

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Flesch
Forename:	Ernst
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	20 June 1928
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

Date of Interview:	11 November 2006 and 25 June 2007
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Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
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**REFUGEE VOICES:
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE**

INTERVIEW: 137

NAME: ERNST FLESCH

DATE: 8 NOVEMBER 2006

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 4 seconds

BL: Today is the 8th of November 2006. We are conducting an interview with Mr Ernst Flesch. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.

BL: Today is the 8th of November 2006. We are conducting an interview with Mr Ernst Flesch. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. Can you tell me your name please?

EF: Ernst Flesch.

BL: Do you have any other names?

EF: No.

BL: Where were you born please?

EF: In Vienna – Austria.

BL: And when?

EF: On the 20th of June, 1928.

BL: Mr Flesch thank you for having agreed to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. Could you tell us something about your family background please?

EF: Well, we were a very ordinary family. Both my father and my mother were part of large families – like they had brothers and sisters. I was the only one though, am the only one. And we lived in Vienna, very modestly, because in those days lots of people in Vienna lived with one room and a kitchen. We did, for a time anyway, until a couple of years before the Anschluss, where we got a nicer flat, slightly larger with an actual inside toilet, not on the landing. There's a story attached to that. On the Kristallnacht an SS man came in, had a good look, and had a go at my mother. And went out again. It turned out he wanted our flat and he got it. When I came back, in '48, for the first time to Austria there was hardly anything left of that block at all, a

few bricks and I was very pleased to see it. But that's our background, in the 10th district, which is a very rough area, not terrible but, you know, working class area. And my father was the secretary of the synagogue there.

BL: What was the name of the synagogue?

EF: Humboldt Tempel.

BL: And what sort of neighbourhood was it, the 10th district?

EF: Oh, very working class in general, though the part where we were a lot of working class people lived in council blocks, but we didn't. We lived in an old Mietskaserne, which is a 'rent barracks'. These were big blocks, elderly blocks, divided into flats. The second one, the one with the better flat, was in the same area, only a few streets down, but rather nicer and not so many stairs to climb.

Tape 1: 3 minutes 1 second

BL: What about your grandparents?

EF: My grandparents – well, my father's parents were long dead. But my mother's parents lived in the country, in lower Austria in a small town called Purgstall, and my grandfather was the teacher of Jewish religion in that area. He used to travel around by bus, even by bicycle to teach the Jewish kids in the scattered Jewish families there. He was a key person in that particular community.

BL: What was his name?

EF: Salomon Fried. He was a – actually it's quite interesting – he was a Hungarian- speaking Slovak who'd come to Austria before the First World War and lived there for about thirty or forty years until the Nazis came; then he moved to Vienna and was later deported. His wife, my grandmother, died just about then. She wasn't deported. But he's still remembered oddly enough by the older generation in that village – sixty years or seventy. But he was well liked, had his own house which is still there.

BL: Did you visit him there? Do you remember any visits?

EF: Every summer we lived there during the school holidays, my mother and I. My father came out for part of the time. Yes, oh yes. So when I first got back to Purgstall, which was about 1968, I immediately knew where the house was and everything. It's completely familiar. So I've been back a few times since then. Last autumn, but that's a special story.

BL: We'll speak about that later.

EF: Yeah.

BL: How many Jews were in that area?

EF: Not that many, but there were a few in every little town there. For instance, I met just now, purely by accident more than anything, a family who lived in the next little town, used to live in the next little town, well-off people. And the people whom I was in touch with recently, I think he was a dentist and they live in the smartest part of Barnet up in Arkley – Hadley actually. And the man was a pupil of my grandfather's and I got together with them fairly recently. It's rather interesting. They got out of course and are still living there, but go to Austria every summer. They've got a house there.

BL: It must have been as a child – how different was this country life to living in the 10th district?

Tape 1: 5 minutes 49 seconds

EF: Oh, very, very different of course. I mean we were out and about in the woods and up the little hills, things like that all the time in the summer. Vienna – we were in a town and that's all there is to it, you know. Day in day out. We went to parks of course, quite a lot of parks around Vienna.

BL: What are your earliest memories of growing up in Vienna?

EF: Well I was spoilt and tyrannised by my mother. On the one hand, she fed me very well. On the other hand, if I didn't do my homework I was in very real trouble. She was very ambitious for me and I had quite a nice childhood in general. But limited because of the tiny surroundings we lived in, you know. It was like...in England this would be poor working class conditions. But we weren't terribly poor. My father always made a living, you know, reasonable lower middle class living. But posh it wasn't, certainly not.

BL: What did he have to do as secretary of the synagogue?

EF: Keep minutes of all the meetings of the Committee, sell the seats for the High Holydays. He was also in charge of a house next door which they owned, a block of flats which they owned, he had to sort of deal with the tenants and that sort of thing. And, in addition to that, he did a bit of freelance bookkeeping for firms. Some of the firms' owners were on the committee of the synagogue, so you know it was an extra income.

BL: What sort of synagogue was it?

EF: A traditional synagogue. It wasn't a liberal synagogue. It was – nothing in German. It was all in Hebrew. Yeah. Traditional synagogue, probably be called – I don't know what exactly it would be called. I'm not in touch, but, you know, conventional.

BL: Did you ever used to go there?

Tape 1: 7 minutes 52 seconds

EF: Yeah, oh yeah. Quite often. Because my father was always there, you see, at the weekends and that sort of thing, Shabbes services and so on. He wasn't anything to do with the ritual but he had to be there. He also dealt with the poor, who formed the minyan. He had to deal with them and pay them out and that sort of thing.

BL: Tell us about it. So there was a paid minyan?

EF: Oh, yes - there was a paid minyan. There was a Deputiner [?] and there was a porter who was not Jewish, and who turned out, immediately after the Anschluss, to have been an illegal Nazi party member all the time. His daughter was one of the first that we knew went into the BDM, etc. He wasn't on bad terms with my father, but we found out he had been a Nazi all along, which many people were in Vienna of course. You couldn't tell who was...couldn't tell at all.

BL: Did you have any experience of anti-Semitism?

EF: Yes, in the sense that we weren't ill treated or anything like that before the Nazis came but you couldn't walk around without somebody shouting behind you something. And my mother used to reply, angrily. It didn't do much good of course. You know they'd say 'Gestank Palästina!' and all that sort of stuff. In Vienna this was normal. Much worse than in Germany, in general.

BL: What did your mother reply?

EF: Gesindel! She was snobby for no reason. But I had non-Jewish friends and everything, there was no...

BL: Can you translate this for us - what it means - Gesindel?

EF: Gesindel? Cannaille! Rubbish! - Gesindel in High German. But there was no need for that. These people were poor and ignorant and they were no more vicious than anyone else, you know. But you were taken notice of and not molested physically, but you felt the anti-Semitism. Of course you did.

Tape 1: 10 minutes 7 seconds

BL: What sort of school did you go to?

EF: Normal primary school. I was good in school and not unpopular. We were a big mixture. There was a big mixture actually. One, immediately the day after Hitler came in, he already wore the swastika, a tallish boy. He was already a Sitzenbleiber. That means he had to repeat; he wasn't very clever. His mother was a market woman in the nearest market. And a typical, you know, lower middle class or lower, lower middle class Nazi. Whereas other kids were sort of very proletarian and their parents were probably anti-Nazi. I remember the last day at school before I got slung out another Sitzenbleiber walked - the school wasn't far from where we lived, sort of three or four blocks down the road... That guy went all the way to my home with me, almost to sort of keep guard that nothing should happen to me, which was very nice. But it was very mixed you know. Vienna was, as I say, Vienna was a dodgy city. There were many decent people and many awful people.

BL: Do you recall any of your friends, your childhood friends?

EF: Yes. I've never got back in touch with them again but one even had connections in the Reich, family connections, and was a good friend to me. There was no real antagonism there at all – none. And others too, you know. But of course we did keep largely to Jewish connections, not only.

BL: What about your parents? Whom did they mix with?

EF: Mainly the family, which was very large, you know three, four, five brothers, and my mother had sisters and an uncle – she had a brother. That was an interesting case. He was an Austrian Fascist. He was very closely connected with the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg governments, which didn't stop the Nazis from shooting him eventually of course. But you know... He was in the civil wars of those years. He was on the side of the government, of the Fascists.

BL: As a Jew?

EF: Got baptised. Not so much for political reasons, but also mainly for professional reasons because he was an ambitious man. He was rising in the Post Office. He was quite a high official in the Post Office and got the Golden Cross of Mary from the Schuschnigg government.

BL: What was his name?

Tape 1: 12 minutes 52 seconds

EF: Erich Fried, Erich Wilhelm Fried. After he got baptised, you know, he took on an extra name because it's a Catholic thing. But...interesting stuff you know. After the war I found a picture of him with the steel helmet on. He was a volunteer at seventeen in the First World War, then fought in Siberia, I think, against the Bolsheviks. But, on the other hand, my father was a Social Democrat, if anything.

BL: Did he belong to a party your father? Was he active in politics?

EF: No, he wasn't active but I think he was a member. But then again, after February '34, when everybody had to join the Vaterländische Front, my father did too for peace and quiet, you know. It's quite interesting, actually, this whole history of the Jews in Vienna. Many were Social Democrats and the Social Democratic Party leaders were Jewish. But they had to run of course in February '34 and they were so – they were Jewish but they were so - atheist that they left the Jewish community, officially. Sie haben sich ausschreiben lassen. They wanted...and this again is to do with what I'm engaged in now. I'm in touch with a man in Austria, a teacher, who organised some very positive things, but he's got a strong Catholic background. He was in fact a teacher of religion, partly. And he writes me long, long essays on Austrian History. We have a sort of running discussion, and the last one he wrote about...He's very concerned this man. He's a good guy. He's concerned with the failure of the two main forces in Austria, the Social Democrats and the Catholic Church, complete failure to protect their Jewish fellow citizens when it came to it.

And most recently he wrote in detail about the Social Democratic Party and he said: 'Well immediately after February the Zionist people who ran the Zionist newspapers and things like that said: "The Social Democratic Party is finished – those damn atheists!" you know. Now, come into the Zionist organisation'- the Jewish Viennese. And I suppose a lot did. Quite a few went to Palestine of course, now in Israel. So things were, you know, things very mixed even in the same family. Though it was unusual for people to fight amongst themselves in the same family, except privately of course. But you found probably if a family was completely non-political, then they all were. Maybe the very odd one who wasn't. My father was never an active party member but I think he was a member.

Tape 1: 16 minutes 7 seconds

BL: For how long was he the synagogue secretary?

EF: Oh, years. All the time that I was alive which is...before that even. Yes, I think it must have been at least fifteen years.

BL: How did he get to this job, do you know that?

EF: Don't know. He was a trained bookkeeper. I suppose that had something to do with it. That I couldn't tell you. It was before I was born.

BL: Do you know how your parents met?

EF: No. No, my mother was working in Vienna with a fairly well off family in the second district, the Jewish district. They were I think in the book trade. They had bookshops. And she was looking after the kids. I think she must have had maybe some sort of training, partly commercial and partly sort of...looking after kids, I suppose. And therefore she was living in Vienna and that's how she must have met him. He never came to...he only came later after they were married to Niederösterreich. It's not where he came from. He came definitely from Vienna. I think his parents had a grocery or a greengrocers or something like that.

BL: But you never met your father's parents?

EF: No, no, no. They were dead well before I was born. Because my father was much older than my mother. That's why he didn't survive and she did. But normal life until the Nazis came. Then of course everything was immediately torn to shreds.

