

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	187

Interviewee Surname:	Owen
Forename:	Ursula
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	21 January 1937
Interviewee POB:	Oxford

Date of Interview:	22 July 2016
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	2 hours 36 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV187
NAME: Ursula Owen
DATE: 22nd July 2016
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

*Today is the 22nd of July 2016, and we are conducting an interview with Mrs. Ursula Owen.
And my name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.*

Can you please tell me your name?

Ursula Owen.

And what was your name at birth?

Ursula Sachs.

And when were you born, please?

21st of January 1937.

And where?

In Oxford.

Ursula, thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices project. Could you please tell us a little bit about your family background?

[0:00:51]

I was... the second child of German Jews. My brother was born in 1933, also in England, but at the time my parents were living in Berlin. And they had a family friend who advised them to have- when my mother was pregnant the first time, and indeed the second time, to have the children born in England, because he said, you know, Hitler was not going to be any good for the Jews and that this would be a good thing for the children to have British – British citizenship. And... so in November 1933, the year that Hitler came to power, my mother - who had a whole big group of cousins who'd come a generation earlier- Jewish, who'd become English really in, in that intervening time - went to stay with her cousin in Leeds, and my brother was born in November 1933. And then she did the same when she was pregnant in 1936, and I was born in January 1937 in Oxford where she was staying with her sister-in-law who'd already left Germany because she was a doctor, and she wasn't allowed to practise. So, it was a strange... My family were... secular...and assimilating - always. I - I've been trying to write a memoir and you know this assimilating- there are assimilating signs from way back. ...They- they felt, my parents felt themselves to be Jewish very definitely. So did my grandparents, but they didn't practise. And indeed, when my parents came to England- they were always rather interested in the Christian opposition to Hitler. They lived in Dahlem, in Berlin - Dahlem-Dorf. And it was where pastor Niemöller...preached in the church down the road. And my mother used to tell me about him preaching with a – oops – preaching with Gestapo- a Gestapo officer on- one on either side of him... And listening to his preaching. Do you want me to shut the door? Are you alright?

I'm fine.

So... we- my parents came from Frankfurt. My great-grandparents- my great-grandfather was born in Kattowitz [Katowice, Poland] and started his life shovelling horse shit into carts, to be sent to the *Eisenhütten* [iron foundries] for - for fuel. And he ended up being one of the richest men around, and owning many of the mines in Upper Silesia.

[0:04:02]

What was his name?

His name was... Can you stop? Can you stop it?... Sachs. Sorry. His name was Elias Sachs, and he was notorious in our family because he retired at forty because he'd made all his money. He was very active in sort of- set up banks and he was... quite politically involved. But he retired at forty, and then drove his children mad by... getting behind them and driving them mad. My grandmother always said he was a bit of a nightmare father. But my grandfather seemed to survive him. My grandfather was called Hans Sachs and was a rather well-known- he went into pharmacology. I mean you - even then, as a Jew, there were certain things you couldn't do. He went into serology and pharmacology and he actually was- together with colleagues, invented the test for syphilis, which my grandmother always rather proudly told anyone who'd listen.

And where was he based?

He was based in Frankfurt- in Frankfurt and then in Heidelberg.

So, when did the family move from Kattowitz to Germany?

Yes... He went to Germany to study. He went to Berlin to study, and he went to Frankfurt to study and then he ended up in a job as a, as a- I think he was in the cancer department in Heidelberg. And that's where he was when he got his letter saying he was no longer wanted. It was the kind of very, very, racially clear letter about 'time to leave'. He didn't get his- first time around I think even the Nazis didn't always, you know, they sometimes had to keep enough people there to get- keep things going. But he... he- first time around I think they kept him on, and the second time around he... he lost his job.

And what did he do? What did he do, after?

[0:06:25]

He... He and my grandmother took a long time to leave. They took longer than my parents. They stayed in Heidelberg. They... sometimes talked about 'Oh, this nonsense will pass',

which my parents never did, not really. I think they always knew. Although I speculate a lot in my- especially in my memoir about what they felt about was going on, living in Dahlem, what- because as you know the Nazis moved very fast when they got in. They started- you know, they set up a concentration camp. They killed their political opponents. They... They did- They moved very fast in the first six or nine months. I was- I- I of course I talked to my parents a bit, but of course, as ever, you leave it all too late. And I didn't- I didn't quite discover what- what they thought. Except I think they always knew what was going on. My mother- my mother was rather brave actually. She went to the 1936 Olympics with my father's office outing. And she refused to put up her hand in the 'Heil'- in the 'Heil Hitler' salute. And the woman next to her lowered hers. So, she- and she went into Jewish shops. She was quite brave. But she also... was very aware. My brother went to a kindergarten. I, I was born in 1937, he was born in '33. So, he was going to a kindergarten where they separated the Jewish children from the non-Jewish children. And he was put in with the non-Jewish children because – quote – “he didn't look Jewish”. And my mother was always terrified that he'd tread on the toe of some important Nazi father, father's child. And so, she was conscious I suppose in a way that women are in everyday life and things. She was very conscious. And she often used to say, “We left it too long. We left it too long.” But my father said it was extremely difficult to get exit visas, even for rather middle-class, upper-middle class people like them.

Can you tell me a little bit- both of your parents were from Frankfurt?

They were both...

Originally?

They were both originally from Frankfurt [am Main]. Grew up together; you know, could wave to each other down the road. My father's sister was a great friend of my mother's, et cetera.

And when did they get married?

[0:08:59]

They got married in 1932. My mother had- my mother...my mother's father was a doctor. And a very nice sounding man. But I never met him. My mother's mother... He was a doc- he was a doctor in the local community, and my mother said he was one of the few doctors that saw working class patients. But they came in by a separate entrance. And my mother's mother helped him by using the radium machines to radiate, which of course nobody knew at the time, could cause cancer. And she died of cancer when my mother was eighteen. And that was... probably the biggest blow to my mother's life. She talked about it all her life as if it had happened yesterday. So that was terrible.

What were their names, the grandparents on the mother's side?

The grandparents were called Marta and Henry...

Böhm.

Böhm. Böhm. And on my father's side, it was Lotta and Hans Sachs.

And the practise was in Frankfurt, your grandfather's?

[0:10:07]

It was in Frankfurt, yes. Exactly. And when her mother died, she used to go to the Sachs household - because Ilse, the- my father's sister, was a great friend - and feel deeply relieved. Because somehow her father was in such deep mourning, that he couldn't address it. And her sister, who she never got on with very well, was engaged to be married. So that's how- And they- they were- their- their adolescence was rather idyllic sounding. They went on- they were, I think they were probably all Jewish, I'm not sure. They went on skiing trips together, they went to dancing classes together. I mean I was very envious of it, because I didn't- I didn't have an adolescence like that. And it was great. And there are lots of photographs of them.

And where did they- where in Frankfurt? Do you know where they lived?

Bockenheimer Landstraße.

Bockenheimer Landstraße.

Yes, itself, yes. Yep. And my father was born... I once, 'cause I used to go to the Frankfurt Book Fair because I was a publisher. He took me round Frankfurt Westend where he was born and where all his friends lived. So, we did a little tour.

But they got married and then decided to move to Berlin.

They got married, and they moved to Berlin because that's where my father had work. He was...He did a- did he do a PhD? He certainly did graduate work. He was a clever man.

And what was his background? What was his background?

Chemical engineering. He was- he was a chemist and a chemical engineer. And he joined the family firm. It was his cousin's, who owned the firm. Very rich, called the Grünfelds. Oh, the picture's gone. That's- that's their mother. [laughing]

Yes, I saw that before. Aha.

And...

What was the company called, please?

[0:12:00]

It was called *Gesellschaft für Elektrometallurgie*. And when they had to hand- until 1937 they were kind of left alone by the Nazis. Indeed, they were probably ...doing helpful work for the Nazis, because it was a non-ferrous metal company and they made alloys and things like that. And then in 1937 the Nazis came down heavily on all Jewish businesses, and they handed it over to Aryans who... were friendly Aryans, in the company. And the Nazis immediately called it "*Hermann Goering Werke*". And they took- they- when they left, which they all did – the cousins and my father and mother– when they left to go to England, they set

up fairly soon afterwards, in a few months, the English, English London offices called “The London and Scandinavian Metallurgical Company”. They had a branch in Sweden, and they stayed in touch with their German colleagues. And so, after the war- and they were very decent- after the war they handed them back to the- to the owners. So, and it’s, yeah, they did alright. And then they- then of course they did it for the English government - British government - all this stuff, so my father was never interned because he was doing war work.

And did they manage to bring some of their assets out, or did they...?

I don’t think they brought any assets out, but they had connections in Sweden, in Turkey and things and I think via those they managed to... get some money to set up the British company and they- and I think- I get the impression that fairly soon he was reasonably well paid and it was a going concern. And in the end, he was very- rather rich. He did well.

And maybe can you tell us a little bit about your parents’ life in Dahlem? You said they were assimilationist. What was that mean exactly?

[0:14:06]

I don’t know. I don’t know what their, my parents’ life in Dahlem was. I mean... that’s what I speculate on.

But you said your mother used to go to this- to Niemöller and...

Yes...

...they must have [listened to that].

...they used to- Yes, they used to do that. They were secular Jews. They unquestionably felt Jewish, and I’ve always felt Jewish, even though I’m not- what happened to them was that they converted to Christianity when they came to England. And my mother taught in Sunday schools and things. So, I was brought up an Anglican, which is quite a boring religion to be brought up in. But that’s how I was brought up. But I’ve always felt myself to be Jewish in the way that they do.

Did they make- do you think that was a decision... for their safety as well? Were they worried about that, or was it that...?

Everyone always says, "Oh that's why they did it, to assimilate and..." But it was- there was much more to it than that.

You felt there was more to it than that...

I would definitely- and they remained, my mother remained very close to the, her local church all her life. Well, you could argue that was partly social, and it was, partly. But I- No I think it was more- there was more to it than that. But I... I suppose I felt- listen, I'm- I'm an agnostic. I probably am not an atheist but I'm an agnostic. So - I didn't talk to them in detail about, you know, what did it meant to them.

Yeah...

But my father read books by... "Honest to God". All those books that came out - Teilhard de Chardin...

So, they were interested- They were interested...

They were interested, very interested

in theology, or...

They had quite a few friends who converted. Jewish friends who converted. Including one of their great friends who was a judge in Germany. A Jewish judge, married to a non-Jewish woman... who survived Dresden. And he became a vicar in Dalston.

What was his name?

Werner Simonson. Yeah.

[0:16:02]

Well, it's a very interesting aspect I think...

Yes.

...which we... don't often...

Yes, one doesn't hear about... No.

Yeah ...don't hear about.

And people are quite scornful about assimilation. I mean, I see it when I read books, too. I think a lot of Jews felt that assimilation, the desire for German Jews to assimilate, was partly responsible for what happened. That they kidded themselves that they were part of the society when they weren't. Lots of stuff like that. And there was a very- quite an antagonistic feeling. When I grew up, I just suddenly picked up that- I remember talking to a friend of mine, not long ago... maybe about twelve years ago, who'd gone to Princeton. And I was talking about how I was writing a- thinking of writing a memoir about an assimilating family. And he said, "When I was in Princeton a few years ago, the word "assimilation" was as bad as the word 'nigger'." It sort of- and it was about German Jews, because other Jews didn't go in for it so much. And then what became... rather sort of glorified, was ethnicity.

Yeah.

And... I love all that. You know, I think there's a lot more to be said about assimilation than that. I know everyone thinks that automatically you have to give up everything. But that wasn't what it was like for me.

That's interesting. And do you think it helped your parents to settle in England? We'll talk about it later, but...

Yeah.

Did it help them to...

To what?

...to root themselves?

In England?

Yeah...

My mother liked England a lot.

But I mean their- the conversion.

The conversion?

Yeah...

[Audio break]

I asked... whether conversion helped them to...

