

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Lawson
Forename:	Gunter
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	22 September 1935
Interviewee POB:	Berlin, Germany

Date of Interview:	3 September 2015
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV153
NAME: Gunter Lawson
DATE: 3rd September, 2015
LOCATION: North London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

It's the 3rd of September, 2015, and we're in the home of Gunter Lawson in North London. Gunter, thank you very much for so kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR project. Could I ask you first of all to tell us your full name, your date and place of birth?

I'm Gunter Ferdinand Lawson, and I was born 22nd September 1935, in Berlin.

And could you tell us something about your family background?

I'd better just explain that the family name was Löwenstein, and we as family decided to change our name in the early 70s. I can discuss the reasons about that later. OK? So, the family background... was that my mother came from - was born in Riga - and came from a family that were, I suppose you'd call them middle class. Quite well off. They'd moved from Riga to... St. Petersburg as it was then, and then- but then got caught up...

[interruption]

...got caught up in the Russian Revolution. And managed to escape and get to Germany, where my mother's maternal grandparents lived in Königsberg. The family name was Lowenstein.

Yes.

And we changed that to Lawson in the early 70s...for reasons which I might explain later. So, the background to the family was that my mother came from, was born in Riga. Middle class family. They were I believe leather... factors. They- A family business of several brothers. My mother's uncles would buy leather from - go out and buy leather from farmers, and then have it processed and then sell it on.

[0:03:01.5]

They moved from Riga to St. Petersburg. By the way, they were German speaking and Russian speaking. Not Latvian. My mother always said that the only people who spoke Latvian were the maids. They, as I say, moved to St. Petersburg and Mum was educated there. But then with the Revolution, her father was killed. He was out in the country, and they didn't really know what happened. And her mother and her two brothers... and herself came to Germany, where the maternal grandparents lived in Königsberg. And they then moved on to Berlin, and Mum's- thought of Berlin as her home. She led a...an apparently happy life there, although there were all sorts of traumas that took place. And... so that's the- her background. I know much less about my father. He was born in Posen which was -I think when he was born was in Poland, but later became German...And all I really know about his family and the background was that his father. He was born in Posen, which was, I think when he was born in Poland but later became German. And all I really know about his family and the background was that his father had been in the First World War in the German Army and had after the war been a very successful businessman. They were quite prosperous. I think he bought and sold... army surplus. So, and he had one sister. But he was never- He was never educated properly by the family. So, my mother was always- felt that that was a great wrong done to him. But they were married in 1928, I think it was. And ...but there were problems around- I know she spent her early married life living with her in-laws which is not the best way to start married life. And that she eventually got what she wanted, which was an apartment of her own. But then basically the marriage broke down because of my father's ...failure to tell her about debts he'd accumulated. And her beloved flat was raided by bailiffs and she lost all her... belongings, beloved belongings. And by this time... I'd been born, and

of course the Nazis were in power. So, life was unbelievably difficult and complex. Mum eventually managed to get a, a job as- to look after the elderly parents of her best friend from school days. They were well off. They had a nice apartment. And Mum, in exchange for the accommodation, for her and me, looked after that elderly couple.

[0:07:06.5]

Could you just... [to cameraman: How far back do you want us to go?]

Could you please explain where this elderly couple were living?

They were also in Berlin. This was all in Berlin. And... now what's been going on at the same time as all this personal- these personal problems - was that Mum was seeking ways of getting out of Germany...escaping. And there were several strands to this. One, she had an- one of her uncles, had put up a bond, which would have allowed her to- or funded her for going to Palestine. But that never came about. She couldn't get the paperwork, I think. Now, to make sense of this I must go back a bit. After Mum left school, in Berlin in about 1918-19, I think it was two or three years later, she came to London, where she had an aunt and an uncle on her mother's side. And the aunt ran a very successful beauty parlour in Bond Street. And Mum went to work for her, basically as a- an apprentice in the beauty business. This is one of the things which really annoys me which I forgot, never remembered to ask her. Did she want to do this? Why did she do it? But you know, we don't know. She lived with the - her uncle, who was a very successful manufacturing jeweller. High class business.

[0:09:20.5]

Where was that?

This was in London, in Kensington. Both the uncle and aunt lived in Kensington. They were very successful financially. And Mum worked in the beauty parlour. And there was another apprentice there. And this apprentice was called, I think, Mina. Mina Green. As far as I know she wasn't Jewish, but she later in life married a...a Jewish guy who was a successful children's clothes manufacturer. Had a very important impact that, because...and then, after a few years working in London she came back to Berlin. Again, I don't know what the