BL: Before we move on...How observant was your family, or what did you keep?

EF: Well, my father was always there because it was his job. He prayed. My mother very rarely went, maybe on the High Holy Days, although she came from maybe more of a Jewish background than he did. But they were not fanatical at all. No. My grandfather was a religious man of course being a teacher of religion. But again he didn't have a beard; he had a little thing here... (Indicates a very small beard) Very modern person really in his way. But believing, observant – oh yes.

Tape 1: 18 minutes 30 seconds

BL: Which languages did you parents speak?

EF: None, only German. Well, a bit of Yiddish I suppose. Although we weren't... You see my father's people were from Moravia, which was not a big Yiddish area, not like in Poland or Lithuania or whatever. They were Jewish most certainly, but they weren't properly Yiddish speakers. Most Czech Jews were German speakers as in Kafka, etc... And my grandfather, of course, was Hungarian speaking – still had that accent too. Whereas my grandmother, his wife, was from Niederösterreich. That's where my mother was born too, and they were long-established Austrian Jews. I think they were quite rich. They were in the clothing business and I think they supplied uniforms for the Austrian army and things like that, also in Niederösterreich. They weren't in Vienna. Well, some sisters of my mother lived in Vienna. One sister lived with the grandparents. I've got a picture inside - you can look at it afterwards – it must have been about 1933.

BL: Did you have many cousins?

EF: Yes, sure, well not many, but I had a number of cousins. On my father's side cause he had several brothers who lived in Vienna. They didn't live in the country and they were all married and some of them had kids, yes. There's one in Stoke Newington now, a cousin of mine, in sheltered accommodation. But two were killed. Two were strong Zionists, young lads. And both were killed, one on the way to Palestine, during the war, by the Nazis in Yugoslavia or somewhere. And the other one, I think, in the Israeli war, in the first war. So both of those brothers were killed.

BL: You mentioned anti-Semitism in Vienna. What was it like in the countryside?

EF: Not terribly bad in that area. Strongly Catholic, not strongly Nazi, on the contrary. There was an incident that I heard about – I of course didn't see it, but they put a peasant girl in the window of... there was a biggish clothes shop opposite my grandfather. The shop is still there but the family is long in America of course – before the war. And they put a girl in the window saying: 'German Pig: I was shopping at the Jews'. And the peasants had her out very fast. They wouldn't have it. So... in a way it wasn't – no – in the whole place we only knew three Nazis, active ones, mind you. But the others, they went along with it like everybody else. But if you go to places like Steiermark or Kärnten, there's still a lot of neo-Nazi feeling. That's where Haider gets his votes, you know.

Tape 1: 21 minutes 40 seconds

BL: So was it a relief in the summers in terms of the political situation to go to your grandparents?

EF: No, not really because we were not directly involved. Nobody in my family was imprisoned or anything like that. On the other hand, my wife's parents and my father was in a concentration camp under Schuschnigg, as an illegal communist party worker, and his wife's parents.

BL: When was that?

EF: Between '34 and '38, but then they got out to Czechoslovakia and later to England. They were all right you see; they were lucky. I think the Quakers helped them to get out, oddly enough. They were living in Czechoslovakia for a while and then they were brought to England, that lot.

BL: So when were they imprisoned?

EF: Well it must have been about '37, maybe '36, '37. Because they were definitely illegal party workers and they must have got caught. But they didn't... You see the Austrian concentration camps weren't like the Nazi concentration camps; they were fairly easy going.

BL: And when did they leave Austria?

EF: Oh, not long before the war, in fact. They left of course when the Nazis came in in '38 at some point. But they came to England just before the war, not very long before the war. Starting in Birmingham, they worked for the Cadburys you see, the Quakers. They were very good, but they got some cheap labour out of it. But...yes...It was a different background.

Tape 1: 23 minutes 23 seconds

BL: So in fact you didn't go in the last years to them to visit them?

EF: Whom?

BL: You said this was your grandparents?

EF: No, no, no...

BL: Sorry then I missed...

EF: No, my wife's parents. As I say, my in-laws, who are both dead now... the mother only died last year at 99...very tough. She wasn't Jewish. But he was and more of Polish origin and poor. Steel worker, never had a job. But he did all right. He was a jeweller and a metal worker too. So he either worked in factories or in his own jewellery workshop here in this country.

BL: Sorry I got confused. So what happened to your mother's parents?

EF: My mother's parents. Well, as I say, my grandmother died just about when the Nazis came. And my grandfather was then deported in '42. I think first to Theresienstadt, but I'm not sure about that. I know he died in Auschwitz, not in Theresienstadt.

BL: And until '42 he stayed in...

EF: In Vienna oddly enough, yes. They weren't deported until fairly late. But then my parents and a lot of the rest of the family to Theresienstadt, which was a ghetto

more than a camp. Yes, in fact one of my uncles was in charge of shoe distribution. You see, obviously, Viennese and German Jews were probably on a slightly different footing with the Nazis. Persecuted just the same of course and murdered. But my mother survived. She said some of the SS treated her quite well. So you know. She was like any ordinary Austrian woman, not particularly Jewish in appearance or anything. But she got through. She was just about the only one who got through, who was left behind. The ones who got out of course lived for many years in Israel or here. Some went to Australia, big families. My mother had five siblings and my father had six, something like that. You know in those days people had big families, sort of 1910s, '20s, still.

BL: And most of them stayed behind, or managed to...?

EF: No, not most, but about half, yeah. Well, you see two of my mother's sisters – she had three sisters. Two of them came here as maids, as house maids, and of course survived and looked after me when I left school and came to London. So, you know, I was lucky like that, because a lot of people they had nobody here.

Tape 1: 26 minutes 15 seconds

BL: So, let's just go back to your school years in the 30s. So, when actually were you made to leave school?

EF: Well, soon after the Nazis came in, that same... it was '38, right? March '38. By the summer most of the Jewish kids had already been shifted to special schools. They were no longer in the ordinary primary schools and probably secondary schools as well.

BL: So what happened to you?

EF: I was shifted to a school much further away from where we lived than previously, a walk but not a terribly long walk, you know. And stayed there till the summer holidays, and after that I went to the Heuss Gymnasium. Passed my 11-Plus, 10-Plus, and was in the first class. Then came the Kristallnacht and in January I left, you see, so I was only in the gymnasium for one term sort of thing and went straight to Britain.

BL: Were there any other Jewish kids in that class in the gymnasium?

EF: All Jewish.

BL: Oh this was now an all-Jewish school.

EF: It had existed before, but of course now most people had to go there rather than go to a normal gymnasium or Realschule or whatever secondary schools. Both primary and secondary schools were segregated soon after the summer

BL: Do you remember the Anschluss?

EF: Oh, yeah.

BL: If you could describe what happened?

EF: We kept indoors while hundreds of thousands were screaming: 'Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer!' etc...outside, especially in the centre of the town. And that's interesting. When Hitler came he was on the Heldenplatz which was in front of the Imperial Palace with god knows how many hundreds of thousands there and they all went crazy, you know. And, a couple of years back, a lot of Austrian school children released balloons in honour of the victims from the Heldenplatz which is good. A certain amount of justice in that. And this is what this teacher I'm in touch with had organised in my grandfather's area. And he came across my grandfather's name, but we can talk about this later. It's not relevant at this point.

Tape 1: 28 minutes 49 seconds

BL: So you kept indoors?

EF: We kept indoors, yeah. And immediately after that the kids were already beginning to be in Hitler Youth uniforms. I kept on...I continued going to my normal school until we were slung out, which was a few months later. In the class, actually as I say, there was one guy who was immediately – he was older you see and probably an enthusiastic young Nazi – you know. The majority of kids didn't take too much notice. They all had to join the...they didn't have to - they all joined the Hitler Youth.

BL: Were you...You were about 10 years old?

EF: Nine actually. Yes, I turned ten in June '38, so for a few months I was still nine when the Anschluss took place. After that I was ten.

BL: Were you worried? Do you remember? Was it a worry?

EF: We were all worried, of course we were. I mean...The very first thing they did was they made the poor elderly Jews scrub the pavements, you know, laugh at them, kick them. There was a lot of sadism in Vienna, in spite of the golden Viennese hearts. The Viennese are known for their Gemütlichkeit, you know, all this, but when it came to it, a fair proportion were very vicious, very vicious. Well you see it gave them a chance to steal of course. There were 200,000 Jews and nearly 180,000 or something like that in Vienna, which was a tenth of the population. And a lot of them had shops, not all of course. And this was a golden opportunity for people to steal their shops and steal their flats and everything. So for many people Hitler was a good thing, gave them a chance to rob and steal.

BL: What about Kristallnacht? Do you remember Kristallnacht?

Tape 1: 30 minutes 53 seconds

EF: Yes, I remember it very well. This SS man came to visit us. My father was inside the... nearly every Jewish man was put inside for a little while. A lot were let out again quite soon, but some went to Dachau and they weren't let out quite so soon. And when they were let out, unless they'd been murdered, they were told: 'Three

months...out. Otherwise, you come back again.' But my father was only in for a few days. You see, I think he got a certain amount of privilege because he was working for the Jewish Board of Deputies, that's the Jewish community as such, although not directly, but indirectly. And he was let out quite quickly and I think that might be one of the reasons why they weren't deported until fairly late. You know, the people to do with the Kultusgemeinde were a little bit – not very privileged – but a little bit privileged I would think.

BL: So when was he arrested?

EF: Immediately on Crystal Night. In fact they started burning the synagogue while he was in there, but they didn't force him to stay in.

BL: Did you see the synagogue burn?

EF: No. We stayed indoors, but it did. In fact it was completely destroyed. There's now a block of flats there, with a plaque. Now, on one of my visits to Vienna, I saw some working men doing some street work there, right there, and I was standing by that plaque and I said: 'My father used to work here.' Not a word. Yeah. They still don't love us very much. But, as I say, it's mixed. Some very positive things.

BL: So when was the first time immigration was discussed in your family?

EF: Immediately after the Kristallnacht, and they were trying to get me to England somehow. And I remember I had an interview with an English professor who came who was sort of looking around for kids. And somehow, I don't think he could have taken a liking to me because he said to my father, 'Well your boy can come to England as a...there's a boarding school in Whitby.' I remember that very clearly, Whitby which I'd never heard of, of course, in Yorkshire. And of course it would have been an expensive boarding school. We couldn't do that anyway. And so it didn't happen. But then they got me onto the Kindertransport of which there were many, one after the other from about December to quite late summer, a few months before the war. And I was on one of the earlier ones in January, as I say. It was all right.

BL: What did your parents – or do you remember – what did they tell you?

Tape 1: 33 minutes 59 seconds

EF: They told me 'You're going to England to get away, thank goodness.' But they stayed. My mother didn't want to leave my father. She could have gone, as a maid. But she had nursing training at the end, under the Nazis in a children's hospital or something like that. That stood her in good stead in Auschwitz, I believe. Because as far as...I could never quite gather – she didn't say very much. But I think she must have worked in the hospital or something which meant she could steal more or something you know. That's how she survived. She was never backward in coming forward my mother, she was...After the war she was in a holiday camp in Belsen and did very well for herself in the black market and things like that. One day about '46, '47 I had a parcel and it was a light grey German naval leather jacket which I wore for years. As I say, she must have acquired this somehow, brand new. Wore it for years

and then she came over because one of the sisters married. That's again, I could tell many stories. She married a man who was as Viennese as can be but who was a British citizen for some reason. I think his mother must have been here when he was born or something. He was in the British Army and his brother - nothing to do with me directly - his brother was a sergeant in the Eighth Army fighting in the desert, the British Forces and later on a Trade Union official in Surrey or somewhere, Sussex. And my uncle, who had been in the army and had the right to do this sort of thing, and he brought my mother over from Belsen. She got in touch with us; we didn't know where she was. She managed to find us.