[0:18:00]

Don't know... I don't know. They knew that they wanted us to assimilate. They came- they went to live in Putney. They didn't go to Hampstead. They went where there were hardly any Jews. And they- they wanted to assimilate, but they wanted us to assimilate. They knew that they couldn't. They had strong guttural German accents, you know. But we were - especially my brother and me who were born before the war – we, they wanted us to assimilate. So, I was extremely committed to belonging. Anxious about it, wanting to belong. Doing everything I possibly could. I was a very good girl. And my brother...who is very, very different from me. I'm very fond of him but... They sent my brother to a boarding school. Shrewsbury. And I went to a day school. And when I talked about assimilation, which I did for quite a long time before I started writing, he didn't really know what I was talking about.

I remember going on to Desert Island Discs and talking on Desert Island Discs about feeling I ...grew up in a German family. Not a Jewish family, but a German family where all the habits, and eatings and talk and... And he rang me up after and said, "I don't know what you're talking about." [laughs] And what he says now is, "I was sent to Shrewsbury. I loved it." He's a Tory and a Christian. And he... he said, "After eight... I was English." Now that didn't happen to me.

That's interesting.

Yeah.

Yeah...

And he feels that now, I think... yeah.

Let's come back to that ...at the end. Let's just go back to your- to the thirties and... your parents and life in Dahlem, which of course you can't remember...

I can't. I, I would- I would be making it up. I mean I think they probably went to music and... I don't even know- I think they had, were involved in the family firm and social life. I think my father- my mother found that quite difficult because the, the owners of the family firm, the Grünfelds, were quite dominating. They were very rich and they were dominating, and I think she felt- I remember her saying that she was ticked off for phoning my father at the office. You know, that sort of thing.

Yeah. Where did they live? Where did they live?

[0:20:37]

They lived in Königin-Luise-Straße in a flat, which I went back to in my forties, when I- I was living with a man, a journalist who knew Berlin very well. And I'd never been. I didn't, I didn't take great interest in my German past. I mean I did in my Jewish past but- and he took me back there and... the house was bombed...

Yeah.

And so, I went up... the sort of low laboratory type house with flats or something. So... I went up the side path, and he took a photo of me, and I burst into tears. [laughs] It was sort of something about... being in the place where you were first- when you first were. And of course, you don't - if you're exiled you don't have that. You can't touch the place where you came from. And Oxford didn't quite do it really, in a way. ...Yes, so I- and I think- I know that I always rather thought- I always rather down-played the- the exile of my parents because they dealt with it rather well, and without a lot of fuss. And my mother had a lot of breakdowns in her life, later. And I used to think, yes, I'm sure it was part of it. But I used not to think it was so much part of it. Then I found amongst her possessions, two bunches of ...tied up in a ribbon, of letters and telegrams she'd had when my brother was born and when I was born. And there were probably 120. And they weren't all intimate friends. But it made me realise that she had this network of acquaintances, of friends, of family and things which... Of course, leaving that was difficult. But I think she liked England a lot. In some ways more than Germany. She liked the English. She liked their quietness and their tolerance, and they're- they're much less authoritarian, on the whole, than the Germans.

But it's extraordinary- maybe you can tell us a little bit more. When she came first in '33 and then for your birth...

Yeah...

How practically- how did she organise it so...?

[0:23:10]

Well, she had... in one case, the cousin. And in the second case, her sister-in-law. So, she was actually- she had a very nice time when I was born. Particularly when I was born. She- I think she- because she was really quite ill. She was diagnosed... many times over as schizophrenic. I've never been sure whether she was. But... diagnosis was very dodgy.

In Germany, or...?

No, no, later when- much later when she had breakdowns. But, when she started going to hospital I was already in my teens, but she was- there were things before that, that I think she found difficult. And she was needy and I just think she found a load of things difficult. But she... Yes, she's- I've forgotten what you asked me. You asked me...

I said how did she manage practically. Did she come by herself?

Yes- How did she manage...

Did your father come?

My father came too, but went back to Germany for my birth. I don't know what happened with my brother. But he came too then had to come back early. And she had six weeks, and they were a good six weeks. I've got a strong feeling that that was a happy time for her.

In both cases? Your brother and yourself?

Not so much with my brother. I think it was a more difficult birth. I don't think she stayed so long. I don't know, but...

Because for the time, I think it's quite extraordinary that you travel somewhere to give birth.

Mnn... Mnn...

But I don't... I mean...

Well, she did have- in both cases she had relatives.

Yeah. But there was no discussion at that point of staying- about staying in England?

No, oddly enough that... I never asked them, "Why didn't you just stay?" And I suppose the answer was, they didn't have exit visas yet. You know, they could- and in- until '37, which is the year I was born, my father was still working there. I mean I don't know why he didn't decide to leave anyway. But he - it was a family firm that was left alone. And then it wasn't.

[0:25:11]

Yeah. And did they- Did your parents talk about... incidents or... personal incidents, anti-Semitic incidents or other incidents at that time, in Berlin?

They talked about these- they talked a lot about- actually I had a lot of stories about lucky escapes and good Germans, oddly enough. One of the lucky escapes was my father, hitting a young SS officer on a motorbike, and not hurting him badly and thinking, "Oh, my God." And then the man rang up and said, "Could you not report it? Because my - I'm not insured." And then there was the story of my mother going to the Olympic games, and lowering her hand. And there was the story of my mother going into Jewish shops, and... And my... There were awful stories of - when they tried to get their exit visas. When they realised- the firm realised they had to go- the Jewish members of the firm. They sent in a very honourable Aryan member of the firm to argue with this nightmarish Gestapo man whose name I do- I did, have, who was the Chief in, in Berlin, who screamed at him. And eventually after hours of this screaming, handed over all of these- all the exit visas except my uncle's, which he held on to out of sheer malice to see if, you know, "If you all behave, then I'll let ...go." And then the man did some more work on him, and eventually they all went. So, there was- in terms of personal anti-Semitic... they didn't talk about it. They really didn't talk about it that much. They talked a lot about good experiences. Like when they left, my mother always said, the customs official... let them just go through. And the SS officer behind them, he searched every single item in his suitcase. So, there were sort of those sorts of stories.

[0:27:26]

Mn-hnn. And once...

Unusual...

... they got the papers, did they leave quite...?

Probably quite soon. One of the explanations I've wondered about, though it's not what they gave for them leave- 'cause I don't- they left us. They left Germany without my brother and I... which has always been a source of great bafflement.

Yes...

And they left us with our grandparents, who were Jewish as well, in Heidelberg. And they sort of thought they'd call for us when the time came. People do funny things in times of war, you know. They- they behave as if things are normal, and they're not. So, when I used to ask them, which I did, you know, "Why did- why did you leave us behind?" They would- my mother rather embarrassedly would say, "Well, we wanted to settle in - settle down." And my father would be less embarrassed about that. And it was very much a time when children were not the centre of life. You know. That wasn't how it was, as it became later for- for our, our generation. And so, I rather accepted that. And my- that's the reason they gave, so it probably is true.

Yeah. And what do you- And what do you think, now?

Well, what I wonder – somebody put the idea in my head - was whether my father was afraid that having handed over the family firm, the Nazis would no longer have any use for them and that they might get arrested at the border. Now they never said that, but I wondered about it. Cause in a way, it seems so extraordinary – to leave us. And then they- then they rang my grandparents when they- Chamberlain was talking about Berchtesgaden and meeting Hitler and et cetera. That was obviously trouble which my grandparents... you know, it wasn't reported very well in Germany. And they organised for us to leave, and that was in August, six weeks later. And I asked my father at the end of his life whether he wasn't frightened that it might not work, and we might not meet each other on the station. And he said, very vehemently, "Yes, I was frightened." But the whole thing, to me, seems so insane.

But would it be possible that your papers weren't ready, for example?

[0:29:54]

No, I don't think so.

The papers were...

I mean, the paper was that document that I showed you. And I think that was there. Yeah, we had to get that. And... not to my knowledge, no.

But were you left with the grandparents and a nanny, or how, practically in- what were the...?

Well, my grandparents had a- had a, a maid, and she took us across the border.

And what was the situation- they remained in Heidelberg?

They stayed in Heidelberg then they left it... till the end of the year. Then they got out, just, by December 30th. They left it a long time.

And where did they go?

Well, one of the reasons they left it, is he was a- quite a distinguished pharmacologist by then. And he- he was also in his late fifties, so, quite an old man by the standards of the time. And... he was looking for work, he was looking for a job and he didn't get one in England. He would have wanted one in England to be near his children and grandchildren. So eventually, they really did have to get out. And there was a huge fuss, and they- the very decent man in Heidelberg gave them the exit visa without getting an answer from England and things. It was really fairly horrific. And my grandfather particularly was very agitated. And he got something in Dublin. And so, they went to Dublin. They came to England first and then they went to Dublin. And he had a job at the Institute for Advance Studies. ...I'm not sure how happy he was in that job; it wasn't- didn't entirely suit him. My grandmother, who was a great optimist, and she always talked about their time in Ireland as wonderful. And it was rather wonderful. People were very friendly and supportive and there was a Jewish community there. But I'm not sure about him. He was rather pessimistic and... downbeat about things.

And did they stay there, or...?

They stayed, and then he died at the end of the war, quite young, in his sixties. He had an operation... and he died. So, she then left, after he died.

[0:32:07]

And where did she go?

Well, she'd never lived alone in her life. So, she first of all came to live with my parents. And.... [phone rings]

[Audio break]

Your grandmother....

Yes, so- but my mother was- didn't, it didn't go terribly well. I think my mother probably had issues. I think my mother's illness started further back than the obvious signs of it. But- and- so that didn't go. So, she then went to live with my father's sister, my aunt Ilse, who was a great support for me. Because I lived- I found it- I had a complicated relationship with my mother because I was the one, she saw as her support, and that I understood her and things. So, I- and I went along with that. So, I was very involved with her life, and that wasn't very easy.

And where was your aunt?

My aunt was in Oxford and my parents were in London. My aunt had meanwhile married a very nice English scientist, and lived in Oxford. So, she went there- she went backwards and forwards, but she did live with us as well. But in the end, she lived mainly with my aunt and her family. And as I say, she never really lived alone.

[0:33:37]

Yes. And do you have any memories of Heidelberg? I mean you were very young- probably...

No.

Anything?

No.

No.

I don't- I was eighteen months old.

Yeah... too young.

No I don't.

And... So the journey was that the nanny took the two of you...

Well, I think my grandfather came with us... to the border, and then went back.

Which border? Where?

Dutch.

To the Dutch border. And then the nanny...

Took us across, yes.

And where did you meet your father?

Well, I don't know, but we got a plane from Amsterdam, I think. I don't know what the station was.

But was it in England or in Holland?

It was in Holland.

Your father travelled...?

No, my father came to the Dutch border.

OK...

Oh, no, he definitely did. And my mother was waiting in... in England, with her cousin. And she always told the story- it's interesting about my mother in a way. I'd been sick on the plane, and Peter my brother had been sort of playing around with the luggage and was rather filthy and everything. And my mother always told the story that her cousin turned to her and said, "Are these your children?" As if, shock horror. I thought "Well," you know, "there we were... surviving Nazi Germany." That didn't seem quite good enough to me. Anyway. It was... what happened.

And you came, and went to Putney.

They had...

[0:35:11]

Or, at that point, where were they?

They ... They probably had started renting the house in Putney, which they then bought, yes. Yeah, we were in Putney.

And was there any other family in Putney? Or was there any reason why Putney?

No, I don't- Putney was near to my father's office which was in Wimbledon. No, there was no other family. In fact, very few other Jews. And I'm sure they made that as a deliberate decision not to go to Hampstead. I would like to have had more Jewishness in my- in my life. You know, I'd like to have had the odd Friday night, or... But I, we didn't have any of that. We, we went to- we went to church.

And when- You said they converted fairly soon when they came.

Fairly soon, yes. In Oxford. They went- they must have gone to Oxford... I'm just trying to think whether that was when we were evacuated. They were confirmed, and we were christened in Oxford, in the church - St Mary's in Oxford. And my mother taught in Sunday school. And that was probably when we were... When we were coming here, during the war. Because by then the war had started, I think.

And Ursula, what are your earliest memories? What can you remember?

