate is not an English name?

No, no, I would not change it. Not under any circumstances. That is my name [laughs]. My name is Beate, but nobody seems to mind that, the fact that it's not a name they have here. When they say, 'Oh, what sort of a name is that?' and all that, you know, I say, 'Well actually, it's not common in England at all. People don't call their children Beate. On the other hand, in the centre of Europe it's quite usual so there's lots of Beates. So, you know, it depends where you live.' And I explain it like that [laughs].

Hmm-mm. And it doesn't bother you if people then ask, 'Oh, where are you from?' or that sort of question?

Do they ever ask me that, by now?

Do they? I don't know.

[Pause] No, I don't think they do. They take me for granted as living here. But, I mean, the thing that makes things complicated is that all the rest of my younger family are born here. [03:08:05] They don't know a word of German and don't want to. And they take it for granted that I must fit in with them, and I don't fit in with people, you know, [both laugh] necessarily.

So what message have you got for them then, in this case [both laugh]?

But you see what I mean, it is sometimes quite difficult to live in a family who think they're looking after you. That's their idea. I don't feel they're looking after me and I don't feel I need looking after. I can look after myself [laughs]. But it's more the Jewish thing that is a problem because, I mean, I have Jewish friends here and they go and eat their kosher food and that's fine by me, but I don't particularly like kosher food so, you know, we have our differences but in a friendly sort of way.

But why is it a problem? Why do you say it's a problem? The Jewish thing.

Well, I don't think there is a problem. I don't feel there's a problem. I think between people there will always be some problems, between all people, because they're each different people and they think in different ways, and they worry in different ways, and they behave in different ways. So, it's not just – it's not what I think. [03:10:00] It doesn't matter, you know, it's – [laughs] I mean, I sometimes take sides with people. For instance, I have one friend, she's a relative but I was particularly fond of her, and she lived not very far from me and we saw each other all the time. And she then got moved and got a flat in the other end of London so I hardly saw her at all, and what's more, she found herself a boyfriend with whom – who's moved in, and so that's a very close thing. But he's not Jewish and with her family that is a great – you know, I mean, once you're married, you're – if you marry – it's a very dodgy situation for her. And so, what she's done, she's very clever – apparently, there is a course you can take which teaches you about what Judaism is. I don't know, you may know about that. And she's put him on that because he's intelligent and he likes to understand things, and he knows that she's Jewish and he isn't, and what is the situation, you know. So, that's quite interesting. So, he goes to the course so he understands where she comes from, but doesn't – so far, nobody has said that he's going to turn Jewish. [03:12:02] So, I don't – but there are more and more people who insist that – we have one of them here, has just turned up, who will not marry people who are not Jewish. And he made her take lessons from the – you know, the people, and she said – they weren't very happy about it. They didn't really want her to come three times a week and ask them about these things because they're quite busy and if you're not Jewish, well, you're not Jewish, you know. But no, in the end she gave in and she did the whole lot and she learnt it all by heart, and now he's married her [laughs]. And the question is, what happens with the children? They have two small children. What are they? Are they Jewish? Are they not Jewish, you know? Are they – it's quite tricky. And I'm told – I don't know if that's true, that this sort of thing has become much more common. Have you heard about that?

I don't know, but it's not a problem for you? You don't have a problem with it?

No, [laughs]. Yes, well, I mean, I like everybody to be happy. I don't like to criticise anybody and, you know, but it does to me sound ludicrous to force somebody to become Jewish by

these means in order to get married to somebody they love. It doesn't make sense to me.

Okay?

No. I think Beate we are – this was – your interview was very long. Is there anything else we haven't discussed you'd like to add which I haven't asked you? [03:14:03]

I don't know. I mean, there are lots of other things that happened in the time which we haven't discussed.

Yes.

And – oh yes, I mean, for instance that what happens to his parents. They got killed by the Nazis.

Whose parents?

The male side of the marriage.

Of which marriage?

Well, there was – I tried to make it clearer – there were – oh yes, I read that actually in a book but then I met the people in reality. [Pause] How can I explain it? This [pause] – I mean, Jewish people are usually quite touchy, you know. They like to be looked at properly and not – they mind if the people round them don't take them for full. And so, they try to be always to be better than the others. I don't know if you've noticed that. At everything. I mean, for instance, science, a lot of the best scientist are Jewish and they work very, very hard, and I don't know if that's a natural thing or whether they feel they have to make up for something, you know. [03:16:04]

Yeah.

There are things like that. I mean, they're all kinds of things which are not yet straightforward. You see what I mean?

Hmm-mm.

And of course, the people who are not so clever at the science as these people who are very clever and make use of it, the people who are not as clever dislike them for being so clever. And that is a bad thing, you know, but there are all kinds of things underground that aren't so easily just spun out like that [laughs]. You see what I mean?

Yeah.

Okay?

Okay, but I think we should finish now.

Yeah, okay, okay.

We're going to just briefly look at some of your photos.

Hmm?

So thank you so much for this interview.

Hmm-mm.

And spending time with us and sharing your story.

Well, you can leave out what you think is too much [laughs]. It's easy enough isn't it, to leave it out?

Okay, thank you.

You only show what you want to show. Hmm?

One second.

Oh, I see [pause].

Can you please tell me who do we see on the photo? Who is on the photo? Who is on that photo you're showing us? [03:18:00]

My grandmother.

And what's her name?

Caroline and I can't think of the second name at the moment.

And she took care of you and your siblings.

She came every day from the centre of Berlin to our place which was outside, and did things for us, and taught us things, and took us to places, and she really was a second mother, you know, in many ways.

Thank you.

And of course, at the same time she could visit her daughter who was in bed, which we weren't allowed to see 'cos she was too ill [pause].

Yes please, who is on the photo Beate?

Hmm?

Who is on this photo?

Eva.

And how old is she here roughly, fourteen, fifteen?

Oh, she'd left school I think by then, that time. Let me just look. Yes, because she's got her hair up and she had long hair before.

Okay [pause]. Yes please, who is on this photo?

Hmm?

Who is on that photo?

I am.

And how old are you roughly here?

Oh, getting on. I mean, I was very grown up, working, and having my hair done. [03:20:01]
That was a thing once every so often. That was a joke with my husband [laughs]. And I would have been about – early twenties.

Not married yet? You were not married?

No, but we knew each other. We were working in the same place.

So how old were you when you got married?

Oh, heaven knows. More towards later in the twenties.

Okay. Yes, who is in this photo please?

Hmm?

Who do we see on the photo?

My husband.

And what was his name please?

Of course [laughs]. [Sighs]. Leonti Planskoy.

Thank you.

They learn a lot of things, you know.

Who do we see Beate, what do we see on this photo?

Hmm?

What can we see on this photo?

What can you see on this photo? Well, what you can see is – twelve was our number. The other one, the twenty-four, is their number. But people come and ask, ‘Why have you got these two numbers for the one house?’ And so, then they explain to them what’s behind it and why it is like that, and they tell them about the Nazis. Because they don’t know. The Germans don’t know about the Nazis.

And your name is on it, your parent’s name is on it, your siblings names is on it.

Yeah, and they say, ‘If you can get them to ask questions, why is this and why is that, then they learn something.’ [03:22:06]

And there’s a special plaque for your sister. There’s a special plaque for your sister.

Yes, I did that because I wanted – later on I wanted them to realise that she was something quite exceptional. Although people didn't realise it at the time, it will come one day. And it has come.

Thank you very, very much again for this interview Beate [pause].

Well, I think it's quite apropos. There was a World War 2 so, you know, he was perspicacious to think of it before. That there were –

[03:23:08]

[End of transcript]