BL: Let's just go back to the Kindertransport. What do remember of the day when you had to leave?

Tape 1: 36 minutes 3 seconds

EF: We went to the Westbahnhof and left from there. We got talking to the parents of another slightly older boy, bigger boy, and my mother said: 'Look after him' sort of thing. When we got on the train the very first thing he did was to swipe me around the ear! I still remember that. For no reason, of course, just because I was smaller. A lot of these kids were very screwed up, not surprisingly. We were too. But, anyway, what we were worried about...we didn't take anything. We could have taken gold watches and things like that. They sure enough came through, but they didn't, they didn't check anybody. We could easily have taken stuff out. But, anyway, we ended up in Swiss Cottage oddly enough, about 5 minutes from here, in a flat which was a kind of transit point organised by the Jewish committees or whatever. The woman in charge was called Miss Heinemann, and another boy and I were there for a couple of nights only, two or three nights, and then went up by train to Glasgow, to this orphanage. A Jewish orphanage in Glasgow.

BL: What was it called?

EF: Gertrude Jacobson Orphanage. It was from a Trust, a Jewish Trust. And it was meant for poor Jewish kids, Glasgow kids, not foreign ones. But quite a few of us were sent there. Quite nice, it had big gardens and... It's still there, but it's no longer the same thing. I went there in the 70s and the site was untouched, but I think they'd altered the house a bit. So we stayed there until September, till the war started. We were evacuated a couple of days before the war already.

BL: Just to come back - was it hard for you to get on that train? I mean you were a single child - probably for the first time...

EF: No. no, oddly enough, no. You know kids can take a lot in their stride. I wasn't traumatised by it at all, no. We were a bit scared in case the SS came round you know, which they did, as I say.

BL: What could you take? Do you remember your luggage?

Tape 1: 38 minutes 26 seconds

EF: Nothing much. Just plenty of clothes, unsuitable clothes. Plus furs, which no kids here wore at all at that time. Plus furs and Austrian peasant jackets which again nobody wore. So none of these clothes were much use to me. They were in good nick too – shame! But my mother was like that, you know. She made quite sure I was well supplied.

BL: Do you remember your first impressions of England?

EF: Scotland – well, England and London yeah, very foggy. Very foggy that winter of '39 – well, '38, '39 really – yes, foggy, cold, damp London and Scotland even more so of course. I remember my skin sort of tore slightly with the Scottish climate. But we weren't unhappy. The gardens were nice in the summer. The summer before the war we were O.K, you know.

BL: Who picked you up when you arrived? Where did you arrive in London?

EF: Liverpool Street, like everybody else. I don't know. I don't know who picked us up. I can't remember. But they took us here to this area. That I do remember.

BL: And did you have any choice in the question of going to the orphanage, or it was decided?

EF: No...no. It must have all been decided beforehand, you know, they took so and so many. Some Germans were already there. And then more Austrians came, you know. It wasn't huge, but there were twenty-five kids, something like that. But there was another hostel in the centre of Glasgow, a smarter area. And they were under a Refugee Committee. And we all got together during the war in the same hostel. So all these boys from the other hostel in Glasgow were our friends. I'm still in touch with some of them even.

BL: And what was it like, the orphanage?

EF: Very Jewish. And the people in charge were London people, cockneys from the East End probably. And lots of prayers. And we went to cheder and on the Holydays we went to synagogue of course. So it was a very Jewish background, a bit too much if anything. They shoved it down our throats which didn't improve our piety. But it was all right. It was secure. The food wasn't particularly good but there was plenty of it. You know...we weren't short. O.K. I remember she had a cockney voice, a cockney accent. And in the morning she said 'Neah then boys – Up!' And I thought she said 'Narlem boys'. We didn't know what that was, London, you know, 'neah then'. Because we saw Scots immediately, went to Scottish school and everything.

Tape 1: 41 minutes 33 seconds

BL: Did you speak any English when you came?

EF: Very little and only a few sentences. We learned, we started to learn, but I was only there for one term or less, so, you know, it didn't do much for me. But we learnt it very quickly once we were there. I joined a class of eight – I was ten – a class of

eight-year-olds. But, within six months, I'd risen about four classes and was with kids my own age by the time the war started. And, in fact, when we were evacuated to the south of Scotland there I was with kids older than myself, so I was a bit lucky, you know, education-wise. But of course that was only in the meantime. When we got to this hostel from the South to the West of Scotland, we had for the first couple of years, we had teachers in charge there, Glasgow teachers, Jewish teachers, and we had our school there, secondary school in fact. We passed the 11 plus or whatever it was. Then, in Scotland again, I did my first year of secondary school in the hostel. But then these teachers were called up, you see, or took the place of those who were called up in Glasgow and so on. So, after that, we had only people who were Hebrew teachers. They didn't know how to deal with kids. One was actually Palestinian and the other one was of Hungarian origin but he had lived in Italy and he told us he was in the Fascist youth in Italy. And we didn't like these people very much, who couldn't deal with us. We were very screwed up of course, needless to say.

BL: How did that manifest itself?

Tape 1: 43 minutes 27 seconds

EF: Fighting with them all the time. And not only that we... this was a lovely house in its own grounds, not huge grounds but way above the River Clyde, beautiful area. And there was a big greenhouse. One day we decided to take bricks and smash it to pieces. Things like that, you know. Screwed up, not surprisingly. Although we had our own way of life, we were quite happy. We played football and cricket. And then later, when these people left, we went to school in Greenock, as I say a local grammar school. It wasn't a traditional grammar school; it was more a modern grammar school. French and German where I had my own class in German. I was the only one in it. And they supplied a teacher for me, just me. There were other kids there but I think I was a bit better at it. And I passed my equivalent of O-level when I was thirteen, in German. Nothing else of course, in German. Yes, I could do it easily. So we weren't unhappy there, but as I say we did fight with the management after a time. One of the teachers who ran it very well, the man in charge, I'm not sure but he may still be alive in Israel. At one time he was...he started as a novelist. At one time I think he was the education adviser to the Israeli government. A man called Luvich, Mischa Luvich [?] of vaguely Romanian origin, but he was a Glasgow teacher, you know, and he was very good. And at the end of the first year of secondary school, which was in the hostel, he said: 'Why don't you move up to the third year? Second year only repeats things', which I don't think was right. But he wanted to push me and he did me a favour because when we finally went to Greenock I was with kids older than myself in the third year of secondary school. Scottish education is better than English education, at least it was then.

Tape 1: 45 minutes 44 seconds

BL: Were you in touch with your parents? Did you have any news?

EF: Only at the beginning - certainly before the war. I was a very lazy writer but they wrote to me. I've still got the letters. I daren't look at them; it's too much. But, yes, they wrote to me regularly. And, when the war started, one of my close friends in the orphanage - his parents had got out to Holland. And I used to write to my parents

via them. Terrible though, the Nazis caught up with them in Holland. The mother of this guy who died only this year - she actually came to visit him in Scotland, but went back to Holland and they didn't survive, whereas my mother did survive. She was a lot further away; she was in Vienna. But they were not far from England and they didn't make it. Tragic. But, yes, so then we went up to the 4th year. I went to grammar school in Scotland. The very last term we went back to the very south of Scotland to a place called Castle Douglas and that was near Kirkcudbright, which is the main little market town there. And we went to the grammar school there, Kirkcudbright - as they say in Scotland - 'Academy'. And they had Latin and everything, but of course I didn't do any Latin. I had to do Latin O-Level later. But, yes, so we were not unhappy kids in general.

BL: Did you feel resentment from the local scene?

EF: No, but they didn't love us either. I mean our schoolmates were very friendly. But the local village lads where we were, I heard them say: 'Oh, German Jews'. You know, that sort of thing. But they weren't vicious or anything. Just ignorant.

BL: Did you continue to speak German to each other?

Tape 1: 47 minutes 49 seconds

EF: A lot, not all the time but quite a bit. We never forgot it. Most of us, right up till now, they all remember – those who I remain in touch with - I'm sure they all remember their German. One mate of mine came on a visit from Venezuela. He did a good business career in the States, but he still speaks Viennese and we had a good laugh together. But of course my best friend went back to Austria after the war. But that's another story – for political reasons. But left quite soon again and went to America and had a very successful career. That's the one who just died not so long ago, successful career in insurance, lived in Manhattan on the Upper East Side. Did very well for himself.

BL: Did you belong to any youth organisations at the time?

EF: At what time?

BL: When you were in Scotland.

EF: No, but we were in touch, even very early on, with some of the youth organisations in Glasgow. Some of the older brothers were in that. When we were twelve or thirteen we already had connections with the refugee movement in Glasgow, which was an important part of my later development. Yes, there was a Freie Deutsche Jugend about seven or eight years before the DDR was formed. Already in Glasgow there was an FDJ.

BL: Really?

EF: Well, not the same thing obviously, but refugee kids.

BL: And what did they do, or what did they organise?

EF: Active help for the interned people when we had anything to do with it. But, after the Soviet Union came into the war much more active in the war effort and all that sort of thing. But we were too young you see. But that's a later thing when we came down to London. In Scotland – oh yes, I was connected. But as a kid you know they invited us for maybe a weekend in the Highlands and things like that. They were good to us these older kids you know. We were well-organised. Some were Zionists of course. In the hostel of course we were pushed into the Zionist organisations, not anything else. But we were in Habonim you know, but not terribly active, but we were connected with that as well. Not members really – well, maybe we were members, I don't know. I never signed anything. But, you know, we were consciously Jewish, no question. Too much. They pushed it down our throats so much that a lot of us became atheists. A lot of us. Not all.

Tape 1: 50 minutes 48 seconds

BL: But who was responsible for that? The actual teachers or...?

EF: The teachers and the committees who ran it. Wolfson was on one of them. They wanted us to stay Jewish of course, which we did up to a point. We had Bar Mitzvah, you see, because we had services in the hostel and all that. In fact all the time, too much.

BL: Did you have a Bar Mitzvah in Scotland?

EF: Yes – yeah!

BL: Can you describe it for us please?

EF: Well it was...we had services in one of the bigger rooms in the hostel. Had to do the normal thing, you know, read some from the Torah and the Hav Torah. You know, you sing it a little bit. Oh yes, we did all that. Sure.

BL: Was that a positive event or you just felt it as a forced event?

EF: I quite liked it, yes. Yes, you know, as I say, I was gradually losing my connections really with the religion. And when we got away from there, of course, I can't remember anybody going to synagogue ever, of my friends after, when we got to London and that sort of thing.

BL: So what happened? Did you all go to London together when you finished school?

EF: No, no. We went in dribs and drabs. Some stayed in Scotland. You see, we from the Orphanage Committee, they weren't particularly keen on us continuing with our education. So, as I had two aunts in London, one who had originally come to Scotland herself as a maid, the other one came straight to London, but by the time in '43 they were both in London. And I went down to London to live with them, first with one, then with the other. They were very good to me.

BL: Where did they live?

Tape 1: 52 minutes 34 seconds

EF: In Soho. Greek Street. One worked in a café in Windmill Street, the other one was in charge of the canteen of the Windmill Theatre. And so they both lived near their work of course in Soho. Later on, during the war, one of them and I, whom I was living with then, went down to Clapham for a while, but then we were blasted out by one of the rockets. Luckily, we were in the shelter. So we moved back to Soho again and we lived there until my mother came in '46.