Well, the trouble is, I'm so steeped in stories and I'm so steeped in trying to write the stories that I honestly don't know anymore, what I can remember. I can remember being very, very shy. And... I think I can remember sitting at my parents' table when I was maybe three or four and listening to their conversations with their fellow refugees. Cause when my mother- before my mother got really ill, which was quite a lot later, they did have their refugee friends over. And there was lots of laughing, and lots of stories. Well, I don't know. I feel I remember them. What can I say?

In German? The conversation?

Yes, I mean they did speak German to us, and we spoke English to them. That was the way it worked. So, I did understand the German.

They continued speaking German...

They did. And then at some point it slightly changed, and they needed to learn English. So, we spoke English to them.

But they had a circle of refugee... friends.

[0:37:46]

Not exactly circle. A few... I'd say two or three couples. Two couples particularly I remember. Both of them converted to Christianity. One of them rather jollier than the other. But they laughed- they did laugh a lot at their own... ..misfortunes, in a funny way.

Yeah?

Yeah. They were...

There was humour in there, as well...

There was humour there, yes... And there was a kind of not doing heavy- there was not a lot of 'Oy-vey' and, you know, 'How awful it was'. As I say, I grew up on a lot of stories of good Germans. There's a famous one of my grandparents. The reason they finally left was that just after Kristallnacht - they were still there on Kristallnacht - the three o'clock knock at the door came. And there was the... Gestapo officer. And- and they sort of thought that was it. And he turned out to be an... ex-pupil of my... grandfather's. And he came in and he said, "I joined the Nazi Party because I believed that they were going to do good things. And then I saw that they weren't." But of course, he couldn't get out. And he- so what he could do was warn people. So, he'd come to warn them to get out. And then after the war, my grandmother wrote a note about him to the British authorities, or the American authorities or something. So that was an extraordinary story of a... No, there were a lot of...

So, they had positive- Not positive, but they didn't have a...

[0:39:23]

Mnn. Mnn.

They had positive...

Yes, my, my- they did and they ...they also had negative things. I mean my father was sent – rather extraordinary - there are nine letters, I think, written in English because he had to write them in English.

Yes...

He was sent by the Control Commission at the end of the war in 1945, Christmas time, to go back to Germany to look at the state of... the steel industry and the non-ferrous metal industry in Germany. So that he had this extraordinary trip in Colonel's uniform. And- looking at his country that was completely destroyed of course. Well, not all of it. I remember him writing to say... I think Heidelberg was all right and Nuremberg wasn't. You know, there were- there were devastations and then there were things that were left alone. So, and he wrote- And he talked to people all the time. And... there was a lot of, "Oh well, we don't understand why this happened to us." And, "It wasn't anything to do with us", sort of thing, which he was pretty contemptuous of, in a quiet way. And he sort of said, "Well, you know, I could write a book about this, but ..." you know- And, "it's rather depressing." Very quietly and measuredly, but... And then he went to Hitler's house in Berchtesgaden and said, "Oh! He certainly knew how to find a good view", and things. There were a lot- it was extraordinary! And then this country that he liked, he certainly loved the physical country. And- and seeing it. It's very, very strange, and he's very measured. You know, very un-angry. They're all written to my mother.

Yeah. How long did he spend in Germany then?

[0:41:16]

I think he spent about... six or eight weeks maybe. Maybe something like that.

And you've got the letters?

I've got the letters, and I found them. My- my brother had them. And he goes to the American zone and they have great meals. And then he goes to the British zone and they have terrible meals. [both laugh] Like no food. Or maybe there's- you know, it's an extraordinary account of the war.

Yeah...

The last war, really, yeah...

Very valuable...

Yeah – yep.

...resource.

I wonder. Yes, maybe. Maybe your people would like to have that.

We can talk about that. Definitely interest...Different organisations.

Yeah...yeah.

So, you remember a little bit, then, this German- that atmosphere.

Yes...

Your parents.

Yes, I do. I think I do.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And what about your own schooling and what happened to you?

[0:42:20]

Yes, I remember... Well, I went to Oxford High School first when I was four, because we were evacuated then. And I was excruciatingly shy. And we- I didn't say anything. I remember the school report saying, "Ursula's seems to be intelligent, but she doesn't speak." [laughing] And nobody can quite believe it now. It is very strange. I was- I remember feeling shy really till I was into my twenties actually. And I don't feel shy now. I don't know what

makes it- I think Virago changed it, probably. [laughs] But, so I do remember going to that school. And I remember we were evacuated for a while, with a... rather lovely couple who were very religious. Belonged to something called the 'Moral Re-Armament' movement and they lived around the corner. So that was quite daunting, 'cause I was four. You know. My mother lived there with us. I think my brother went to The Dragon School in Oxford. I remember it was snowing one day, we were sent home early. I do think I remember this, walking home to the house because it was early. And not daring to ring the bell, because it was early and I was breaking the... pattern. So, I remember just a lot of shyness and... not- not speaking out. I, I really had a great- very strong need to ...be good. Be... Do what seemed right. Belong. I would think I was probably quite embarrassed by my parents' sort of loud, talking in German which they did, not always, but sometimes on buses and all that stuff. And, and then we went back to London. And then I went to Putney High School. And that was the school I went to for the rest of my life in Junior school and the Senior school.

[0:44:28]

But the evacuation was with your mother? Not by yourself...

No.

And your mother came...

No. No I was never by myself. No. Absolutely not.

While your father stayed...

He stayed and came backwards and forwards. Yes. He stayed to work, yeah.

And why Oxford? Was there any reasoning for that?

Because of my... father's sister being there. And actually, we didn't live with my father's sister, we- we lived with these people who put us up. But I think there was a feeling that Oxford- and there- it was quite a strong refugee community in Oxford.

Yes, it was. Yes.

Did you know that too?

Yes, I know there was a strong community.

Yeah...

Your mother probably- I don't know whether- she must have been in touch with people...

Yes, I don't know how much she did that, really. Mnn...

*But do you think your shyness was...a result of- of this migration, or family constellation or-
How do you...?*

Yeah, my grandfather always wrote- my grandfather wrote a lot to my mother. And he always wrote that you know, he was- he said I was not a ch- Is that alright? Sorry... I was not a chatterbox. And he said, "And I wish I had been. And maybe Ursula's like me..." Or something. He was quite a shy man. I don't know. I don't know. I think I was very keen to do the right thing, and please and be along. I was very un-rebellious. And my parents were both- my father was quite authoritarian. Overtly so. But my mother was too, in a funny way.

[0:46:06]

In which way? In terms of education, or...?

Yes, or, you know. Often sort of made- there was a right way- there was a right answer. There was a- a wrong answer. There was a nonsense answer. You know, there was... Education and... behaviour... Sticking to the norms and things.

But quite strict or...?

Yes, it probably was. I mean, yeah, I was a- I grew up in the fifties; that's what- that's what we were like. And children weren't the centre of life in the way that they were even in the

sixties. But... yeah. I suppose it was strict. It seemed- it was more just that you were just aware. For instance, it would never have occurred to me... to do what my daughter did, which is say, "Sorry, Mum. I'm not coming to that play", or, "I'm not going." You know. I never said, "No" Even though I... didn't particularly want to go to the late Beethoven Quartets in the Victoria and Albert Museum. And of course, I'm very glad I did, but it would not have been possible to say no.

[00:47:19]

Yeah... And what about music?

Music was big in our family.

Can you tell us a little bit about it?

Well, we were all- my family is very musical and I learnt the piano and I was quite good. And, you know, even- I don't think I ever thought seriously about being professional. But I was good and I was taught by my mother's cousin, who was a wonderful teacher. My mother played the violin, my father played the flute...beautifully actually. It brought out his gentler side, you know. And my brother played the cello and my sister also played the piano. But she was seven years younger than me, so... So, and I-

When was she born?

She was born in 1943, in the middle of the war... in a little nursing home in Wimbledon which sounded very chaotic. My mother always said that she had to ring the doctor herself because there weren't any nurses around. You know, when she was starting labour in the middle of the night. ...So, music was huge, and we- they took us to music. We played music as a family. When we- we became a rather unhappy family, cause my parents were pretty unhappy together and my mother wasn't well, and- but we always used to go and play music. That was always kind of something we could do. And... I suppose I slightly associate it with you know, playing music is a way of surviving. But no, I- it was hugely important to all of us, actually. My brother became a very good cellist. And they took us to the opera and to concerts and- And they had very strong opinions about what was good and what wasn't...

Aha...

And there always- we'd leave the concert and there would always be - was it good or was it not? There was never anything else. [laughing]

Do you remember some of the concerts you went to?

Yeah, I remember going to a Klemperer concert.

Aha.

I remember not liking Klemperer nearly as much as my parents thought I ought to. I went... and they were very clever about opera, because they took us to light opera. My father liked Viennese opera and things. And so, I remember going to "The Chocolate Soldier". And then they gradually got us into Verdi and... you know, early- and Mozart and things. No, they did it well and I, I love opera, actually.

And when- at what point did your mother's illness start. Was it... in the forties, or...?

You mean in her forties, or...?

No, I mean...

[00:50:01]

I don't know when it started. I think- Certainly my sister feels, who's seven years younger, who was born in '43, that she felt- she sort of felt she didn't really have a mother. Now I don't know whether that was true or not. But I think I felt that way before she actually showed signs that there were- there was a kind of neediness in her, in which she needed things from us that... instead of us looking in to her eyes, you know, she looked into our eyes to find some... I don't know. I so- f my sister was born in '43... how old would my mother... I think my... My mother was born in '99, so what's forty-three... that's thirty-three, thirty-four. Yes, I think there were some signs. But then she started seeing a psychiatrist. It was all kept

under wraps. Lots of family secrets. When I was about twelve my father and she went to town, and I thought they were going to a divorce lawyer, not that I knew much about divorce lawyers, but they were not happy. And I used to hear them... shouting at each other in the night from my bedroom. So, there was a lot of that. And so, she started going then. And then, she first went into a... clinic, a hospital, when I was sixteen, I think. But in between while she was very, very reliant on me. As a kind of person who understood her. And I sort of did understand her, up to a point. I could see why she driven mad by my father who was not... You know, he was like, well, a lot of men of that generation, and possibly a lot of men - period, you know, who can't- who don't want conflict and just want to try and smooth everything over. So, I felt sympathy, but I also felt sympathy it for him, because... she wanted him to be someone he wasn't. So, I was very, very- I was thinking about them all- a lot.

It was a difficult age for you.

Yes, I mean it felt as if it took a lot of space for me. I think it probably wasn't quite as bad as I felt it was sometimes. But you know, it just- I thought, "Is she right?" – "Is he right?" You know, et cetera.

[00:52:41]

Yeah... Was there any support for her? Other support? I mean you said they didn't talk about it, so...

Well, we had a very lovely woman who came to clean the house and to do odd bits. Cooking. Who was... a lovely family support. And I liked talking to her. And then, a bit later, we had au pair girls, some of which were... wonderfully supportive to my mother, and others of whom were sort of younger and less so. And then eventually... she went into a, a clinic. And then- I'm just trying to think what the sequence was. Then my father had to bring in... housekeepers, which he did. Do you think we could stop for a bit?

We can stop. It's hard to...

[Audio pause]

Shall I talk about that a bit, or...?

Yes. We were talking about your mother...