rationale for all this was. And she worked- she worked as a secretary in the years before and during her, her marriage. I think she was quite a successful secretary. Efficient. When it came in the late 30s, to - to try and escape from Berlin, she needed a sponsor in order to come to the UK. And neither the uncle nor the aunt would do this. Why, I don't know. I think they were...they didn't realise. To give them the benefit of the doubt, they didn't realise the seriousness of the situation. All they saw was a niece of theirs with a child. Divorced. What? Why should they do it? I don't know. But they didn't. But Mina Green... That was her married name...her husband and she would do it. She'd kept in touch with them. And they had a weekend house down in Hampshire, at Ringwood. And they sponsored Mum to come over as the housekeeper for that house. So that meeting - That friendship in the early 20s resulted in me being here, [laughs] if you like, if you understand. And... So... Mum managed to get out, and we were on the last train that crossed the German-Dutch frontier in late August 1939. I can't remember any of this. Mum tells me that my father came to the station to see them off, or see us off. And there had been a family ...retainer, Granny, who at various times looked after me. And she, the story is that you know Jews weren't allowed in to - to visit the zoo, but Granny took me - she wasn't Jewish - just before we left Berlin. This is just a story I've been told. I don't remember any of it. So...we arrived at Liverpool Street Station on the 29th of August, 1939. Apparently, we were met there by two of Mum's cousins. She had the son of the aunt who ran the beauty parlour, and he had just volunteered to go into the Army. And he came to see her. And that was the last time she saw him 'cause he was later killed at Tobruk.

[0:13:55.5]

Could I ask also about your father? Was that the last time that you saw him?

Yes. Absolutely. I ought to add a little bit. This best friend of hers from school days, whose parents Mum looked after, had by the time Mum went there, had committed suicide. And her - her husband was a lawyer. And he had advised Mum, "You must divorce..." He knew that her marriage had broken down. But he said, "You must divorce because otherwise your husband will have the power to stop the child going with you". So, there was that dimension to it as well. And as another element in it, too, that comes to light later. Which is that this best friend had had a child. Henry... Who was a couple of years older than me. And the father had

sent the child- it wasn't a Kindertransport. He was sent over here, and he was adopted by a family in Swansea, I think it was, South Wales definitely. And that again all comes into the story later. I'll tell you about that. So, Mum and I arrived here. She was met by Myron her cousin and another cousin from another uncle. Again, all on her mother's side... Who was a young woman who'd also worked for the beauty parlour aunt. We'll call her Bertha, her name was. ... Mum went out immediately to Ringwood. And there settled in to look after the house. There was a maid in, for the- to look after the house. And apparently, I must have been sent to the local school. I have no memory of any of this.

[0:16:45.5]

Because you would have been four, maybe just coming up to five... when your...

No.

...arrived in England?

I'd been- I was born September '35, so September '39 I was going to be four, and I was presumably celebrating my fourth birthday in Ringwood. I obviously... I think I was sent to school; I don't know. Mama says that ...at some stage there, I stopped speaking German and started speaking English. [half laughs] And I don't speak German any- I gave it up at school. I'm no good at languages.

Did your mother have - experience any pressure not to speak German in Britain at that time?

Did...do you remember her mentioning it?

Well- there's two things. One was that because of her stay in the early 20s, she spoke perfect English. With a strong accent, but her, her English knowledge was excellent. But she- as far as I can make out, she must have been isolated in this house. There she was, in the house. I don't know whether she was able to make friends locally. It wouldn't have been easily – you know – someone speaking German. So... that was the situation. But then by I think the early part of the new year, the government introduced legislation that said, no enemy aliens – and

Mum counted as an enemy alien – no enemy aliens were to live I think it was within a six-mile radius or distance from the sea. So, she had to leave!

Where did you go from there?

So, she came to London, and again I don't quite know. You mentioned about the ...the place in Russell Square that – But she must have lived with me for some time, in some accommodation provided by the Jewish community. I don't- Again, I have no memories and not much information. I know that one of the families that I came to know later, that they were there, that... But fairly soon afterwards, I don't know how she earned her living at that time. What she did. Fairly soon afterwards, with the Blitz evacuation, we were evacuated. She would never let me go. There was no way she was going to send me off as a child - lone child evacuee. So, we were put on a train. As she describes it, you didn't know where it was going. And the train ended up at a station in Leicestershire. And people came from the local villages to choose who they would be willing to have with them.

[0:20:26.5]

Do you remember any of that?

No. I don't...total blank.

Did your mother feel humiliated by it? How did...?

No, I don't think- I never felt...I never felt that Mum felt humiliated. It was all, it was a challenge. You know, how were you going to live? That was the main thing. We were... taken in by a family, in the village of Enderby. Very nice family, the Downings. But- and Mum got a job in Leicester. That was quite ...as a machinist. I do not know where she learnt her skills as a machinist. It wasn't from her mother; her mother was useless- her mother had been brought up in a middle-class family. They had servants so they never had to do anything themselves. So, where she learnt to be a machinist, I do not know. And when I say a machinist, I mean... in the clothing industry. And it was a long journey. Enderby was six

miles. You had go- go by bus to Leicester and then she had to change to a local bus to get to where this – the family business of [inaud] were - were located.

They would presumably have trained her...

I don't think they were capable of training. No, I don't mean capable. You know. They ran their...

Someone outside the factory...

She couldn't have learnt the amount- the skills she had. I don't think they would have taken on anybody who wasn't skilled. ...So, again. Things I don't know. But we lived with the Downings. And Mum doing this long journey every day. I go to a local school. All I know about that local school and that education, was that as time went by, Mum got more and more concerned about its lack of effectiveness. And... Mum was approached at one stage by the Vicar of the village, who said that he was concerned that he'd seen me with a group of children smoking in the cemetery. So that really got her very concerned and worried.