BL: So the Refugee Committee was quite happy for you to leave?

EF: To leave? Yes. I left of my own accord. I didn't arrange it with anybody.

BL: How old were you then when you left school?

EF: Fifteen. And I was in the 4th year - finished the 4th year, the last term in Scotland as I say. Yes and that was the end of my schooling, my full time schooling, until I decided much later to start studying. You're only motivated later. You know, as a kid, I wanted to get away from school, you know, and I hadn't done very much work anyway. I was good at school. But...no, I came down to London and immediately went into photography. The Jewish Board of Deputies, guardians, sent me to a well known Jewish photographer who had about six shops in the West End. He came from the East End and, during the war, he had about six shops in the West End. He made a huge fortune from all the American Air Force men and they all wanted pictures, you know.

BL: What was his name?

EF: His name originally was Boris and he was well known in the East End, in Whitechapel. But then he was called Bernhard Bennett and had a works in Oxford Street, where I worked. And then they sort of sent me around to the various studios. I picked up - they didn't teach you anything - I picked up how to take photographs and how to retouch and that sort of thing.

BL: So you became an apprentice or...?

EF: No, there was no apprenticeship. You were a low paid worker, unskilled, and picked up what you could.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 4 seconds

BL: What attracted you to...?

EF: Well, nothing! Nothing! I liked it once I was in it. But they only put me in there because I was good at art, you see. I was good at drawing. So, they weren't going to provide an art, an arts training for me, but they sent me to a photographer which was all right. I didn't mind, you know. It was a big firm. They had all these

shops and sales girls everywhere in the works, printers and finishers and all that. So I got round it a bit you know, picked up, wasn't taught.

BL: So which year did you start?

EF: '43. And I was there for 4 years. Then they shut all these shops in the West End because the war was over and then Bennett went into cameras. But one of his operators, in Marble Arch actually, a young fellow, very ambitious, decided to open up on his own. And as there is a vague connection – very odd. Life is odd. His uncle in Vienna took some of my baby photographs. He had a studio in our district. His father had a studio elsewhere and he was a photographer. Opened up on his own in Swiss Cottage. And I worked for him from '47 to '56 – for nineteen years.

BL: What was his name?

EF: Freddy Weitzman - Weitzman Studio. He later became something else so he decided to go in for posh English weddings and we became Mayfair Press with an address in Baker Street somewhere and a postal address in Curzon Street. He was a shrewd man. He went into property later. Only died a couple of years ago. I was friendly with him till the end – yes, in touch. I used to help him with his forms for the Austrian pensions and things like that because I remembered it probably a bit better than he did. He did too. He was older than me by a few years. And his widow is an East End girl, still around in Swiss Cottage, she sometimes... Now she really doesn't know the German so she gets me to help fill in her forms cause she gets widow's pension from the Austrians and things like that. Still in touch. Yes, so I started work here and I... Now then, my friend first, then I, we joined the Austrian organisations here, which was leading from what we'd done in Glasgow already, only much more active now. It was called Young Austria and a chap in Princeton has only recently sent me an essay they've written about Young Austria.

BL: So this is in 1943?

EF: This is in 1943. We were recruited, as it were. And both of us were active in it. I don't know if you know much about the Free Austrian movement, the Austrian Centre and all that.

BL: You should tell us but we need to change tapes. So we need to take a little break.

EF: Right, fair enough, now, yep?

Tape 1: 58 minutes 32 seconds

End of Tape One

TAPE 2

Tape 2: 0 minute 9 seconds

BL: This is Tape Two. We are conducting an interview with Mr Ernst Flesch. We were talking about the time of your coming to London in 1943.

EF: Yes, so we were soon recruited into Young Austria. At first I went to something else. They had, the Social Democrats had a London Bureau here with a couple of very influential ex-Viennese Socialist leaders. One of them was a man called Oscar Pollack who later became the editor of the *Wiener Arbeiter Zeitung*. Even before the fascists he was already a high-up. But these people were not for an independent Austria. They were Grossdeutsche. In fact the whole leadership of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, Jews and all, were Grossdeutsche. And we fell out very severely with them because the Free Austrian movement was purely for an independent Austria, an independent, democratic, progressive Austria. Now, I don't know how much you know about the history of the Free Austria movement and so on, but the fact is, like many other refugee movements, the Communist Party ran it – not on the surface, but...It wasn't strictly a front organisation because anybody could join and we wanted everybody to join of course. The more the better – we were 1,000 members. Not in the Youth Organisation. We were hundreds rather than thousands, but in the Free Austrian movement thousands. The Austrian centres were great social centres for the Austrian refugees and anybody else who wanted to - libraries, theatres, restaurants - a lot, really very, very good. And so they did social work among the Austrian refugees, but they also did political work in the sense of propagating an independent Austria, etc. That was called 'Englische Arbeit' if you went to English youth clubs, which I did, as my English was a bit better than the average who were older. I'd gone to school here, you know. I went and did talks quite often in the winter and all. It was not all that pleasant but part of the duties, you know. Anyway, Young Austria, as I say again, was a universal organisation but the leadership were people who... years of illegal activity in Austria and all that business. The Chairman was a man called Fritz Walter who...capable, very capable man. After the war he went back to Vienna immediately. Even before the end of the war I think he smuggled himself back via Yugoslavia and he became Chief in Vienna afterwards of the Freie Österreichische Jugend, which of course was the equivalent of the Freie Deutsche Jugend, except that in Austria they were the lowest of the low.

Tape 2: 3 minutes 7 seconds

In Germany they ruled – in East Germany – see? Anyway, the whole Austrian organisation were very effective, really, really very effective. Only a small proportion of the people went back, only the most active. Now, my best friend - the one who ended up in New York – he went back and quite soon, in '46. My mother just came from Germany in '46 and there was no way she was going to go back to Vienna, you know, so that's one of the things that decided me to stay here. And other things too because in '48, only a few years after the war, I went to visit my friend in Vienna who was still there. He was on the point of leaving mind you. He was already working for the Yanks for one of those refugee organisations – The Joint – or one of those things...and going to work in a Jeep, you know. He'd already fallen out with the Friends, the Comrades. Anyway, I went to see him there and I hadn't fallen out with anyone. I wasn't particularly in touch mind you. And I went to an FÖE [?] march to have a look at it. And, on the way back, on the tram, there was somebody sitting about the distance you are and said 'sind ja lauter Juden', so that put me right off the Austrians, bless 'em, you know. So with all these things...Besides, the conditions were bad, although I could have put up with that. But everything together, no. So I was one of the ones – you'll see that in the book you know – I was one of the ones who stayed. In fact, the majority stayed. But the most active went back and some of them are still there! But a good few came out again when they saw the Austrians at

close quarters and some after the Hungarian revolution. Things like that. I don't know if you know a guy called Hammerschlag...not Hammerschlag, Kammerling. He's often been on telly as one of these Jewish refugees, etc, etc. Quite a bright guy, he was in the army. He actually married a girl who recruited us and they went back, I believe, after '56 and are now pillars of the Jewish community in Bournemouth where her parents had been living all along. So you see there were different reactions to the whole condition.

Tape 2: 5 minutes 42 seconds

My friend Peter, the one who went to New York, said: 'The rats are running over our faces at night and all they tell us is how to work for Uncle Joe'. So, when I got to Vienna I saw all this and I decided not to stay. Besides, my mother by then was here. So I stayed here, and then...But I went to Budapest in '49 to the World Youth Festival. And one of the guys said: 'Na! When are you coming? We are a People's Democracy!' They didn't take kindly to my staying in England. As I say, I wasn't a very important member, but I was one of the activists, so... it never happened. Just as well. I mean I made a career here and everything else. I'm settled here. Never became British. They didn't give it to me. Nope. Not so much even for political reasons, but because when I applied, which was sort of early in the 50s when I was already studying, I thought I would still have to go in the army actually - not that I liked the idea. And the very first thing the Special Branch man who comes to interview you...We were on quite good terms, you know. He said: 'Why didn't you apply earlier when you had to go in the army?' I said: 'I don't mind going if I have to.' He said: 'Ah, it's easy to say that now.' So I had actually made the mistake. I thought I would still have to go, but I wouldn't. So they considered that I only applied when I wouldn't have to go any more. It wasn't true, oddly enough. It should have been but it wasn't. Because I wasn't going to fight in Malaya, that's for damn certain you know. Anyway, or in Korea. So it didn't happen, but a lot went back - yes. And what it was you see...I don't know if you know all this but Charmian [Brinson, co-author of book on Austrian Centre] certainly does and all that lot; they know all about it. The fact was that, although Young Austria and the Free Austria movement were non-party organisations, the directing hand was what it was. And so, you know, we went along with that of course. I mean that's how we grew up, you know. The thing is a lot of water has flowed under the bridge of course, but at that time we were genuine!

Tape 2: 8 minutes 22 seconds

BL: So tell us about the activities.

EF: Oh, well, very regular Heimat where you had talks, political discussions, singing, table tennis, things like that - social activities for young people. Lots of outings to Richmond and places like that. Very nice. And of course they helped people. They had hostels for people working, who were on their own in this country, working in the war factories, things like that. In fact the very first group of Young Austria I joined was called the 'War Worker Hostel Group' in Primrose Hill actually! So you know they did a lot. They brought a lot of people into the factories and of course also into the army cause a lot of that generation were only partially interned and some of them were able to join quite early, probably first in the Pioneer Corps, the usual, but then into the fighting units, you know, very much so.

BL: How was the whole thing organised? Were there local groups? What was the structure?

EF: Local groups. Local groups but with a central organisation leadership. One of the people, the one who was immediately below Fritz Walter... Fritz Walter, he wasn't an Austrian; he was a German. But his real name was Otto Brichaczek, which is not surprising. But, anyway, the second in command as it were, was Herbert Steiner, who later became the head of the archives of the Austrian Resistance. He was a leading spirit in that, became a professor in Vienna or whatever. And so, you know, people like that. Some very bright people there in the leadership. Some had already been activists before the war, illegal, like my father-in-law, but he wasn't in the Youth. Oddly enough, my father in law, he was the caretaker of the Swiss Cottage Austrian Centre. He was a handyman as well, so you know...

Tape 2: 10 minutes 31 seconds

BL: Where was this centre?

EF: In Eton Avenue, one of these big houses we hired. Then there was one in Fitzjohn's Avenue, which belonged to the left wing socialists who were part of us. The person in charge was a woman called Marie Koestler, an Austrian MP who went back to Austria after the war. The Social Democrats wouldn't have her any more. She was a pre-war Social Democrat deputy or something in the Austrian parliament. Anyway, then there was one in Paddington. I think that was the main headquarters in Westbourne Terrace. Then a more Jewish one in Seven Sisters Road in Finsbury Park near Stamford Hill. But, anyway, in all of these there were Youth Groups and others besides and very active. We had a choir which sang all over the place.

BL: What sort of things did you sing? Do you remember?

EF: We sang all sorts of things. We sang Austrian stuff, classical stuff, and of course political stuff as well. So, you know, very active – oh yeah.

BL: Such as - can you remember some of the songs?

EF: Yes, I remember them all but I'm not going to sing them here. No, you know, like the Spanish civil war songs, Soviet songs and also Viennese, Austrian songs. 'Der Arbeiter von Wien' – have you come across that? 'Wir sind das Bauvolk der kommenden Welt.'

BL: Go ahead.