Yes... Shall I start? Yes, my mother... was in and out- but more in that out, of mental hospitals, I suppose, for about eight years... seven years. And I... She first went in to a residential clinic when I was sixteen. And- she- my father started having housekeepers, who- live-in housekeepers. And he, you know, he had to keep the show on the road, and he did alright. He was- I think... I think he probably - I'm speculating – he probably loved her more than she loved him. I think she was- she was not- she wasn't work- she wasn't working. She wasn't really train- She was trained to do something called "Mensenstieg- [correcting herself] Mensendieck", which she hated, which was a kind of German... gymnastic thing. Very slow motion, which people did naked. And she did that when her mother died, you know she- she was- nobody really quite took care of her. Her father retreated into sort of grief. Nice man, but retreated into grief. And... she didn't get herself to university. I mean, you know my aunt did and my father did, but... So, she wasn't really ...she never worked. She had three children and she ...You know, that was a lot of work, but it wasn't outside work and I – I was always very aware of the fact that... I would work, you know. That I wanted children. But I wanted work, because I was so aware of her brooding and you know, and... the truth is like Betty Friedan said in "The Feminine Mystique", you know, you sit there and you think, "Is- Is this it?" You know, with your perfectly OK, you know... husband and children and house. But you know, well, we know all about that. It was a kind of... So, my mother was kind of ...I don't know whether she ...That wasn't something that came in as far as I understood, that came into their conversation. And so, she was pretty unhappy with my father, and they were pretty unhappy together and there were lots of rows and things. And- and he had housekeepers. They were OK. They- they weren't awful. And the last one was a woman who- a German woman, not Jewish, who came, and inevitably fell in love with my father. [laughs] What else? And... I kept worrying about that. I didn't- she was very controlling but my sister thought she was OK as well. I found her very controlling. You always had to tell her if a friend was coming home, you know. You couldn't have a boiled egg. It had to be... It was a lot of control. Newspapers put away the minute you read them, et cetera. And I went off to university. My sister was seven years younger, and was actually more rebellious than me. Was able to be, in a way. She was kind of- she didn't feel- she didn't feel that kind of

connection to my mother and she saw that I had it. And in a way she was protected by me, I suppose.

[00:57:32]

She was freer.

She was what?

She was freer.

She was freer. And she - she acted freer than me. I mean I was... the inevitable good girl. I went to school. I worked hard. I did well and then I started not doing well. I think probably connected with the fact that my mother was ill. Who knows what it was. But I didn't feel very clever. And then I... got into a couple- I wanted to do medicine. And I got into a couple of universities and- Edinburgh and St Andrews. And my parents wanted me to go to Oxford. Maybe my mother, I don't know. And so, I agreed to that. I agreed to everything, really. I sort of thought- I didn't fight things. So, I ...I remember trying to get into Oxford. [laughs] And because they were refugees, I appreciate this rather, they always were finding ways of facilitating their lives, which I - I did too. And I do it for my children- my child and my grandchildren and everything. It's what you do if you're a refugee, find ways through. And so they found this woman don at Oxford, who I could meet - who was a physiology don - at my godmother's. So, I went to tea with my godmother and this woman. And... she was just awful. She said, you know, "Oh, we had such a clever student the other day- last year. She wrote so well about Hebrew palaeontology." Well, I didn't know what Hebrew palaeontology was. I was sitting there, a little sad seventeen-year-old girl, thinking, "Why am I here? What am I doing?" And I thought, "I'm just ignorant and hopeless." So, I went home. But there was something in me: a little core of steel. It taught me something. So, I went to- a week later I went to an exhibition at the Royal College- at the Royal Academy. Didn't care what was on. And it was- I have never forgotten it. It was an exhibition of Portuguese art. Bought the catalogue and learnt it by heart. And when I did the Oxford entrance, I spewed it all out. [Bea laughs] And I got in. I just got in. I mean they actually took twelve women a year and I was the thirteenth, and then I got in. And all this time, you know, I was very connected with my mother and my mother's illness. I played in the Wigmore Hall because my teacher had her

best pupils play in a concert every year. And I... was terrified, but I played three years running. And the third year, I played in a rounders match in the afternoon, which my mother didn't want me to do. And I said, "I can't not play in my rounders match. I'm the captain", blah, blah, blah... And I made a mistake in the Mozart so- rondo I was playing. And my mother was devastated. And... so I remember there were these complicated things. She was very involved in me and who I was and - and I represented her, but also, she was ill, you know. So... they went on being pretty unhappy. She was in and out of hospitals. And then she was in a hospital where the doctors started talking to her, not the first time I think, a doctor had- about her marriage, and whether, you know... gently. He was very good, actually. I mean I gather he was very good. I didn't- he talked to me a bit about it. And... I remember then there was an occasion in the holidays. I'd just met Roger, who I then married. And he'd come home with me. And my mother was there at the weekend. Of course, my mother had to or-organise with how to deal with these housekeepers. And especially the one who was in love with my father. So, there was- that was all fairly terrible. I felt sorry for her, actually, my mother. Because there she was, coming home at weekends, the mother, the wife and things. But somehow or other this other woman, who I suppose I felt a bit sorry for too, was sort of wanting to be... It was all very difficult. I tried to talk to my father about it with not great success. But I suppose what he was doing, in his own inimitable way, was keeping the show on the road.

Yeah...

[01:02:13]

You know. And so then one day, one weekend when I was there with Roger, they had a row, and my father stormed out of the house and slammed the door. They were big shouters, both of them. And went to his office and rang me and said, "I can't do this anymore. You take over." I was sort of what- twenty-two or something. So that was- and then my mother gradually got, got better. I mean Roger and I married, went to live in Oxford. And she gradually got better and she used to come and stay and we used to see her. And then she came out, and she went to live in Oxford because we were there. And because my lovely aunt was there, the famous Ilse, who was a wonderful sort of rock - for me. I'd lived with her briefly between school and university. And she was like a mother to me and she was like a mother to my sister. And she was there. So, she came out, and we found a flat and we

furnished it. And it was tough, 'cause she came every day for tea. But I sort of thought that's what I had to do. But I also thought, we're going to- we were planning to go to live in Egypt and I sort of knew it wouldn't go on forever. So, we did. I mean, she was- she was OK. She managed. She managed a life on her own for the rest of her life.

And was she better after separate...?

She was better, yes. She very anxious. She was still on medication but she was, yeah, she was OK. She went to work in Oxfam. She went on package holidays. She was extraordinary, actually. I mean, she drove me completely nuts. And the minute she died, it all fell away and I thought she was a heroine. But you know- and she was both. Her neediness was overwhelming, you know.

Yeah...

And I was quite the recipient of that. Then gradually I, I withdrew from that a bit and my brother and sister- I said to my brother and sister they had to sort of, be involved more. They weren't bad at all. They were fine, but they- I was so much the person she rang and everything. So, I gradually...

And did she go back to Germany at all, your mother?

She did... Hang on... Yes, she did. I don't think either of them, well certainly not my father. My father went back a lot. And then he married, Annemarie who was the childhood friend of her -his and my mother's. He, he met her- I think he was really faithful to my mother. But then when he, he sort of separated from my mother he met- He used to go and see Annemarie in Germany. And then they gradually- she was married to a Nazi sympathiser, and she got divorced from him, finally, and they married. So, he went back a lot. Yes, she did go back. I'm just trying to think why I don't remember it with great... clarity. But I think she did. She went to Norway. She went to America. She- she went to see her sister in America. Yes, she didn't have any feelings about not going there. Some of my- some of my parents' friends said, "I- We'll never go back." But not them.

And did your father... settle in Germany? Did he go back or... much later?

[01:05:53]

That was later. He settled in his sixties, I think, probably. No, he married Annemarie and she lived in England for about twenty years or something, so it was later. I think- yes, I'm trying to think about the dates. I think he- he certainly was perfectly well, and so was she when they first went. And the idea is that this is a place where you could... grow old, get unwell and there would always be somebody looking after you. Actually, I thought their medical attention was lousy. But...

But that's where they wanted to be.

That's what my father wanted, and I think probably what my- I think my stepmother was more a- although she was tough as anything, and a very nice woman- I think she was a bit more of a doormat than my mother, who sort of wanted other things but didn't know how to get them. She was too desperate, to, you know to... she couldn't express it. So, I think my stepmother went along with it, probably. And that- It seemed alright. It was a posh old people's home. I- I didn't – yeah. Very 'gediegen' [tasteful] as they say, in Germany.

Mn-hnn. But your father- yeah, not many refugees... want to go back or...

No, no. It was very interesting. Yeah, I asked him what he felt once about... being there with all these people who were his generation, and things. And he said, "Oh" he was fine about it. They didn't make fusses about things like that...

Yeah...

Except he said- except this one occasion when he had a conversation with a man who was asking about his life, you know, at some social event at this place, which they had quite often. And he told him and he said, "I was Jewish and I had to leave." And the man said, "Why did you have to leave? You don't look Jewish." And that was- [laughing] my father was absolutely beside himself. But on the whole he didn't think that. I thought it sometimes, but... He didn't waste time. He didn't- I mean that was one of the problems between him and my

mother is he didn't speculate on emotional things. I mean I found that quite difficult. Things were sort of in the middle. Not too this much, not too that much. In the middle.

And now, what about you? So, you said you- you studied medicine...

I studied medicine but I- yes, I didn't terribly enjoy it. I wasn't terribly good at it... and I wanted to- At one point I wanted to change to something called PPP which was psychology, philosophy and politics. But... they weren't keen for me to do that. And actually, I was quite glad to do- I did a- if you do medicine, you do a degree in physiology. So, I did that. But all my friends did literature or languages or something, and I... I knew that that's what I loved. And I loved- I didn't love being with medical students who were very, in those days, quite reactionary. You know, and quite... yeah, a bit- a bit pedantic and so I loved being- and I- of course I lived in- I was in an all-girls college which I completely loved. I left home with all these really difficult problems. My mother was really poorly. In fact, in the first term she- my father rang me, I remember, telling me she was back in hospital. And I didn't talk to my friends very much about it. Anyway, I made great friends in the college and... And got, above all, interested in- I sort of thought you know my father was rather conservative with a small 'c', but also sometimes with a big 'C'. And I sort of went along with that; I went along with lots of things. You know, I- I wasn't- I wasn't arguing that much and I got to Oxford and it was the time of Suez and it was the time of Hungary and I just couldn't believe my eyes and my ears. There was everyone demonstrating, talking, exciting. And I was just- I was very easily influenced. And I was radicalised in about a month. So that was a big change, and in fact my- the person I married was a socialist at the time. I'd never met a socialist, you know, that was not part of my life. But I remember there was a... girl in our class, in my school, which was a rather stuffy school - Putney High School. Stuffy in the sense of not- it was a good school in a way, but also not very- not very...what's the word? Certainly not radical, but not expansive.

[01:10:58]

Yeah... Open minded?

Yes... There was a girl in our Sixth Form whose parents voted Labour. And we all pitied her!

[Both laugh]

It's extraordinary! I remember it vividly. So then- so I did that, and I had a wonderful time at Oxford. I felt- I really did feel sort of free of... home. And... made great friendships.

Discovered lots of things and quite liked the work. And... met Roger in my second year and fell in love with him, and... as many of us did, you know that was very much a pattern. We met someone at Oxford, we fell in love, got engaged... and a year later we married. That was a huge pattern. We were fifties girls.

Yes. Yeah...

And... sex was difficult because there wasn't birth control available really, and- and it was frightening too. You know, you felt you were not being good and maybe you'd get pregnant and all those things. So- but- we managed to sort of have it in ways that people did when there wasn't real sex around. So, I then- what I did at the end of that three years, I took my degree in physiology. Got a degree, not a very good one, and I applied to do a course in social science and social administration. There was a famous conversation with me and my three- I had three very close friends at Oxford. We were walking down the Banbury Road having a conversation - which wouldn't have been possible a few years later - about whether we should be happy or be good. And I remember them all wanting to be good and me wanting to be happy and thinking, "Oh, my God. Maybe I'll be thrown out of this magic circle." Cause I- And of course being happy was marrying and- and of course they wanted to as well but- anyway, we all wanted to be good and we all kind of wanted to be social workers. So, I did this course at Bedford and I loved it actually. It was very- I did very well in it. It was the first thing I'd really- and I loved- I loved learning about the state of the world and everything. And I- so at the end of that year I married and we went to live in Oxford 'cause Roger had a fellowship at St Anthony's. And I started work at the local mental hospital. And partly I did that I'm sure to see- 'cause I was sure I would go mad. I was absolutely sure I was like...

Were you worried that it...?

'Worried' is- I mean it's just- on my mind. All the time. Because at the time, she was often diagnosed as schizophrenic and at the time everyone- it was mostly seen as inherited.

Hereditary...

So, I was really- I just assumed I would get- go mad. So, I think partly working in a mental hospital [half- laughing] ...was a way of testing myself. So, I did that... Can you stop it a minute?

[01:14:23]

Yes, please.

OK. So where are we? We're at- I've finished my...

You were doing- you worked-

I'm working in the mental hospital. That was in 1960, and I worked there for two years. And Roger was at St Anthony's. And then Roger- my mother came out of hospital, and came to Oxford in 1961, I think. Stayed in a hotel for a while. And came to tea every day. And then my aunt- I think my aunt found her the flat and I helped her furnish it. So, there was a huge amount of that. But we were...But Roger was writing a book about the Egyptian economy. And he needed to go to Egypt... and to learn Arabic and things. So, he got a job at the American University in Cairo for 1962. And, that was fine. And we didn't think much about that. But except I thought, "Gosh, we'll go to Egypt and that will be... a break from my mother." Cause I did feel- I felt it as a burden. And yet I felt- and actually Roger was extremely good about it. He was very- he liked my mother and he took it on really, with me. But it was sort of, me, you know, who she- and I felt... well I felt very anxious about madness as well as all that, so...

In a way you're almost- you were almost like a second generation... you know they often say that...

A second generation?

That there's often somebody in the family who takes on the parent or...

Yes, and I think I didn't- I had a bit of therapy, but I didn't take on therapy in a big way till I was the age that my mother was when she first went into hospital. Cause I felt, if I can survive till I'm forty or forty-two then I'll- might be all right. It was really... And I was very- I was a very anxious young woman. And yes, I got on with things, you know.

What were you anxious about?

[01:16:30]

Oh... everything. Mainly about the emotions. Not- not about the world. I can cope with the world. I always have been able to cope with the world. I'm good at making things happen. I'm good at... dealing with things. But the emotions are- I, I'm- I ruminate about them. I worry about them. I don't- you know, I don't always understand them. I'm not... Yeah, it's- That's what, mainly. So, we... and I felt that about Roger. I was often very anxious with Roger. We- we were growing up together. We were a young married couple. That's what we did, we grew up together. But... he was rather- of course I was fascinated by that at the beginning, but then I found it difficult. He was rather withdrawn, and... a little bit withholding. And I found the withdrawnness especially fascinating, 'cause I could bring him out. I was good at that. But in the end, I found it very difficult. ...Anyway, we were growing up together. And we got- and then they suddenly wrote to us from the American University in Cairo saying, "Look, you won't be able to live on your salary. Would your wife like to have a job teaching English?" And, as you do when you're twenty-five or six, you- I said yes, thinking... later, that I knew nothing about it! I didn't even bother to read a book about it. I mean I was doing my work at the hospital, and it was bizarre. So, we went to Cairo and... We went to Cairo in 1962 and I took the job too. And so, we - we were there a year. And that was extraordinary. It was Nasser's time. And... it was a very extraordinary- I loved- I loved Cairo. I loved the Middle East. I loved the warmth of the Arab world. I feel very sad now that can't- Don't really want- can't go back, really, at the moment. ...Made friends. There was quite a lot of anxiety cause- which was difficult. I don't know how to- I don't want to go into it particularly. But I also- I had fallen in love with someone who'd fallen in love with me before we went to Cairo. And I still loved Roger. I was deeply confused about such a situation, you know. I- I was twenty-five years old and I didn't really understand- but it happened. And so, some of that was overshadowing Cairo. But also, it wasn't. I mean, we

were good at- we were good at living in strange new worlds. And we did it together. And it was very- it was lovely. And we went up the Nile, and we went to Alexandria. And we had an extraordinary time. And then the next year, we went to America for him to finish his... to finish his thesis. And I re-met the American who- where we'd fallen in love. And after long agonising... I nearly stayed. But I didn't. I felt I still loved Roger. I wanted it to work and I didn't. So, I came back with Roger. It- you know- we had quite a bumpy marriage. And I went off and lived on my own for a year, to sort of try and work out what I felt about sort of anything. And then at the end of it I felt I wanted to try with Roger again, and so I did. And so, the last part of the sixties, consisted of... We went to the Lebanon for a year. So, another year in the Middle East. And just after the '67 war. So that was- we drove. We drove to the Lebanon from Oxford. [half-laughs]

[01:20:45]

Wow.

And it was really amazing. And lived in a village above Beirut, before the awful civil war. That was extraordinary too. And drove back. And... we were trying to have a baby. And... I wasn't getting pregnant. I sort of, part of me somehow superstitiously always wondered whether I'd get pregnant – always. Whether that was sort of fear about my mother or about, you know, inheritance or what. I don't know what it was. Anyway. We- we tried for quite a while, and then we applied for adoption. And then also, very significantly, I got rather ill. I've been ill all my life, rather oddly. I don't feel very ill, but I had a- the dentist saw it. I had something called a 'myxoma' in my upper jaw, which is what they give rabbits - myxomatosis. And it was just eating my mouth away. And they had to take out my upper jaw. And that was a- it took me a year to recover. And it was very traumatic. It was hard, traumatic to the marriage. It was traumatic for me. I was kind of in limbo. I didn't have a child, I didn't have a job. I was ill; I didn't feel good about myself. And I was confused. I had- I was pretty confused, you know, about how I lived. I was- I suppose what we were- were- we were fifties people who were encountering a world where there were no rules anymore. And I kind of threw myself into the 'no rules', for better or worse. It wasn't quite feminism, but nearly. It was the end of the sixties, so there was a lot of stuff. And ...yes, we, anyway, we- Kate, Kate was born, actually, just after the first Women's Liberation Conference in Oxford, which I didn't go to. I didn't go to, 'cause I wasn't particularly

interested, actually. And then she was born and then that was kind of, you know, overwhelming. But I then- I clearly- I was still a very confused person, and I was also not... particularly afraid. The thought of living on my own with Kate, and having lovers and things didn't frighten me. I don't know what- God knows what sense to make of it. It's very hard to make sense of it all. So eventually, painfully, we split. ...And- and I stayed in London. We were in London for a while, because Roger had a sabbatical. And I stayed in London with Kate, but I took her every weekend to see him. I was filled with guilt about it, and took her- took her to Oxford every weekend so she saw a lot of him. But you know, I was filled with guilt. I was filled with confusion. I had- I did have quite long relationships with people. Two or three. You know, sort of twelve years and seventeen years and things. But I- I was not, I was not good about- I hurt Roger and that's – everything else was just life. But I did feel I... hurt him. And he was difficult. All those things. So, then I got a job, which actually he found me, because he met someone who... was a publisher. I got a job in publishing in the early seventies when Kate was about fifteen months old. Part-time job. Perfect, you know, can't get those anymore. Part time job in a- in a... a reprint house. Rather wonderful. Did reprints of African books, and history and science, history of science books, called Frank Cass. It's a Jewish firm, actually. Have you ever heard of it?

[01:25:06]

Yes, my book is published with Frank Cass.

It is? Is it?

Yes!

Was Frank Cass alive?

Yes, he was.

Well, he was my first employer. He was a wicked man, but I liked him. [laughs] How extraordinary! So, I stayed there two years. Sort of, you know... it was manageable. I had a wonderful baby-minder. And I was always sort of seeming to be getting in trains and cars and things, but it was fine. And then I moved to something called Barrie & Jenkins, which a

friend of mine called Christopher MacLehose ran. And that was a lovely two years. And then they got taken over by some bastards who didn't know what they were doing and sort of- it got wiped out, actually. And then, in the course of that, one of the people I was working with there, and editor, knew Carmen Callil, who was just starting Virago. Hadn't yet published. And there weren't many- there really weren't many feminists in publishing. In fact, I would say for a while that we were probably the only two. And he knew that she was looking for someone to work with. So, it's such a long story. But I'm not going to tell you the long story. That's- that's not for now. And so, the long and the short of it was that I started working freelance with her. I did some freelance work for her. You know. We all made bits of money, but we didn't pay ourselves for a bit. And then I- I- then we did start paying ourselves – peanuts- it was always pretty peanuts, but we did. So, I, in 1974, I started doing it full time. And we published our first book in '75.

And what was the first book?

[01:27:00]

The first book was a book called “Fen Women”, written by my friend Mary Chamberlain. And it was an oral history of women in Cambridgeshire. And it caused a great scandal because, you know, it was a feminist press. On the whole, other publishers were on our side. And even the media was on our side, although there were lots of quite rude reviews. Terrible one by Anthony Burgess about, “Who are these... who are these female sows?” I mean, you know, horrible stuff. But the- the Cambridge Evening News did a big scandal in their evening paper about how their sex lives had been a bit... but it was all rubbish, you know. But she- I remember, Mary held a meeting in the Cambridge Town Hall to make it clear. But she- she had quite a rough time. So that was the first book. And- and then, we were associated with- at the beginning, we were associated with Quartet Books. And then we wanted to go independent. So, we decided, after a year – made a big difference actually - that we wanted to be independent and just publish our own books. And... make the money we needed to make to survive. And we did! We... We, I mean it's interesting but we sold, we didn't sell all books by any means, but we did- when we took on people like Atwood, or I brought Maya Angelou in the early 80s, we sold hundreds and thousands of copies of it. We- we made sure that we could sell the books as well as buy the books. And print them and... So, and I stayed there seventeen years.

And was the idea of Virago... Was it only- You published only women?

[01:28:50]

Yes, we published the odd man.

Aha.

Usually, dead. [Both laugh] And occasionally alive because for instance, Vera Brittain's executor, he did some letters of hers or something. But, yeah.

Right.

And I remember turning down... a man, who sent a manuscript. And he reported me to the – what is it called? – The Equal Com- The Equal Opportunities Commission. Immediately! You know, there was [laughing] the whole world of women, and this one man. So, I learnt my lesson never to- I never said- I think I said, “You know, we don't publish men.” I never said that again. [laughs] I just said, “Your book's no good.” So yes, it was meant to be, and turned out to be, for men and women, for women and men, books by women which would tell you about the world. I- I mean I can't tell you what- I don't think books about- I don't think there were books written about childbirth by women when we first published. 1975. They were all written by men! I remember at the first press conference, a journalist at the back of the room put up his hand and said, “How are you going to find...” – we were publishing twelve books for the first year, right? – “How are you going to find enough books for next year?” I can't tell you what a view there was of... So, we published, you know, feminist histories. Novels, feminist... Kate Millet, you know... kind of what do you call it you know when you...rhetoric, feminist- feminist theory. Poetry, health, everything. Everything. And... like everyone else, we had some absolutely amazing best sellers which supported, you know, maybe half a dozen and which supported a lot of ones that broke even, and then supported the ones that sold to two men and a dog, which also happened. We published- “Testament of Youth” sold hundreds of thousands of copies, which we kind of found and got to the television and things. It was just- It was an amazing thing.

So, from which years to which years were you at Virago?

I was there from '74 to '90. Yeah. And then I was offered a job at the Labour Party to be its cultural policy adviser. I suppose I felt I wasn't going to stay at Virago forever. I mean I could have done, I suppose, but I didn't- what was I then....'78...'90 I was... fifty- fifty-four. And I got offered a job by Mark Fisher who was the shadow Arts Minister. And we had a really interesting time, and then lost the election. But we did- we got given money by Paul Hamlyn to, for the arts. And we published two books with Penguin. And we published policy documents and we had lectures. It was really exciting. I lived with Mark Fisher for a while. I lived with the- the person who took me to Berlin I lived with for... seventeen years. Complicated. He was also married, so we lived, we both lived with him. And then I lived with Mark Fisher for a little while. And then I- I, when- when we lost the election, I wasn't sure what I was going to do, and I applied for the job at "Index". And rather to my surprise got it. Because they...I wasn't a journalist but they needed... They needed- they were- they were going down the plughole, and they needed somebody who could run things. And I could run things. So, I had a wonderful time there for fourteen years, actually.

[01:33:09]

And just tell us a little bit, because some people might not know what it is, the "Index"...