EF: [Sings] 'Wir sind das Bauvolk der kommenden Welt' - you know and so on. I remember... wrote them down at one time. So, you know, many social activities, and there were quite a few couples, and we were too young – sixteen, seventeen – but, you know, some people married and were still married many years later. So it was a good thing! And it gave a lot of the youngsters, the younger refugees, but nearly always the ones who were not so Jewish-oriented you see, 'cause they joined the Zionist organisations and they went to Israel, that sort of thing. But we had no connection with them, no, whereas in the hostels in Scotland we had had

connections with the Zionist youth, although we weren't activists of course, but not after that, no.

Tape 2: 13 minutes 4 seconds

And then, as I say, I was working for Boris and then later for Weitzman. And in '56, my mother came in '46, I went to Budapest but it didn't... I felt all right you know? Yeah. We were in power. A few years later, the Hungarians did their utmost to get rid of us, including the Jewish leadership – Matyas Rakosi, etc. Yes, so by '55 I decided, with my wife's consent, to start studying. 'Cause I thought: 'I'm not a businessman. Never was, never will be.' And I was never going to make a lot of money in photography. I was competent enough. I'm better now than I was then actually. And I thought, no. I was always good at school and wouldn't mind being a language teacher and hadn't forgotten any of my German, at all. And so I went to evening classes for one year and that was sufficient. Because, academically, I'm quick and so I did three A-Levels and two O-Levels in one year. And that was good enough to get into teachers' training college for an arts degree. But of course it wasn't what I wanted because I went to the oldest teachers' training college in the country, which was a Church of England teachers' training college in Chelsea called St Mark's and St John's – MarJohns for short - and their aim was to make good Christian gentlemen out of their students. They never succeeded with me somehow. Anyway, it was quite a good course – 3-year course with a degree, teacher certificate and degree concurrently. I did an extra year for the degree. So what we got, a group of us - I'm still in touch with some of them, lovely guys, good, the best of English people, you know - we ended up with what is called an External Degree of London University or BA in three subjects, which was useful for teaching. So I did English, French and history. That's right: English, French and history, and came out with a Second on that. And a group of us did this and all became teachers of one sort or another. One ended up as a headmaster up in Norfolk where he came from, another one is a Yorkshireman and ended up as a children's writer and a teacher, lovely, you know.

Tape 2: 16 minutes 3 seconds

One, who was very thick and very upper class - he had been in the navy and he was Flag Lieutenant in Portsmouth in the Royal Navy, young fellow, tough little thin guy, thick! - he ended up as headmaster of the British School in Buenos Aires. First, in a public school here, Sherborne or somewhere. So, you know, a very mixed crowd. But we got the degree. But then that wasn't me. I got a job then after three years in Shoreditch Comprehensive School, which I could well have done without. It was formed just then and it lasted no longer than about six or seven years when they packed it in. This was before all the immigrant kids, so can you imagine? They were all the sort of barrow boy kids from Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, you know, and difficult, let's say. Not all, but a huge school – there were three schools put together and there was no Grammar School element. There was one central school, which was a bit better, you know, but the others were ordinary secondary modern schools and they made this comprehensive school out of it. On the very first day somebody wrote on the wall: 'Ban compulsory education!' So the atmosphere was not too conducive. I was teaching English there actually because they didn't do German. They did French, so I did a little bit of French. But then, when I had the chance immediately after those four years, I went into a grammar school in Enfield. It was a technical grammar school. In those days there were different grammar schools and the first foreign language was German so that suited me. So, from then on, I was largely a German

teacher, did a little bit of beginner's French and things like that. But I packed up English teaching; it wasn't me somehow. If I'd taken more care I could have done it, but I wanted to teach foreign languages and, from then on, I was teaching German. Not a bad school. But they packed that up later as well after it became a comprehensive. And I'd had enough of kids. I never was all that fond of kids and teaching them for ten years is enough to put anybody off. So, when a chance came up to work in further education because I'd already been doing an evening class in Enfield Grammar School of an evening doing O-Level German with adults, and enjoyed it thoroughly. So I got this job in Barnet College of Further Education and worked there for many years from '63 I think, if I'm not mistaken, '63 to '88, something like that. And retired early. I retired at sixty, which you were able to do at Barnet, enhanced. So I was there for many years. No, I'm not an ambitious person really, so I didn't particularly try to rise in the hierarchy, which is mainly administration. I preferred to stay and teach A-Level, you know.

Tape 2: 19 minutes 30 seconds

So, immediately after my teachers' training college and my first degree, I took an honours degree but part time at Birkbeck, which is a wonderful institution. And it took me three years. I worked hard and I'm a native speaker so it wasn't very difficult. So I was at the top and could have gone straight on to an MA or even a doctorate but I couldn't be bothered. But I made up my mind to do an MA and I did in fact do it while...all this was part time. And I started on an MA at that time you still had to do it by thesis, in London anyway. And I did something interesting, a magazine which appeared from 1910-1930 called 'Die Aktion'. It was an activist German magazine, where all the sort of left wing Expressionist writers and poets, you know, they contributed to it, whatever. And I couldn't be bothered for the life of me. I broke up with my wife then as well. This was about '63 and '66, at that time. And I let it go. So my supervisor said: 'Look,' he said, 'you're not making any progress here. But, the regulations have changed. You can now do it by examination and just write a dissertation you see' – shortish, 30 pages or whatever. So I did that. Got through, although it was all evening classes and libraries and university and places like that. And you couldn't smoke, so I fell asleep regularly every night during lectures. And I still got through, didn't get any distinction. So I ended up with a Masters' which I've still got – never went further. For the life of me I can't be bothered sitting in libraries for years, you know. It's not me. I've been sitting in cafes for years. So my life then, well while I was married...You see then one of those things that went towards breaking up my marriage is that I decided to stay in college while I was studying full time, for 3 years.

Tape 2: 22 minutes 6 seconds

And of course that doesn't go with being married you know. And, in the meantime, my old lady, who is a very agile, tough sort of person, went in for flamenco dancing, even semi-professionally. She used to appear in cabarets, in restaurants and things like that. And we broke up over it. She was working with a young Spanish fellow who'd come over from Spain, completely green, but already an experienced guitarist. He's now the best in the country. You've heard of him no doubt – Paco Pena. And she fell in love with him needless to say and so we broke up then. She came back afterwards because he was only in love with his guitar rather than with her. And anyway, he's still around. He's now one of the honorary chairmen of the London Flamenco Club. But he plays all over the world now, he's well known. He's not the top in Spain but

he's certainly good. Anyway we broke up in... finally, no, first in '63 and then she came back and we stayed together for about one and a half years and then we did a big trip. From then on, about that time, we started going further afield, like, I got my driving license in '65 and that same year, in '65, we went all the way down to the Sahara to Morocco, right into the desert until we saw that there were no roads. Then we came out again. We had an old jalopy. And the next year we were not on good terms then. The next year we went further. We decided to drive to Turkey, but we didn't drive to Turkey. We drove beyond to Lebanon and Syria as well. And, on the way back, we had a serious accident, hence (gestures to scar on his face). And I went to sleep, in Yugoslavia, and went straight into a lorry, luckily a parked lorry. If the lorry had been coming towards me I would have been long dead. But, as it was, I only smashed my head in. But...woke up in hospital in Belgrade. Anyway, we parted again after that. This time not quite for good, but to all intents and purposes. And we've been in touch ever since and we travel very regularly together. Peculiar relationship – she's had another partner for years. But we're always on good terms. We've even all three of us got together at times you know. But that's her partner. I'm not her partner. But anyhow, since then we've travelled a long way abroad even after the accident. The first time I went to India was in '76, but I'd already been before that to the Soviet Union, including central Asia. You know, we started travelling seriously about '74. I was in the Soviet Union.'76 I was for the first time in India.

Tape 2: 25 minutes 21 seconds

In '74 we went all the way to Uzbekistan. And also there were two trips – very funny – two trips consecutively and one night in-between. There's a peculiar story there. I thought I might stay in Moscow because the first trip was Leningrad, central Asia, Moscow. The second trip was Moscow, Caucasus and Moscow. And I thought maybe I could stay over privately in Moscow, but I was warned that it wasn't advisable. People could have got into trouble, that sort of thing. So I flew back to London at the end of the first trip, stayed overnight in my own bed, went out the next day on the second trip. Very weird. Didn't cost me anything except fare from Victoria station. Very weird. Anyway, that was the first one, a long way, but after that from... and then I drove around quite a bit. I had a good mate, who was a London taxi driver actually, and together we went to Europe quite a bit – Austria, Germany, France, and even in '69 to Hungary and Romania. So, you know, we got around Europe quite a bit. Previously to that, in the early '60s, I had already been to Spain, Italy, Greece, etc. So, you know, from then on we travelled non-stop. In '70 we went to Spain and Portugal, what did I say – '76 to India, Nepal and India actually, and in '78 the south of India - all that area. So, you know, over the years I've been to half the world really.

Tape 2: 27 minutes 17 seconds

BL: Let's just go back a bit to the post-war era. Can you tell me a bit about your mother coming to England?

EF: My mother came direct from Belsen. She'd been a year in Belsen. She looked dark brown like that...And I'll never forget, no I'll never forget. We were all waiting at the barrier in Victoria Station. And she came; we knew it was her. She was brown and fatter than she'd been, you know. She had a good time for a year in Belsen after the war. And the first thing she said, 'Ich scheiss mich glatt an!' - A favourite German expression in Belsen no doubt among the survivors. Anyway, she started work very

quickly for the Jewish Committees in their catering, you know, in their restaurants and things like that, and she stayed in catering till she retired in about '67 or something like that and quite happy. She had an English boyfriend for many years, younger guy, a Lancashire man, very good to her too, which saved me a lot of trouble when she got very old. I was very lucky like that. She was very good to me. I used to go there and eat. We bought eventually...First, she was in small accommodation. I stayed with her to start with. When I got married of course I didn't stay with her any more. I stayed in Finsbury Park for many years. I got married in '52 and from then on I stayed in Finsbury Park for a long, long time 'cause the flats were so cheap a week. You know we were rent protected so I had no reason to leave. But Finsbury Park is not my favourite area so... Then, in the early 70s, my mother and I bought a house in Wood Green, that way, quite nice. And she lived there; I didn't. I stayed in the flat after I'd broken up with my wife. My mother lived in Wood Green, then she died in '86 you see. So she lived there for about 10 years. It was good; she had a little garden and everything. And when she died her boyfriend couldn't live without her. He'd also retired. He was a valet at the Savoy and he retired and of course she died in '86. And he died in '88 or late '87. He was much younger, couldn't take it without her.

Tape 2: 30 minutes 0 second

And of course I had the house, which was in my name anyway, my mortgage, though it wasn't much of a mortgage in those days - £6,000 or so, I can't remember. But, anyway, I had it, the mortgage was paid off and I sold it within a fortnight. And, as a result, I was able to move straight to Hampstead, to Belsize Park, and got a flat in one of the blocks in Belsize Park in '88 and since then I've been in the Hampstead area, which in any case for years and years I'd been every night, but from Finsbury Park.

BL: What places would you come to in Hampstead?

EF: Oh...partly the Cosmo, but not only, others too. The Habana which was near John Barnes you know, near Finchley Road Station. It's now called Luigi's. Still there. Met a lot of my friends there. And others too, some in Hampstead High Street, you know, in the village and all over the place. I'm a café mensch, you know.

BL: Can you tell us a bit about The Cosmo please?