"Index on Censorship" was a magazine that was started in '72, in response to the show trials in Russia, by a whole lot of people, but mainly by Stephen Spender. Two dissidents in Moscow wrote a letter to The Times – it was a very dramatic story - and said, you know... could anyone help? And this group of people like Auden and Spender and... What's the man called? Lots of- Stravinsky and various of people. But... Spender started the magazine, and found a- an editor. And it was a, a magazine defending freedom of speech, world-wide. And it- of course in '89, when the end of the... everyone thought, "Oh, well that's that job done." But of course, it wasn't at all. And the people running it at that time were- were not making it work. And they were going to close it down. And the staff said, "Can we just advertise the job one more time?" So, they did. And they hired me. And... in a way it was lovely, because I had only up to go. You know, there wasn't... [laughs] And I loved it. And we did- We did- it still exists, actually. And we did save it, and we did make it really interesting. And I had a lot of people then, by then. I knew about- you know, I was friends with Edward Said. We got

very high-profile names: Umberto Eco, Michael Ignatieff, ...Christopher Hitchens. We had a lot of- between me and my colleagues we had a lot of people. It was good. It was a wonderful magazine, actually. And so, I did that for fourteen or fifteen years. And at the end of that time, I- there was talk about... getting together all the free expression people, so that we saved overheads. There was always talk about that. I- I disliked very much going to the voluntary sector, because I thought everyone was very arrogant, very nervous, very anxious about their profile. Much more so than the commercial world, where you either do it or you don't. But these- they weren't nice. They weren't particularly nice. And they were fighting each other over every bit of money. So, there was huge amount of competition and... quite unpleasant. And not all that much goodwill. Anyway, the free expression people decided they'd try and form a centre. And then at the same time the Arts Council wanted to look into a literature centre, which had been done a million times, and never got anywhere. And- and so me and another guy- and then he left to do something else, to cut a long story short, got together... under the auspices of the Arts Council, a plan to have a centre for literature and free expression. And... we started getting people around the table who wanted to join it. It would be people working in the building and a little theatre. We had lots of plans for a building, and then we thought where are we going to get the money. And I found the money from one of my funders in Norway, that had funded "Index". And they bought a building for us for five and a half million. And so, it still exists. So, I founded that; I was the founder of "Free Word". And that exists.

[01:36:58]

And where is it?

In Farringdon Road. And it's really doing well. It's been open now about seven years- six or seven years. It's got sort of six organisations working in it, a little theatre, a big- some- a big room where you can have events, a café. It's great. So that was my last act before I retired.

So, you moved in a way from medicine to psychology/psychiatry mental health...

Yes...

... and then into more social issues...

Yes...

... and then...

And then into- I suppose- I love books and literature.

Yeah, and then in the end to literature.

And then of course, free expression. I must say I did feel very strongly about free expression. Cause there is no literature without free expression, in a way. And now I'm writing a memoir and I think why am I writing when it's so- such torture?

[Both laugh]

And the memoir is of your- of your family?

Yes, it's three things really. It's a memoir about an assimilating family; that's how it started. And then it's about becoming a woman, I suppose because I think, in my lifetime, you know, what's happened to women. And I suppose it's also a bit about living with a mad mother a bit, because that was a very significant part of my life. Yeah.

I wanted to ask you about you being a mother. What sort of role? How did you see yourself as a mother and how did you manage as a single mum?

[01:38:37]

...How did I see myself? I just always wanted a child. I think I was completely sort of- I just selfishly thought I want a child. She was a... a... How did I manage? Well, I don't know how to answer that. ...She was absolutely the centre of my life, but I also think, you know, the whole business about work and children was... being- it's never resolved. It never is. It isn't resolved now, and it wasn't then. And I think she might feel- she has four children. And she might- she's certainly been at home a lot with her children. We're extremely close, and she's very proud of Virago and things, but who knows? I mean I think probably doing Virago was

helped by- he was a very full-on father. I mean he- when I took her there for the weekend he just, you know, he was very competent and he brought her back and things, so there was a lot of sharing.

Right...

And I think I just felt she was completely- she was completely my fantasy child. Little toughie. [Laughs] Very strong minded - always. Beautiful. And she was very funny, actually. She was quite rebellious, so there is a famous interview with her and me in "The Observer" and we agreed that we'd do it, but we would check on each other and be allowed to censor it. Which we didn't do in the end. But I'll never forget her last paragraph. She said, "My dad's a historian, and I hate history." She was most rebellious fourteen. "My dad's a historian, and I hate history. My mum's a publisher and I hate books. Reading is so quiet, I have to have the radio on." [Laughs] End of interview. So... yes- what did you say? You said how did I manage it and how did I feel? What did I feel? I felt... ...What does one feel about... I mean I... ask me that more specifically.

[01:41:24]

*Yes, more specifically. Maybe what... What sort of identity did you want to transmit to her?
Also, you know, what...*

About me?

Yes. ...I mean you said before that for you it was important to work. That you...

Well, I was- I did want to work. That was a generational thing of my particular kind of feminism. But I also knew about myself and I am a bit of a brooder and I knew that I feel rather badly about that. And I think gradually, with quite a lot of therapy, I have got better at having an internal life. But I was- I always thought- I always rather wished I was a woman who could be in a house with, you know, five children and six dogs, and that would be fine. But that's not who I am. [laughs] So... Do you know I don't know that I thought about what kind of identity I wanted her... She... she thinks I'm very strong. And I- and lots of people think I'm very strong. I don't think I'm particularly strong. I think I could go under quite

easily, but I don't go under. And I suppose I see- I've got strong feelings, and I express them sometimes. But she thinks I'm very strong, and she thinks- [laughs] I remember once when we had a row she said, "Well, Mum, you just have to decide that you are not always right." But she's also very strong in similar ways. And she's- I hugely admire her. She's had quite a difficult life, and difficult things to deal with. A not well husband. And depressive et cetera, et cetera. I hugely admire her. She's a great- and I think she quite admires me. It's sort of slightly mutual. For being, for getting on with life. She's a great one for getting on with life. She thinks I talk far too much. "Too much talk, Mum." She doesn't- she thinks I'm too candid to the world. That I say too much about what I'm feeling, which she doesn't do on the whole. She keeps it- she's- she's quite reticent about what she actually feels, although she's very bubbly. But that's to...

More private.

...keep you at bay. Yes. Much more private, I think.

[01:43:57]

And did she- did you- did she have a relationship with your parents? Were they still...?

She had a relationship with my mother. She didn't have much of one with my father – a bit of one - but he died sooner. But she really liked my mother and my mother liked her. Yes, she did. Yes. And the very nice thing was that my husband, even after we separated, went on seeing my mother in Oxford and went- and took Kate to see her. But also liked my mother, you know. My mother was a likeable person in many ways. It's just that I had- I was too tied up with the kind of neediness and things.

Yes, so I was wondering how your own relationship with your mother influenced you. Which is...

Yes. Well, she used to- Kate used to see me have these phone calls with my mother and me sort of groaning and rolling my eyes and putting the receiver down and bursting into tears and things. And she saw that it drove me mad, but she was kind of- she didn't say, "Oh, you poor thing." She just saw that it drove me mad and accepted that. Accepted that. Yeah. No,

she, yeah. She was- she did like my mother and my mother liked her, definitely. And my father, my father- I'm never quite sure what my father felt about the adoption thing. Who knows. I was touchy about you know, any messing about on that front. But I don't know. He was, but he was. He didn't- neither of them actually said, "Why doesn't she come over for the day?" That wasn't the sort of... things they did. And my sister had- he was quite- he was a very authoritarian man, so he could be very authoritarian to the kids, actually, and my sister's children and things, so... But it was fine as it was, really.

And was the past something you talked about to your daughter or you said you became more interested in your, in the Jewish part or the German part, later on?

[01:46:00]

Yes... Well, I gave her the Juliette, [laughs] the disc, which she rather wonderfully watched all of.

That's Juliette Pascal...

Yes. But I never- I haven't hugely talked about it, no. I sort of ...yes, I mean partly the trouble is that she doesn't live in London. But it isn't just that. I- and she's always got a lot of children. That is quite difficult. She's still got a four-year-old, for God's sake...[laughing] who's adorable, but still. Yes. No, I think maybe I need to do that. I think I need to do that still. I need to sit down and talk, and I don't talk that much to my grandchildren about it either.

Yes. Are they interested at all in your...

A little bit. The oldest, of course, did as all children do, endless things on the Second World War. So sometimes she's interview me and things about this and that. The other two, yes, I need- I need to do it. I think I'm waiting for them. I'm feeling a bit shy about, you know, doing- wanting to talk.

But maybe it relates to the next question. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as a refugee? As a- As somebody in exile? You mentioned that before. How do you see yourself?

Yes. Well, I don't feel very English. I never have. And I think- I used to feel myself as an outsider, and then I discovered that most people do. Most people do for this reason or that. When I wrote that 6,000 word piece and people read it in the book. People wrote to me and said, "Yeah, I feel just the same about class." You know, I think- but I think I did also discover gradually, slowly, and that was partly because of the context of the world we were living in, that... it was a good, quite a good place to be, in the margins. I mean I have a friend who's a wonderful anthropologist called Hugh Brody. And he- all his anthropology is about how the margins inform the centre. And that at some level, I think I believe that. So not that I think that I'm particularly informing any centre, but I think as I, as I stop needing so desperately to belong, and to have boyfriends who belong to the tennis club and... you know all that stuff that I, as an adolescent girl I did feel. I began to see the advantages of... of being in the margins more.

[01:48:43]

And how would you describe yourself in terms of your identity? You said, not British.

Jewish. ...A woman of a certain age, you know. That's been huge. I mean I think our generation of women has had- are the most privileged generation of women that have ever lived, to be honest. We were allowed to have certain freedoms and... we were allowed to do things. Also, we were allowed to have some independence. And I think even my daughter's generation is having a harder time than we were. Doors opened for us, I think. Maybe for you too. But certainly... So, a woman. And I do feel a great attachment to... whatever it's called. Englishness. I suppose partly the same reason as my parents did. You know, I- I think there is a tolerance an... But I... I can't quite think of myself into it and I... I don't know; it's ridiculous to call myself Jewish and nothing else, isn't it? [Laughs]

That's interesting that you said you feel- you felt you didn't belong, although you did your entire schooling here. You know, often people think that if they did the schooling here, they would belong. But it's...

That's what my brother thought. Yes...

Did it work for him?

It worked for him totally, because he was very happy in that milieu. But he is a Tory and a Christian and I think I probably- no, I think would I have been a Tory and a Christian if I'd gone to boarding school? I don't think so. I don't know- I mean, my family is odd because they're pretty right- to the right of things I'd say, on the whole. Or Liberal. You know, Liberal Right. But I had this great-grandfather who wrote this book called "J'Accuse" – after the Zola book - which was accusing Germany of starting the First World War. It's on my shelf there. And he's- he was a radical lawyer who defended Gerhart Hauptmann and things like that. And he knew Rosa Luxemburg.

What was his name?

His name is Grelling [Richard].

Grelling?

Yes. What was his first name? The book was written anonymously but he had to. He sort of left Germany because of it, really. And I suppose I kind of slightly, though he was kind of crazy in other ways – well, perhaps I am too – I identify with him. Because my family are, you know, they tend to be... right liberal, I'd say. My brother, rather right... [laughs]. So that's been very important to me. I mean social- listen, socialism was very important to me and- and yet I know that lots of- there was lots of disillusion in that for me, too. As, as there was for all of my generation. But it was huge. It was huge. Sort of thought it made sense of the world for me. So, I don't know about this identity thing. I think it's... Do you think calling yourself a woman is part of identity?

Yes.

Yes... European, maybe? Maybe.

[01:52:28]

And do you think about that sometimes, how your life would have been if Hitler hadn't come along?

Yes, I do sometimes. Especially- I go a lot to Berlin. I go with a little group of mostly historians. Including my first author at... Virago, Mary Chamberlain. But a little group of six- usually six of us. And we've been four times now. Every year.

And what do you do there?

We go around and look at exhibitions. Look at the Weißensee Jewish Cemetery. We go to Ravensbrück, we go- we- we never stop. And every time we go, we think we won't do the Nazi stuff this time and we always end up doing it! Because there's so much of it!

Yeah...

And- and I love Berlin. I absolutely love it. And... So why- why did that? What did you ask me that started us talking about Berlin?

If your life- If, without Hitler...