EF: The Cosmo was a very, very traditional venue for the refugee population, especially old ladies, till they were ninety. And it was good. It's because it had a café you see. It was a restaurant but next door was a café. And we were sitting in the café a lot of the time. But, as I say, not all the time. There were places where I frequented more than The Cosmo. Some of my friends were always in The Cosmo, you know. It varied - it's good. But I didn't eat there a lot, but I was in the café quite a bit. At one time I ate there quite a bit, but not too much. All these years in the flat in Finsbury Park, you see. Later on, I went to The Troubadour in Earls Court. I don't know if you know it. It's a very well-known café. It's still there, and very weird. It's like this: the whole ceiling was full of stuff, musical instruments, all sorts of stuff hanging off the ceiling, off the walls. And it was very popular with the Left to some extent. Some of those Trafalgar Square rallies against the Vietnam War were planned there. But I went just as a customer and I knew a lot of people there.

Tape 2: 32 minutes 27 seconds

BL: Did you remain politically involved?

EF: No. No, no, because I never went back to Vienna. I was a trade unionist of course all my life, but not any political party. I didn't think it was my job here. As I didn't get British nationality, you know, I didn't want to interfere. I mean I was interested in politics, still am but no...But of course we all gradually, most of us anyway, went off it for very simple reasons. When we really found out what Stalin was about, we were no longer so keen, you know. But never really stopped being left wing – even now. But you know how it is. You mellow. With age, you've got a little bit to lose. I wouldn't particularly want this flat to be divided up among 3 homeless families, you know. But, you know how it is. Yes, I went to Budapest, as I said, in '49, but it was different seven years later; they rose up against it. When I was there in '49 they were still quite happy with it. It hadn't really shown itself in its true colours. You know Rakosi said: 'We'll show them what a proletariat dictatorship is all about.' [Makes gesture of threatening fist] And again people didn't want to put up with it. You can hardly blame them.

BL: During the war, in Young Austria, what was the percentage of Jews and non Jews?

EF: Vast majority Jews. There were some non-Jews, but they were sort of a few top activists who were political refugees – some were even from Spain. They'd fought in the International Brigade and that sort of thing. They were all older than me. I was one of the younger ones. So, yes, mainly Jewish. Mainly Jewish. But of course Jews who weren't very religious, or at all.

BL: So you said. So you think it gave a home in a way, to people...?

EF: Yes, very much so! Now, a group in Princeton has recently sent me an article that they've put together on Young Austria and she sent me a copy of it. And I just read it. It's very interesting. It's what I knew anyway, but oh yes...they did a lot, especially for the people who had nobody here you know.

Tape 2: 35 minutes 11 seconds

BL: So in your case do you think it helped you in a way to sort of settle here...although of course they...?

EF: No. Not settle here because all the activists, or the majority, went back to Austria. But it helped me get through the war and be active on the Allied side and that sort of thing. Oh yes, we were very committed. I was only seventeen so it didn't arise. As I say, I was not about to volunteer for Malaya, but a lot of our people went in and fought on the Western front and on the second front and some made sure that they were discharged in Austria, demobilised in Austria, and stayed there – all sorts of things like that.

BL: Did you think during the war that you were going to go back to Austria?

EF: Yes. I was a bit young to make up my mind about anything, you know. But yes, yes. I was an activist, there's no question about it, I wasn't just a mid-lifer. But for various reasons, as I say I explained the reasons, I wasn't especially you see... and my best mate, by about '49, left and went to America and I didn't really have anything to draw me. As I say, the very first thing that happened to me when I went over, on the train I met a chap just by accident and we got talking. I think he was going to Steiermark somewhere. He'd been, I don't know, in Switzerland or something, and I said yes well of course I was a refugee and we were very strongly against the Nazis who, you know, fascists against the ordinary working people. He said: 'Oh, but they were very social!' Obviously an enthusiast like sort of 70% of the Austrians. All that sort of thing doesn't go to make you keen to live among these people and a lot of people were disappointed and didn't like it very much.

BL: What was it like going back for the first time to Austria?

Tape 2: 37 minutes 34 seconds

EF: Well everything was completely familiar except that Vienna was very badly damaged. It was only partially destroyed, but pretty badly damaged. The Cathedral didn't have a roof and things like that. And there were still tanks in the street as souvenirs. And it was very rough. So what with my friend saying: 'No, I don't like this any more...' It influenced me and, as I say, I didn't really want to leave my mother again you know. Once is enough in a lifetime.

BL: Can you just say again, how did your mother survive? What were her experiences?

EF: I think she must have worked in some of the hospitals in the camps because I suspect she survived 'cause she could steal more – you know, that sort of thing. And she said the SS didn't treat her too badly. How she managed that I don't know. She didn't... She was by no means a Kapo or anything like that. But I suspect they couldn't see the difference between an ordinary Viennese woman and my mother. That's what she was and perhaps that helped a little bit, I don't know.

BL: What about your father?

EF: My father was much older and he couldn't take it. As far as I'm aware he wasn't gassed. He died of 'unnatural' causes. She never elaborated on it, but she knew – she knew the date when he died and everything. I don't think they were together but they were in touch.

BL: Did she talk about her experiences?

EF: No, very, very little indeed. No. But my mother wasn't particularly theoretical about anything. But she was a practical woman and she wangled her way through somehow – that's all I can say. I mean, had she...? You know, one suspects possibly that she allowed something to, you know, to help her to survive. But I don't believe it because, for a start, all the ones who collaborated were practically lynched in Belsen and it certainly didn't happen to her, you know. No, no. I think it was straight.

BL: So she was first in Auschwitz and then...?

Tape 2: 39 minutes 55 seconds

EF: First in Auschwitz and then, when Auschwitz was evacuated, they took her into Germany – various places. I don't know exactly where. She did a bit of bomb damage disposal, things like that, stole vegetables from the fields, she said, and she ended up in Belsen. Luckily, she was only there a very short time. She didn't have enough time to be like those poor people, you know, the skeletons. Being my mother, the very first thing...her very first boyfriend after the liberation was a British Army cook so she wasn't short of food. But then she came over and she was quite happy. She learned English, not perfect English but she learnt perfectly fluent English and she did quite well, you know. She worked in a little café - that was her last job just around the corner from Piccadilly Circus - as a manageress. It belonged oddly enough to a Pole who was married to an Italian girl. She, the Italian girl, came from a café family. And my mother was the manageress there alongside the guy. She was friendly with the guy, you know. He's a Pole, and so she managed perfectly well. But before that she worked in different places. First, for the Committees in the canteens and things like that and then later in other catering establishments in the West End.

BL: You said before that your mother found you. How did she find you?

EF: I don't know, but she must have made enquiries. All I know is that we heard from her first. We enquired but we couldn't find her. You know it was all very mixed up. But of course as soon as we knew where she was we stayed in touch and my uncle, the one who'd been in the Army, got her over. He was able to do that. And so the three sisters were united again you see, which was a good thing. One of them, as I say, came over with her son, who was a little younger than me. And he's still alive. He's a poor devil; he's had god knows how many strokes. He was an accountant in Margate – big house, three kids, married an English girl, who is very good to him you know. He has to be fed through a tube, can't swallow, poor devil. He was a sportsman too, unlike me. He was a footballer, cricket, golf – didn't help – he still had all these strokes. It must be genetic, I don't know. And he's still around but he can't do anything much. They look after him very well. His favourite daughter is a nurse.

Tape 2: 42 minutes 45 seconds

BL: And how did you meet your wife? Was she part of the movement?

EF: Yes, this is very funny. She being, her father being sort of involved, naturally...She played the children's roles in the Austrian theatre and I saw her on stage. She was only young then, thirteen or something. And I lost track. But, after the war, when Young Austria packed up, I joined a youth club in Belsize Square of all places within one minute of the 43 Group. And it was in one of the private houses and it was called the Primrose Club. Maybe after the area or whatever. And it was composed largely of survivors from the camps, Polish or Hungarian, Ukrainian boys, that sort of thing. And one of these boys was an apprentice at her father's jewellery workshop and she became his girlfriend. But he went to America. I was friendly with him. And he went to America and I took her over you see, to look after her while he was away. He never came back. Many years later, after we were parted, they got

together and he brought her to America, so it's a peculiar world. Brought her to America and took her all over the place. But he was a drunk by then, this boy. He'd done quite well in jewellery and so plenty of money, but she said they fought; they quarrelled all the time she was there, and they didn't part on good terms. So that was the end of that. By then of course we had been married and separated. This must have been late 60s or something. And, anyway, that's how I met her. And of course we had a lot in common. In fact, at one point I was in charge of the children's' group of Young Austria and she'd just left. She wasn't there. But I knew she had been in it because her friends sort of told me, and so I narrowly missed her then, never got to know her. But got to know her later in the Jewish Youth Club, and we got married in '52. That's another story of course. The reason we got married, not because we particularly had to or even necessarily wanted to, but she was studying architecture and her father was very ambitious for her and he was a tough man and he sort of pushed her hard and she didn't like it. And then she started at the Central London Poly in Regent Street. She liked it. It was easy going. You designed away there, nothing serious. But her father forced her to go to University College and that was serious and she didn't like it. It was all mathematics and physics you know, what architects have to learn. And she didn't like it at all so she wanted to leave. Her father wouldn't let her leave, but if she got married he had no more say over her, you see? So that's why we got married, not because we particularly had to get married or wanted to get married. You know, we were all right as we were. But that's how it was.

Tape 2: 46 minutes 17 seconds

BL: Where did you get married?

EF: St Pancras registry office. It's still there – it's now the Camden Town Hall there you know, yeah.

BL: But was it important to you that she sort of came from a similar background?

EF: Yes, I would say that it was. Oh yes. Do you know she was actually born in the same birth clinic in Vienna? That you would never believe but it's true. I didn't get to know her till she was about seventeen or eighteen..

BL: So you went from the Young Austria when it finished to the Primrose Club?

EF: To the Primrose Club, yeah – yes. The man is still alive who ran it, a man called Yogi Mayer. He was an ex-Olympic athlete, still alive He must be ninety if he's a day. And I saw him. He's got the same doctor as me. Small world.

BL: Tell me a bit about Club '43 please.

EF: Club '43. I got into it... Well, one of the people who was connected with it was a man whom I knew from the cafés, a man called Holm – Gerald Holm. He was an insurance agent and a travel courier, both. A money maker and he had connections with them. He is into music and things like that. He's not the nicest man in the world. And he used to have close connections with the '43 Club, but he got slung out because I think he didn't behave himself very well. Anyway, he said, when I was

already starting to do slide shows which was... '88. At one point he said: 'Why don't you do a slide show for '43?' And they were in Adamson Road at the time; they weren't in Synagogue yet. And I said: 'Yeah, all right.' But I changed my mind. I didn't do a slide show. Instead, I read out my dissertation from my Master's course, which was Bertolt Brecht's anti-fascist poetry. I haven't got it any more. I lost it. It's a shame. Anyway, I read that out. It was very successful. I had nothing more to do with them, but there was a little old Austrian man, a little tiny man with a bad defect of speech, and he had been in the gulag for years. Must have gone as a refugee to the Soviet Union or something; they put him inside, needless to say. He survived, and went to Australia, came here, lived here, and he was in the '43 Club. And he, of course, he never had a car; he was in the meat business. And he said - I knew him from the cafes you know - and he said could I please give him a lift to the Monday meetings in Belsize Square. And so I did. Also, I was very friendly for several years with a little old Austrian artist, a designer called Dachinger. I don't know if you've heard of him. Puck they called him 'cause he was like a little gnome, very nice. Very friendly. I was very close with him. And he also wanted to go, but he wasn't a member. He also went fairly regularly. So I ended up taking these two little old men regularly to the club, so I joined! That's how I got into it! Yes!

Tape 2: 49 minutes 49 seconds

BL: So you were not involved from the beginning?

EF: No. Oh no. Nobody was except maybe Clement. He was in it very early on. But he's since left the Committee. He's agitating against Hans you know. He's a funny one. I got on very well with him, but he's full of hatreds, you know. As I say, he's 97. That keeps him going; he's as fit a fiddle.

BL: Can you tell us just the background to Club '43?

EF: The background is just very simple. It's odd. During the war, the German intellectuals, many of them left wing of course, formed an organisation called the Freie Deutsche Kulturbund, Free German Cultural League. And, like the Austrian movement etcetera, who ran it, although they were a minority on the Committee, they still ran it. And some of the good bourgeois intellectuals didn't like it. So they formed their own and that's the '43 Club. The funny thing though now, both Hans and I have been left-wing for years. We run it now. It's no longer really political, although we have many political talks and things like that. But it's now called the Anglo-German Cultural Forum, which I believe - at least he never ceases boasting about it - was Clement's idea to call it that. He was on the Committee for years, but he didn't get on with Hans and he's agitating violently against Hans all the time. He's left the Committee and he only comes very occasionally. I'm on friendly terms with him because a very close friend of mine - unfortunately not a girlfriend - she's a very attractive girl; she's of Serbian by origin, not by birth, she was born in this country, she's, well, sort of on the New Age fringe of things. And one of the things that she was particularly interested in was crystal stuff, you know, mineralogy. And she is very knowledgeable and so is Clement. So when I introduced them - she comes and sees me occasionally. They live in the country now; they had a café in Belsize and I was a customer. That's how I got to know her and her family. And when she comes to London, which she's anxious to do - she lives in the country and she hates it, hates it

violently; she's sort of doing rubbish jobs there. So she comes and stays with me occasionally. And I introduced them. He's very thick with her. He loves her dearly because she knows such a lot. So I'm on good terms with him. He thinks I'm the only intellectual in the group now, which I'm not of course, but that's what he thinks. And he thinks the others are nothing and so he keeps in touch with me and we're on quite good terms. But I know him only too well. He's got a lot of faults. But it's amazing – 97!

Tape 2: 53 minutes 15 seconds

BL: So what's the aim of Club '43 today?

EF: What's the aim? Today? It's to continue the interest of certain refugees in German culture but not only in German culture, culture in general, British culture, other cultures and therefore we make sure that most of the year, except for a month or two in the summer, we have regular weekly meetings, regular weekly talks of people such as you and others, and we get expert opinions on various subjects, many. Now, the people who come to it are more interested of course in the Jewish things, not so much in religious things, but in the Jewish experience, the Holocaust, etcetera. So, if there's anything like that to do with the refugees, we get good attendances. Other times we don't. But we are subsidised, of course, by the German Embassy. And Hans has even got a Medal of Merit for deeds, whatever it is, from the Germans. And we are strictly non-religious, although we do have religious themes sometimes obviously and some of our people are religious. But, as a club we're not. In fact we don't, certainly don't insist that everyone should be Jewish; we've got some non-Jewish members. But it's a good thing. I'm fond of it. Hans does most of the work of getting speakers, etcetera, but I do the money. And, as I've got a reasonably clear mind, the money doesn't go astray. So you know in that sense I do a useful job there. But I like it, and some of the people are very nice. You know, it's ok.

Tape 2: 55 minutes 7 seconds

BL: Is it a connection to the past?

EF: No, not really.

BL: What is it?

EF: Well, the only connection is that they left the Kulturbund. I mean sure it's a connection with the refugee experience, very much so. But that's not its only purpose nowadays. I mean we do deal with British, English things, English literature, whatever, you know. It's quite a wide field. We get any speakers we can.

BL: And how do you think...what's the future going to...?

EF: The future will be all right as long as Hans and I are able to run it, and as long as the Germans give us some money. As I say, they're going to give us more next year. They cut us down considerably this year. But the people from the Embassy who we're in touch with are very much on our side so they've also been agitating a little bit in our favour. And we are told that next year we are likely to expect 2,000 Euro,

which is not bad. It's less than we've been getting you know. We've been getting more like £1,800, £1,900, which is really what we can do with to carry on safely. But if it's a bit less, like 1,800 Euro or 2,000 Euro, it will enable us to carry on at least in the meantime. But, as I say, Hans and I are among the youngest and while we can do it it's ok. But if we pack it in or die or whatever, that's it. Cause I can't see anybody else running it. No. Hans does the work regarding the speakers and so on.

BL: For you, what's the most important part of your continental heritage or continental background?

EF: I'm continental. I'm not British. I don't feel British either. I mean I'm quite happy here, quite comfortable here, although it's changed a lot. England isn't anything near what it was. I mean not necessarily for the worse, but not for the better either I would say. But... I loved London. I don't love it so much now, because a) many agencies are against us drivers. We're harassed right and left. We get fined every two minutes. And it's not nearly as pleasant as it used to be. But it's a good place, you know. I've got friends, many friends, and the clubs, so I'm quite reasonably happy here. But I liked it better before. I loved London very much. And I don't love it any more. It's changed too much.

BL: Do you feel at home here?

EF: Yes. Well, I've got my life all around me. And, as I say, I've got still quite a lot of friends, ex-girlfriends, mates I've met in the cafes and all that. You know I'm not lonely at all and so, you know. Although I haven't been married properly for a long, long time, I've had my girlfriends in between you know. Quite a few. I'm not exactly Casanova of this world, but, you know, we all have our times. And I'm not really husband material. Definitely not. I'm bachelor material.

BL: Mr Flesch, we have to change tapes again.

Tape 2: 58 minutes 30 seconds

End of Tape Two

TAPE 3

Tape 3: 0 minute 10 seconds

BL: Today is the 25th of June 2007. We are conducting an interview with Mr Ernst Flesch. This is a retake of Tape Three because of technical problems. Ernst can you tell me a bit about your identity and how you define yourself today?

EF: Well it's not clear. It's mixed. I've lived here for many years. I'm used to it here. I consider myself a Londoner. I used to love London very much, though less so now; it's changed too much. But I live here and I wouldn't live anywhere else. But I'm still Austrian technically by nationality, though I only have indirect links with Austria. I do still have links with Austria. But it's very difficult to become British, spiritually anyway. I couldn't see myself waving a flag of St George, though I would probably support England when they're playing anybody. But I'm not a nationalist, anyway, and so... I'm something in between. Neither this nor that. A rootless cosmopolitan to some extent. But I am used to Britain of course and this is where I

live. I'm quite reasonably happy here of course, made my career here and everything else. But as I say, it's a bit ambiguous.

BL: When did you become naturalised?

EF: I didn't become naturalised.

BL: Ok, can you tell us a bit why didn't you become naturalised?

EF: Well, I applied when I decided to stay in this country and made up my mind to have a career here. I was studying when I applied. Now I applied at a time, in my late 20s and I thought I would still have to go in the army. I made a mistake. I didn't. I wouldn't have had to go in the army and one of the things the Special Branch inspector who came to interview me asked me: 'Why didn't you apply earlier, when you had to go in the army?' I said 'I wouldn't mind going.' He said: 'It's easy to say that now.' I said: 'Really? I don't have to go any more?' Well, of course, I wasn't particularly anxious to serve in Malaya. Had I been serving against the Nazis I would have gone gladly. But, as it was, I had no great wish to fight either in Malaya or Korea. But it wasn't that...But I think that was the reason they didn't give it to me. They reckoned at the time that anybody who didn't apply in time to do military service was not going to be a loyal citizen. It was not strictly true of course. Some of them didn't dream of being anything else but British if they'd got it, but they didn't get it, so it wasn't strictly for political reasons. Though they know quite a lot, you know. You can't hide very much from the Special Branch, etc. They know a lot. But I was on good terms with this chap. He said: 'Well...' He said: 'Good luck, but the Home Office has other irons in the fire. It's not up to me', he said. And I didn't get it. I could have of course applied since. I could probably get it easily now. But I don't need to now. I've got the same rights as everybody else except I can't vote in parliamentary elections. That's the only thing I can't do. Everything else I'm completely the same as British. Many, many years ago you had to report to the police regularly and things like that. That's long, long gone of course.

Tape 3: 3 minutes 48 seconds

BL: So you're an Austrian citizen?

EF: Yes, yes, I still have an Austrian passport. It doesn't make any difference. We're in the EU now anyway. But all these years when there was no EU it didn't cause me any difficulties at all. It was Europe after all. One European country is the much the same as the other.

BL: And you didn't try to re-apply again?

EF: I couldn't be bothered, quite honestly, to go through the whole rigmarole again. You have to give four referees and this and that. You get heavily interviewed, probably less so now. Considering how many people they let in who shouldn't be let in at all I don't see where the fuss comes in. But, as I say, no. I'm not bothered. I live here. I'm a Londoner.

BL: What impact do you think did it have, being a refugee? What impact did it have on your life?

EF: Well, a lot. I mean from the very beginning I was in hostels and orphanages. And I then, as I already explained, when I got to London from Scotland I was very much part of the Austrian organisations here, refugee organisations, yes. But since then, well, as I never became British, in a way I'm still a refugee. But yes, very much so. It influenced my whole life. Even today, I'm still in, for instance, in 43 Club, which is to a great extent a refugee club. At least the majority of members are. So, yes, all my life completely. I mean I've mixed of course. I've many British friends and I'm in British organisations. But I'm still very much a foreigner really in a way, though one wouldn't think so apart from my accent. My English is as good as anybody's. But yes, it's very important in my life, of course it is.

Tape 3: 5 minutes 50 seconds

BL: Have you looked for contact with other refugees or was it something that happened or...?

EF: Automatically. First of all, the places that I went, places like the Cosmo which I've mentioned. The whole area of course, which again, as I have mentioned, that I moved to the Hampstead area as soon as I could afford it and so you know I've been associated with it all my life, ever since I came to London. And so I mixed very much with refugees, yes. But not deliberately so much; it was almost automatically.

BL: Did you ever experience any hostility towards you - being a foreigner?

EF: No, no. Not in general. The British are tolerant. Perhaps less so than they used to be, but no, I never felt disadvantaged in any way through that. There have always been people who hated all foreigners, but I didn't feel it personally, no. Nor any of my friends, really.

BL: How different do you think your life had been if you hadn't been forced to emigrate - to leave Austria?

EF: I don't think it would have been all that different. My mother would have insisted on me being a good Jewish doctor and would have forced me to study and all that, even if I didn't want to. But I didn't in fact miss my education because I got it here, later on. And I was motivated enough to try for it and got it. Can't complain. Of course I'm only a Magister; I'm not a Doctor, but even so. Yes, anyway, I got higher education, quite well advanced. So, no, I didn't suffer. At first of course there was nobody to keep us in school and so on. As I've said, I left at 15, came down from Scotland and worked straight away, always worked except for my full-time education in the 50s for three years at teacher training college. After that even my studies were part time. So I managed to get... If you work hard enough you get an education. Some people don't bother. Many people don't bother. A lot of people of course are more for business. Of course among the refugees there were few layabouts; there were few lazy people who did nothing. Some of course as anywhere else. But the vast majority did reasonably well one way or the other. Some did extremely well like became big businessmen or leading technical and scientific people.

Tape 3: 8 minutes 50 seconds

BL: Yes but basically you've had to work quite hard to support yourself.