Oh, yes, when I walk around the Tiergarten which I know my mother did, you know, I think, "What would my life have been like?" ...And in that sense, of course, I feel very- I do feel quite English. I don't partic- I think Germans are quite pompous. Not Berliners. They're quite pompous, they're quite authoritarian which I am too, but I don't like that side of myself very much. And they're quite, you know, they're not... They don't have that kind of quiet tolerance I think, on the whole. Of course, some of them do. Of course, they do. But I think I'm glad to be English when I think I might have been German.

But do you feel drawn? When you said you feel drawn to Berlin or to...

To Berlin hugely, yes, I really do. I do. I think it's... I didn't to Frankfurt. I mean I went to Frankfurt all the time I didn't Frankfurt.

[01:54:38]

Because that's where your father lived...

That's where my...?

Yes.

Well, he lived outside. But because of the book fair, really...

And the book fair, yes...

...I went there every year.

Yes.

Yeah. And in fact, I... perhaps I shouldn't say this on camera.

Shall we switch it off for a second?

[Audio break]

Yes. You were saying...

Yes, so... I do know this is not really about Frankfurt, but we arrived at the airport at Frankfurt, got our luggage, got into a taxi. Me and I think two other people at Virago, or maybe three. And I sat in the back and I wound the window down. And the young taxi driver lent across and very aggressively wound the window up again. And I suddenly heard myself say, angrily – very angrily, “Yeah, well I guess you could be one of the people who ran the camps, or something.” So, I realised – and it was anger, I wasn't proud of it – but I realised that there was quite a lot of anger lurking. But- and hating that. You know: “I have the right to do this.” That's what I hated.

And how do you feel today about Germany?

About Germany?

Yeah...

Well... I don't know how I feel. I think that I say to myself you know, you've got to- things have changed and of course they've changed. And I talk to people, Germans, all the time. And it's obvious they've changed. ...And I think I probably feel differently. But I think there was something about- there's something about the helplessness of the Jews, you know, that in the face of this extraordinary aggression and hatred, that I can still get very jumpy about it if there is anything like that... A sort of feeling of people: "You are- you are not important and you don't matter, and we'll do what we like."

And do you think - again it's obvious - that your own family background experiences have shaped your - your work, I mean especially on human rights?

I don't know...

Do you think so?

[01:57:18]

That's what people always say to me.

Yes? Sorry, it's an obvious question.

Yes. No- No it's not that. I suppose. I suppose it might have done. It might well have done.

Yeah...

I just think it's, as I used to feel about feminism, it's the only game in town. I mean I think it's the most interesting thing around. I, yes, it's hard to know how much the family thing...

Or the- the next question. How do you think did the experience- well, I guess it's not- You didn't experience immigration consciously, I mean leaving, but you grew up in a refugee family.

Yeah.

How did that shape you in later life?

Yes... Well, I suppose... feeling an outsider in- that was part of it, and they were very German always, I thought, my parents. But I also- yes, they were also not trying to- I admired them for not trying to be anything else. They were not trying to be posh. They weren't... You know, they were reasonably - reasonably well off, but they didn't have- they didn't have any airs and graces. They were- they were who they were. And liked what they liked. I thought [laughing] my father's views on culture were- I mean he was- he knew a lot about- he read a lot and he went to music a lot. But I remember the famous time when he... he went to see, he told me when I was an adult already, and had a child, he told me he was going to the theatre to see the "Dance of Death" by Strindberg. And it's a play about a very, very disastrous marriage, which he after all had had, in a way. Anyway, so a week or two later I said, "How was the theatre?" And he said, "For me, this play need not have been written." And I thought, "God, that's very German." I mean I think that's very German sort of, saying... it's- so I think... I think I resisted that side of- both my parents had that a bit about what is OK and what is not. But it took me a long time, because I didn't have alternatives. And of course, when I married Roger, his parents were both, they were divorced, but they were both socialists and they had a completely different view of the world. ...Well, not completely, but certainly... Yeah.

[02:00:15]

Well, because there is a certain, let's say, insecurity. I mean, being a refugee puts you...

Yes... yes...

... in an insecure position.

Yes, they- I never- I never felt- I never felt that in them so I- possibly more my mother. Probably more- my father had, was, and his firm- his office was full of quite a lot of German Jews. But there- it was also full of Englishmen. Rather kowtowing Englishmen, I always thought. He liked certain kinds- He wasn't... He didn't find my husband easy because he was withdrawn and not out there and putting his coat on and all that stuff. There's a certain kind of Germanic behaviour which... Yes, I mean, I suppose they did feel that.

But professionally your father did well.

Very well. Very well. My mother I think felt incredibly insecure about loads of things.

Yeah.

Loads of things. And I think she'd started off that way. She was very beautiful. But she didn't have- and she, you know, she had three children and all that stuff, but she had, you know, eight years of mental illness. And- and a lot more, and...

Do you think she would have had mental illness in Germany as well? I mean that's very difficult to answer...

Yes, it's very hard to answer. I – I don't know. I sometimes talked to my father and my stepmother about that. But in a way they're not very- they're not very objective observers. I think they thought she always had a lot of anxiety about who she was and everything. I think she might not have had the breakdown if she'd... had work. I'm afraid I think that. That she loved, you know.

Yeah.

[02:02:13]

I think that's one of the- listen, I'm not saying it's true of all women, but on the whole, I feel that's... That's a lesson, I feel. Don't you?

Yeah, I think just the sense of isolation...

Yes... yes.

... exacerbated by being at home, you know, so...

And- and also you know, work if it goes well, how good that makes you feel.

Absolutely. Yeah. ...And do you think- It's an interesting topic in general, you know, for the- whether the women refugees had a different experience than the male refugees.

Yes.

And they partly of course had different experiences because they came as domestics and...

Quite.

The men were interned...

When they came on their own, yes. Yes.

It's an interesting topic.

Yes, it is. Maybe you should do something on that.

Yeah. But obviously, that's for the older- It's not for the children.

No, exactly.

You know when you came as a, let's say a single person in your twenties. And- And the chances people had as well.

The what?

Chances. The chances. You know, were they, in terms of their education and in terms of...

Once they came.

Yes.

And those people are dead, aren't they? Pretty much.

Yeah...but...

No? Not quite.

We have certainly interviewed people who came, you know, as young adults. But anyway, that's a different topic. What I want to ask you- so where would you consider your home today? You've travelled a lot as well. You've...

Oh, here. Here. ...This house in London.

How long have you been here?

Forty-four years. We've got a house in France, and I do love that. But this is where I feel... And it's partly to do with- I love this house, and it's partly to do with friendships that have grown up and neighbourhoods and... ..I grew up in South London but I moved to North London. I do prefer North London, and Hampstead Heath, and so many things that... I swim in the pond, and I sing in the choir. You know, these things build up a- And I've had relationships with people much of my life. The man I was living with died in 2010. And since then, I haven't been living with him. But I've never lived with anyone 24/7 since my marriage. And it's usually been- And it's what I like really, is seeing them part of the time and having some time on my own. And I definitely feel that need to have time on my own. And I think that may be to do with my mother, and feeling... that I need to feel the space around me. That I'm anxious about need and so- Listen, I- I can deal with it. But if a man is in the room I think, "Is he all right and do I need to do something?"

[2:05:21]

Yes, so your own space... Your own space.

And my own space is when I can think about what I want to think- I mean, listen, I'm not the only one in the world who thinks that. But it is part of me that, now, that I think. And it is interesting that- I know quite a few people who think, not necessarily manage it, but are living partly with people. I mean I also wish I'd been in a long relationship for fifty years with five children, but you know, that's not what I've done. And I don't feel... I don't feel huge regret about that. I'm glad to have had different relationships. I mean, a few long relationships really. And a few short ones, but that's not important. But that's a kind of- the two kinds of patterns of women of my generation, really. Maybe less so with yours, because we really were... at the edge where suddenly the rules were different.

Yeah.

And not clear.

And... you said you're working on a memoir. What other plans, or what is important to you now? Is there- I mean I don't know what other- are you involved at all in the current refugee crisis, or is there...?

No, but I want to be- and I, I do want to be. I'm afraid this wretched memoir is- I need to finish it. No, I do want to be involved in that and I've got friends who are, and I'm going to do something about that. And I'm on various boards and I'm involved with- quite involved with poetry, as I said, in my old age.

With poetry?

Yes. I've got to like it more and I'm trustee of a big poetry festival, so...

Which one?

Ledbury.

Ledbury Poetry Festival...

Do you know it?

Yes, I've heard of it.

[2:07:21]

Yes. Yes.

Is there anything else you- which I haven't asked you in this short interview, we could go on much longer. But thank you for giving us a very good picture of your parents, and of your...

Yeah...

... of your life.

I mean there is lots more but I'm- I am- Yeah. And my children- my grandchildren and my now great-grandchild and my daughter are a big part of my life. It's just- actually, I've been ill so I've seen much less of them. But normally, I see them absolutely regularly. And they've come up to see me, so they're a huge part of my life. And, it's quite complicated cause I worry about them nearly as much as I worried about...

Are you? About the grandchildren?

A bit, yes cause they're not, they've- they've had some difficult times. But they're lovely. Yes, they are.

Is there a message you have for anyone who might watch this, based on your experiences?

...Gosh.

Maybe about fitting in and not fitting in? I don't know- About... being an outsider...

Yes, well I certainly would say that being an outsider has huge advantages, so long as you can get over the- the anxiety about it. And I suppose I think... Well, I think it's very complicated, life, for women and the whole decision about freedom and independence and safety and- that it's complicated. But I don't think everyone finds it as complicated as I do. I do. I don't know what the message would be, but just... The other message I'd give is a sort of Buddhist type message which is the river of life goes on and things change. That's what I- I had great difficulty... learning that. That things do change. I always thought that things might stay like this forever.

And to accept it.

[2:09:50]

Yes, and to- to have confidence that it will change, even it might be good, it might be bad, but it does change. And I think that's probably what I didn't much get from my childhood that that was... I think my mother was sort of... I don't know. She didn't feel like a woman who thought, "Oh, well things change" because I think it was too difficult for her. I think she didn't have enough resources. No women's movement. No work. You know. Difficult. I don't mean the women's movement is the only thing that does it. I'm quite interested in the sort of more spiritual things, but, you know, I'm also quite secular and practical. And- and the fact is that the world does- that things do change.

Yeah, but for her it was probably terrifying. And that's why I wonder when you've gone through such a big change...

Exactly...

... in a way of changing countries... leaving...

Exactly. Yeah. See I still- a little bit of me thinks... that wasn't the worst thing that happened to her. I think the worst- but maybe it was. And maybe it made all the other emotional things so difficult. She liked- she liked the English. She liked, yes, but it was- it was difficult but I think it was also a generational thing.

Yeah.

You know. She didn't- she did have friends, but they- they weren't like my friends. Who you can ring up three o'clock in the morning, you know.

Yeah.

Now that may be to do with- no. I find it very difficult to judge that right. But you're right that was a huge change. She didn't have enough resources...

Yeah.

...to sort of think, "Well, if that happens, I can do that." I think that is what I've got.

So, do you think you are lucky to have those resources in your own life?

Yeah, I'm lucky to think I've got them in my head anyway. Even if it's not true. [laughing] Yes. And I think you can make them. But it's hard for her generation to make. With, as you say, with all that other stuff she had to deal with. Perhaps I feel... about her, like I did about myself, that if you're dealing with the reality every day, you can do it. I think what she found difficult and you know I think some people find it difficult, and some people don't. I do too. That you know the, the sort of emotion- dealing with emotions that....

[2:12:42]

And do you think- I mean, it's interesting that of course, many people we interview never received any form of counselling or analysis. And do you think it could have helped the older generation to...

Her? Well, she had some.

Did she have some?

Yes. She had some. She had a psychiatrist whom she saw for a while. And then in those days those mental hospitals- those psychiatrists in mental hospitals did talk a bit more. There wasn't much; it were lots of pills too. But she did have some. Everybody has this theory that schizophrenics don't respond to therapy. But- I know what therapy's done for me. It's done a huge amount for me. I mean, I kind of needed it. I don't think people do it unless they need it. It's- you know...

But you think it helped you?