EF: Yes, I'd been... Yes, well, I had help from my aunts, first from one then the other. When my mother came, when she started work, she was in catering so I had help from her with food and things like that. So I never suffered. I was extremely low paid to start with in photography, pound a week or something. But, gradually it went up and, of course, when I became a teacher at a normal teacher's salary always made a living. My life has not been bad. I can't complain too much. I got through everything. Accident, heart attack, marriage break-up, this, that and... you get through. I've been lucky in a way. Things were not ever too bad. Yes, I had to work hard. But, being a native speaker, when I studied German it was a lot easier for me than if I hadn't been. But I've known Germans who didn't succeed because they didn't work hard enough. But, yes, I took three years over my first degree and I got a good one. I could have gone on to do a Masters or even a Doctorate. And I did in fact. I don't know if I mentioned that already. But I did start on a Master's course by thesis but I packed that in. I didn't pursue it properly. But then I was able to do it by examination, which means it's easier for me to do exams than to sit in libraries for many years which was never my forte. It's not me somehow. I've done it but I don't like it.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 59 seconds

BL: Do you ever go back to Austria?

EF: I've been quite often back to Austria, yes. But not for some years between 1954 and I think '68 I didn't. I went elsewhere. I started travelling very early on, but first time I went back was in '48, but after that '53 and '54 and then not until '68. That's the first time I went back into central Europe. Usually to the south before that – Spain, Italy, Greece. Yes, last time I was there was about one and a half years ago. Yes, I still only stayed a week then. But I have travelled around Austria quite a lot over the years. Oh yes.

BL: What was it like to go back to Austria in 1948?

EF: Well, Vienna was very bashed. It wasn't destroyed but it was badly damaged, but it was completely familiar. When I got there I knew every street I had known, didn't know the whole of Vienna obviously but my area and elsewhere. Nothing was unfamiliar, but it was very dilapidated in places, not the whole town. The cathedral didn't even have a roof. But I went to see a friend and so I also had connections there. Stayed with a very good friend who later went to America. I think I mentioned him already last year.

BL: What was his name?

EF: Peter Kisch. In America he was Keyes – K-E-Y-E-S. He did very well in insurance over there after falling out with the Left in Vienna. When I went there he'd already fallen out with them. I hadn't, actually.

BL: Was he the one who went back to Vienna?

Tape 3: 12 minutes 54 seconds

EF: Who went back to Vienna quite early with the rest of the activists and got disillusioned very quickly. And, by the time I went back in '48 he put me up in his place. He shared a flat with some people who were still in the movement etcetera, but he wasn't. He had separated himself and soon after that went to America in fact.

BL: So you stayed with him?

EF: Yes I did. But later on, you know, I found a bed and breakfast. In Austria it's very easy to get rooms everywhere Zimmer zu vermieten you know so... a lot of the country lives on tourism, so it's very, very easy, and I've travelled all over Austria, which is very beautiful of course.

BL: Were you tempted to stay at all in 1948?

EF: Well, I was at that time no longer really thinking of going back because my mother had come from Germany. She wasn't really going to go back to Vienna. She'd come from the camps. Also, when I went - I think I've told you this story in this section or in other sections - I went to see, not even to take part, but to see a demonstration by the Free Austrian Youth, the leftwing youth organisation. And going back on the tram with the friend who'd sort of showed me or taken me, somebody just sitting across from us said: 'Eh- they're all bloody Jews anyway!' That put me right off, if it needed anything. So, no, by then I'd made up my mind. I went to Budapest the next year and met some of my old friends and one of them said: 'When are you coming over? When we're a peoples' democracy?' I was a bit embarrassed, but I never did go back. No. And I don't really regret that because I've since had some... There are some very good people in Austria which I've already mentioned. But there are also some not very good people. I've had some experiences which would put anybody off from going back. You know, like, I'll give you an example. I don't know if I've told this?

BL: It doesn't matter if it's a repetition if it's important.

Tape 3: 15 minutes 26 seconds

EF: Well, in the south of Austria, in Steiermark, there's a custom of roasting corn on the cob on a low grade, flat grade charcoal, I suppose. It's nice. And I was there on holiday and there was one of those in the courtyard of the big pub where I was staying [...] And I went to have a look at it and there were three young fellows standing around it, and as I approached they said - one of them said: 'It's not burning very well; they should put a few Jews on it.' And I didn't know...I...I... I went. I didn't stop. I got a shock. And three to one I had no chance you know, so I didn't make a deal out of it. Had he been on his own he would not have been very healthy after that. But it's twenty years ago. I still had a bit of strength. But, anyway, I went. I kept away. But that's the sort of experience you can have in Austria, even today, though

less so now. I mean Haider has considerably lost votes and influence in the last few years, since his high point when he got 27% of the vote. Too much.

BL: Ernst is there any message or anything you think you've learned from your experiences?

EF: Well, yes, one does learn something in life. What I would say is that I think it's very important that people should take careful notice of what's going on around them and even be active in politics if that's their way, their trend. Because if you don't keep a very sharp watch, people can get away with things which they shouldn't. So, you know, and in general try and behave decently to other people of course, which by no means everybody does. And work hard for what you want to do, what you want to achieve. So, I mean they're not particularly outstanding, you know, conclusions. But I think they're valid. I haven't had a bad life as I say. I can't really grumble. Got away with quite a lot of misfortune and got through it all. Still going strong, though I don't know for how much longer.

Tape 3: 18 minutes 0 second

BL: Yes, you said before you of course belonged to Club 43. Did you belong to the AJR at all?

EF: Well, indirectly yes, through the Kindertransport organisation which is now included, incorporated. I'm not active in that. I think I've already said my opinion of that very great organiser who runs it, Bertha Leverton, but we're not on the same wavelength.

BL: But you're a member of the Kindertransport organisation?

EF: A section of the AJR – yes. Yes, since their reunions which...I didn't go to any of them but of course I took notice. Some of my friends came from abroad for them and things like that.

BL: But you didn't go?

EF: No.

BL: Why not?

EF: I couldn't be bothered. I didn't need to. I knew all about it anyway. But some people went for the social purposes you know, which is valid enough. But I did meet of course, as I say, some who are part of the organisation. One of my friends from Scotland – I may have mentioned him already – actually he lived in Nepal for a long time. And he came. And they thought very highly...I mean he was their most exotic member. But I myself was never active. But, as I say, I got in touch and eventually, when they joined the AJR, I automatically did too cause I wasn't a member before that - of the AJR. I am now. They send me the magazine regularly, which I like. I liked it under Grunberger and I like it now under Grenville. It's a good thing.

BL: Ernst, is there anything else you'd like to add which we haven't talked about?

EF: I don't think so. I think I've said all you asked me. I've said all there was to say more or less. But I did enjoy going over my experiences with you and I hope it's of some use to you.

BL: Ernst Flesch thank you very much for this interview

EF: It's a pleasure.

EF: So now you're going to incorporate all that, yes? Well that's good. Didn't take all that long. Yes. Well, I hope this time there're no technical hitches.

Tape 3: 20 minutes 36 seconds

End of Spoken Interview Tape Three

Photographs

Tape 3: 20 minutes 41 seconds

EF: This is an important photograph which I got sent from Austria because one of the girls on this picture was a neighbour of ours and she had this from before the war and they reproduced it and sent me copies of it. I am on the extreme right of the picture at the bottom, in the corner, the dark haired sulky looking child. My father is the one – not the one above him but the one next to him - with the white shirt. My mother is the one with the baby - that's a cousin of mine. And the ladies sitting down are her sisters. The two fair-haired girls are our non-Jewish neighbours, one of whom I'm still in touch with. She's in an old people's home in Austria.

BL: Where was the picture taken?

EF: In the village where my grandfather lived – in Purgstall.

BL: What was the name of the village again?

EF: Purgstall an der Erlauf.

BL: Thank you. Yes please.

EF: This is a very early picture of myself and my younger cousin again in my grandfather's garden in Purgstall in one of my holidays in the summer.

BL: What was your cousin's name please?

EF: Erwin –

BL: Erwin Flesch?

EF: Erwin Neufeld. But she's one of my mother's sisters.

BL: And when was this picture taken?

EF: When he was about four or five, I suppose, which would be '36 or '37. I must have been about seven or eight.

BL: Yes please

EF: This is a picture my parents sent me, after the war had already started, from Vienna to Scotland. And I think it was via Holland they sent this to me. That's them walking in the centre of Vienna.

BL: When?

EF: In autumn '39 after the war had already started. The caption on here is 'Unserem lieben Ernstl von Papa und Mutti' and I think it's the last picture of my parents together that I ever had.

Tape 3: 22 minutes 55 seconds

EF: This is a picture of myself in Scotland as a schoolboy at about the same time as the one taken in Vienna of my parents, so that goes back a long way – 1939.

EF: This is a later picture taken of my cousin and myself already taken in Britain, probably in Scotland when we were both children, but I was already, I think, in my early teens. I must have been nine or ten.

EF: This is a picture, probably the best of the ones of Young Austria. It's an outing to Richmond. It's a picture of myself and a group of my friends in 1945 and I'm the one in the second row, the third from the right, just behind the girl in the black bathing costume – that's me.

BL: Do you remember any of the other people in the picture?

EF: Oh, yes - very much so. Some are in Vienna, have survived. They're older than me. They may not have survived but they were when I was in Vienna some years ago for a reunion. They were still alive then and they may still be alive now. These are people whom I knew quite well, most of them.

BL: Can you give me some names?

EF: Yes. Heidi Rosenkranz, Wolfgang Hammerschlag, Kurt Bromberg and I knew most of them. They were sort of fairly close in the organisation to me in the same group and that sort of thing. But it's a good record because it's a nice clear photograph. I didn't take it, but it's a good record of my stay in Young Austria.

BL: I think the date was 1944.

EF: Forty-four? Oh, well. One of the two - '44. That was early on in my career in Young Austria. I joined in '43.

EF: These are three pictures of me at work at Weitzman Studio in Finchley Road. In front of the studio, one with a studio camera and one doing a bit of retouching, which was partly my job there. So we have quite a good selection of work pictures here.

Tape 3: 25 minutes 25 seconds

EF: This is one of my wedding photographs on the 28th of February 1952. This was taken in the studio on Finchley Road.

EF: This is a photograph taken with some of the members of the Primrose Youth Club of which I was a member. Most of these boys are concentration camp survivors. And this was when a new house was opened on Finchley Road for the club in 1952 and they celebrated by playing a little bit of snooker. And so it's quite an interesting photograph.

EF: This is a late photograph of my mother and her two sisters in Britain. I think it was in Richmond and we all went there for an outing and there they are all sitting together on a bench. It's probably the latest photograph of the three of them together. They're all three dead now.

BL: Can you tell me the names of your aunts please?

EF: Yes, Margaret and Frieda – they were my mother's sisters.

BL: Surnames? Their surnames?

EF: Well - Margaret Strauss, because she married a Strauss and Frieda Neufeld who married a Neufeld.

BL: And your mother's name?

EF: Marie Flesch.

BL: Thank you.

EF: We've now arrived at the present time. This was only taken a year or so ago and it's myself with my good friend Hans Seelig, the Chairman of the 1943 Club, who lives out in Hemel Hempstead, and I went to see him when we went out for a meal. This is taken in the countryside not very far from his home. Then we're right up to the present now.

BL: Mr Flesch thank you very much again for this interview.

EF: It was a pleasure.

Tape 3: 27 minutes 35 seconds

End of Photographs

End of Tape Three