Yeah. Definitely. ...Yeah. Well, I think, you know. I hate to say it, 'cause it makes me sound as if I'm criticising, but she was- she couldn't be there for me, or- because she couldn't do it. She- I never thought she didn't mean to, but, she just couldn't.

And you haven't mentioned your sister much. What happened to her, what did she...? Where did she...?

Yes. No, I haven't mentioned her. People often say that. She became a nurse. A hospice nurse. And we're great friends. I think what's interesting about my siblings, is that we talk much more now about my parents. We never talked about it. We didn't talk about my mother. In other words, we didn't sort of support each other. We were going in different directions. But now my brother has a rather difficult life at the moment so we see each other regularly. And my sister and I talk quite openly about stuff now.

But- so she also went into- into a caring profession.

She went into a caring profession, yes.

That's interesting.

[2:15:00]

Yeah. She did. And she- she married and had four children. And she's always talked rather as if she thought I had a tough time having to deal with my mother. And that sort of- there's some truth in that, but it's also mildly irritating to me 'cause I think, "Yeah, it was tough but I

got things out of it.” I think there’s a complicated mixture of great affection and closeness and this rivalry probably. I certainly was very jealous when she was born. She was a most charming baby. And I was a rather withdrawn little girl. But I think she’s been rivalrous of me too, you know, in her different ways. But we are close, and we talk now much more candidly than we did. But it didn’t bring us together that... my mother’s illness. My brother was away at school. And...

And you were also quite a bit older.

And I was quite a bit older. Quite. ...Quite. Yeah.

OK, Ursula, unless there is anything else.

No, I mean listen, I’m sure there are a million things, but I don’t think. Why don’t we think about if there are more things, that you- we can talk about it with the photos.

That’s right. We can talk with the photos.

Yeah.

So, in the meantime,

Yeah.

...I would like to thank you very much for having shared your story with the Refugee Voices Archive. And we look forward to seeing your photos now but...

In the autumn.

... in the autumn. Thank you very much.

Pleasure. Pleasure.

[2:16:47]

[End of interview]

[Start of photos and documents]

[2:16:57]

Photo 1

So that's a picture of my grandmother, my father and my beloved aunt, who I was very fond of. Taken, I'd say, in about 1913, possibly in Frankfurt, possibly in Heidelberg.

And what were their names please?

My grandmother was Lotte, my aunt was Ilse, and my father was Werner.

Photo 2

This is a photo of my other grandmother, Marte, who died very young, of cervical cancer at the age of forty-seven, with my mother and her sister. So, Marta is the mother, on the left is my mother who was called Emma-Sophie, but she had a nickname of Fips. And Elisabeth was her sister. They never got on particularly well. But it was- I love that photograph. ...That was taken in Frankfurt. My mother looks to be about four or five, would you say? And that means it was taken in about 1915.

Photo 3

These are my parents on their wedding day. I'm just trying to think when they got married. I think it was 1932. And they would have got married in Frankfurt. So that's Fips and Werner on their wedding day.

Photo 4

This is my grandfather in his very fine swimsuit, with my aunt Ilse. So, Ilse and he was called ...Hans. Hans Sachs. And it's taken in- on an island called Rügen [Baltic Sea]. And it was 1919, I think.

[2:19:07]

Photo 5

OK? This this is a picture- I don't know what is being celebrated. It could be a birthday or something. It's my father, his sister- my aunt. My grandmother and my grandfather. I just think they're looking rather raffish and wonderful. So, Werner on the left. Ilse next to him. Lotte next to Ilse, and Hans next to Lotte. And it was 19... 1922.

Photo 6

This is a picture of my parents taken in 1930 in Heidelberg. This is a very touching picture. It must have been when my father's family, Hans and Lotte, moved to Heidelberg 'cause Hans got a job there. And my mother used to visit him from Frankfurt there. And it was before, they probably weren't- they might have been engaged there. It was before they married. Anyway, I like this picture very much.

Photo 7

So, this is them, a skiing holiday. My parents went on rather idyllic sounding skiing holidays every year with a group of friends. And this is 1930-31. And I'm not sure where it is, but it's a beautiful place in the middle of the mountains, and they- it always sounded most wonderful trips.

Photo 8

This is a photograph of my grandfather with my brother and I. And I think it may be one of the few photographs that were taken in Heidelberg, when we were sent to Heidelberg. I'm not sure of the date. We were sent- my brother and I were sent to Heidelberg, and my parents left for England. And then six weeks later they got my grandfather and an Aryan maid to drive us to the Dutch border, in a train. And he met us on the Dutch side. My father came- it was a precarious expedition. So, I think that I was probably about maybe sixteen months old or something, and my brother would have been four. And that probably was taken in Heidelberg.

Photo 9

This is a picture of me and my brother when we already were in England. We were in England then. And we were evacuated to Oxford to stay with my aunt when the bombs started. It was taken in 1940. And I was three, and my brother was six.

Photo 10

This is my sister. A photograph taken outside our house in London, which my parents first rented and then bought, when they arrived in 1938. They probably didn't buy till 1939, in Putney. And my sister was born in England. She was born in - during the war in 1943. And so, I don't know what the date for that was, but possibly... I think she's about four there maybe. 1947...

[2:23:09]

Photo 11

This is me... I'm guessing about my age. Ten or eleven. Standing upright, in front of the family car. Which we got... quite early, I think. It was an Austin. And- I think so, when I was eleven, that was '48. I think we may even have gone off to France and Switzerland for a holiday in it. Anyway, there I am, upright.

Photo 12

So, this is me at my school - Putney High School. Senior bit. I was thirteen; it was taken in 1950. It was our art class, outside, and I'm looking along that row. I can remember the Christian names of practically every girl that's there...not her surname. Near the rounders pitch. Gosh. I remember it well.

Photo 13

So, this is my wedding day... August the 9th 1960. In the garden where we had the reception of a hotel called Lynton Lodge in Oxford. We were married in a little beautiful church in Oxford. And from left to right is my sister, one of the bridesmaids. Roger, my husband. Me. John Newton, who was the best man. And Roger's sister, Jilly, on the right. And I remember enjoying the day because I liked being the centre of attention. [laughs]

Photo 14

OK, this is my... I think, then, fiancée to be husband, me and his sister at Christmas time, dressing up to do charades. I loved Christmases with my husband's family because they were very, very jolly, and ours weren't very jolly. And we played lots of games. So that reminds me of jolly times... at Christmas. [laughs]

Photo 15

This is a photograph of me and my daughter Kate. I'm just trying to think when it was taken. She looks about... eight. And we had someone living in the house with her daughter, who was a very, very good photographer, and she took it. And I'm fond of it.

[2:25:52]

Photo 16

So, this is Virago. It's a picture of... [Audio break]

So, this is Virago. In the middle is Carmen Callil, whose idea it was. On the left is Harriet Spicer who was younger than Carmen and me, and started off as Carmen's assistant, but then became later on a Managing Director with me. And there's me... on the right. And this was taken in 1975, when we launched our first list. And I think it's taken- I think it was taken by the Guardian actually, probably for- for publicity purposes. And I think it's taken in our very extraordinary, rather wonderful seedy office in... Wardour Street.

Photo 17

This is a picture of Virago in, I think, we changed offices so often. But I think we were in Dover Street, in the OUP offices. And we're not all there. Alexandra Pringle's not there. But from left to right is Lynn Knight, who did a lot of the classics - Virago Modern Classics. Kate Griffin, who did the sales. Me, who was the Editorial Director. Harriet, who was the Production Director, Carmen who was the Managing Director and Lennie Goodings who was the Publicity Director. And Lennie Goodings is the person who still runs Virago now. But it's not an independent company anymore; it's part of Little Brown.

When was it?

I think that would be the late 70s or early 80s.

Photo 18

OK, this was the Virago Bookshop which was in Southampton Road, in ...off Covent Garden. It didn't last very long, partly because we ...I think it lasted maybe three years. I- I should know, but I don't remember. And it was- they're difficult things to maintain. It was very beautiful and very nice to have it. But it needed quite a lot of backing at the beginning, and I

don't think we got the backing from the people who owned us, which was Cape, Chatto and Bodley Head who were also struggling with money. So- but this was the opening. And we're all smiling at Rosamund Lehman, who cut the ribbon. ...I'm on the right. ...And next to me is Mary Stott. And next to her was somebody who worked at Virago who's called Karen... gosh, it's Katrina- called Katrina. And then Lennie Goodings, and then... the head of Chatto and Bodley Head and then Alan Bryan, who's married to Jill Tweedie. And Roz del Mar, drinking from her glass. Anyway. That was it. That was the opening.

[2:29:15]

Photo 19

Well, this is me at an Index Awards dinner. We had them once a year where we gave awards to brave journalists, brave writers, brave activists. And... they were very successful. I started them. And we had them every year, and they still do have them. So that's me drinking a toast to... one of the brave journalists... Two-thousand and... hang on, 19... 1998.

Photo 20

So, this is me getting- having got my OBE, with my daughter. At Buckingham Palace, outside. Very jolly day indeed. I thought we weren't going to make it, because she got stuck in a traffic jam but we went shooting into Buckingham Palace with the- with the gravel spraying. And she charmed the parking attendants. And Charlie was there, their - her eldest child. And Frank, who I was living with at the time, couldn't make it 'cause he was ill. But we had a really great day. I enjoyed it.

And what did you get it for, Ursula? What did you get it for?

I got it for... my work at Index. So, I got it for human rights, really. I think I was recommended to it by the Foreign Office List. I don't think they would give it for Virago. I think Virago would be much too political.

Photo 21

These are my three older grandchildren. I've got one more, born since then. The one in the middle is Charlie, who would be twelve or thirteen there. The one on her left is Cady, who would be two. And the one on the right is Natalia who would be three. They're only a year

apart. And then some - another one came to join them later. And I've got a picture of me with her, but those are the three. Taken... I'm not sure by whom, actually.

Photo 22

OK, this is me with my youngest granddaughter. We don't do boys. All girls. Lovely girls. And I'm walking with her in Alexandra Park in Hastings which is a rather beautiful landscaped park on her exotic cycle. And she's probably two there. She's now four, so she's about two. And she's called Leonie – Lonnie for short. And she's as tough as anything.

[2:32:24]

Photo 23

So, this is rather amazing picture, very soon after Charlie on the left, my eldest granddaughter, gave birth to her daughter, Maya. Called Maya. After Maya Angelou. And it's my daughter with her arm on her head. So, there's these three generations. And they- the picture was taken by Ollie, who's the father of the baby. And she's called Maya. Charlie met Maya Angelou because I brought Maya Angelou to the Virago list. I bought the books. And she met her when she was about three at a sort of rather big event for Maya, in the Dorchester. And she was about three and she just couldn't get over her. She followed her all around, all evening. This amazing six-foot three black woman who sang and danced and spoke with great force. So, she's called Maya.

Document 1, side a

OK, this is this extraordinary document in my possession. My brother has one too, which is an exit visa. We were both born in England. My mother went to the trouble of coming to England to have us born, so we had British citizenship. And we were allowed therefore to stay in Germany when my parents left without us, which is a very mysterious story. But I think they felt all sorts of nervousness about various things. So, we came separately. And this is the document that was our exit visa [child ID]. ...And you can see it was done on the 27th of July 1938. Yeah.

Document 1, side b

So, this is the other side of the exit visa, and it's very faded unfortunately 'cause I haven't taken enough care to prevent it. But basically, it says "single journey only". And there's a

picture of me looking a bit sulky. And a Nazi eagle stamped there. And... to me it's just an extraordinary document. I think the- I think we had to pay for it. I think it was- had to pay for the stamp. Anyway, this is what... got me out of Germany.

Ursula thank you very much for participating in the Refugee Voices Project and for sharing your life history and your photographs and documents with us. Thank you.

It's a pleasure. It's a pleasure.

So- just found this, so this is a little addendum at the end. It's a photograph I like. It's got my beloved friend and author Grace Paley and me, and Bill Webb who I was living with at the time. And she came to stay with us a lot. She was a great friend. She wrote wonderfully witty short stories, and I just would like it in. so there you go.

Thank you.

[End of photographs and documents]

[2:36:01]