[0:23:02.5]

How did you feel about the school? Were you...

I can't remember.

...accepted?

I cannot remember. I must have been accepted. I played with the local kids. That was it.

What was the name of the school?

I don't know. It would have been Enderby Primary School I should imagine. Enderby at that stage was a smallish village. It's now, quite a big town. Anyway, at that time, the big scourge was TB. There was hardly a family in that village that hadn't got someone with TB. It was

spread by the milk. It was before - before milk was tuberculin tested. The local farmers would deliver it, and people went down with TB. The family we were with, the Downings, had a son who was in the main convalescent home in Leicester for TB. And, he was sent home to die. Because they could do no more for him. And it was obviously not appropriate for Mum and I to be there. So, she moved out and the house she rented, but we moved across the square – it was a village square - to another - another family.

What was the name of the family?

The second family were the Stephens family. They had a big house, which I believe belonged to an aunt. And they had ...three children. And I'd – there was a boy, teenage boy, who went to school in Leicester. And I just admired- he was my...sort of God, you know, kids...he was...

Role model?

[0:25:25.5]

Exactly, role model. And that was very important. Turned out to be very important. Their oldest- their oldest child, a daughter, made ...teamed up with Mum. She was a great personality. Is still alive, woman in her nineties. And, but she went - having also gone to school in Leicester – went into the ATS.

She would have been a lot of company for your mother then?

I don't know about company, but she was - she was just a very vital personality. And the other daughter wasn't, because she was also now with TB. Again, another member of a family down with TB. So, we stayed there- I don't know how long we stayed there but I'm beginning to have memories now. I can remember having the first ice cream with the end of the war. I can remember the family dinners on ...Sunday with the...this was during the war and the radio on with ITMA [*'It's That Man Again'*, radio programme]. This sort of thing.

So, this would have been the latter part of...

Yeah, the late- I suppose '44 round about that. And there was an...a...an RAF aerodrome not far away, and they always would ask people from there to come and join them. The end of...

What was the name of the aerodrome?

I think it was Desford, but I can't be sure about that. But I do remember that one of the pilots - he was on a reconnaissance flights - and he'd come home, or on the way home he'd fly over the house. And that was the indicator that they should send a taxi to pick him up to join them. And he ...I can't quite see him in my mind's eye, but he was quite a personality. And he- But he was also killed when his plane was shot down. So, there was a lot of- a lot of things going on as you can imagine.

Indeed. Was there any tension because you had come from Berlin?

[0:28:00.0]

I never heard anything like that. I never felt that- The name as well, you know, Lowenstein. No there wasn't any. I am not aware of that at all. But anyway, Mum was very concerned about my education. And also, she was having to do all this travelling. So, she decided to move us into Leicester. And she got- she found a furnished - a furnished room in a house not far from where she was working. And...

If we may come back to her work?

Yes.

Some people felt... that they were doing very menial work, and resented that at times. Do you know how your mother felt about ...switching from being a professional secretary to a machinist?

It's interesting you ask that, because years later, her brother accused her I say accused, you know, said, "Why didn't you work as a secretary? You'd have been much better off". And ...

Mum said, no. She didn't have- I won't say she didn't have ambition. She just wanted to survive. And we were very lucky. She could do machining. Good machinist, and we'd ended up at one of the biggest centres of garment-making in the country. So, she was never out of work. She was...

And it gave you that security...

Yeah. And she had- she moved about, and worked in different companies. She worked for a famous very well-known company called 'Chilprufe' who made ...very high-quality warm underwear. Chill proof. And she worked there for some years. At one stage she moved to the shoe industry. Cause there were boots and shoes made in Leicester as well and worked for Brevitt's, making- sewing the uppers of the- as they were called, in the shoe. So, she was versatile but she had no ambition to go into management or even lower management. She just rejected that until much later in life. So, we moved into this ...furnished room, in Leicester. And then... a short time after, something else came up. And this was a, a big old building, quite close to the synagogue. Hundred, two hundred yards from the synagogue. That wasn't the reason she went there, which was an old school. And it was all let into single room furnished things. But, the old headmaster's office or accommodation was there so she managed to rent that. There was a room, a kitchen, and most of all, a little yard with our own toilet.

[0:31:56.0]

Did she feel that was a tremendous achievement because...many...?

Well, I don't know, but she was very, very happy to get there. And although furnished she still needed lots of things. And the ladies who she worked with at Zide's all contributed. And Mum made friends wherever she went, so she had explained this later but she had sort of two areas of friendships. Jewish and non-Jewish. And the Jewish were all refugees. The non-Jewish were the people from work, and she made friends. And we used to – I don't know what life generally was like, but life in the provinces... you know, Sundays you'd go out for tea somewhere to- Somebody would make tea, and you'd be invited. And we'd go out to the

Jewish, mainly ladies – refugee ladies - and her friends from work. But the friends at Zide's all contributed things to her new home.

Were you able to bring anything – or your mother – was she able to bring anything out of Berlin?

No, all we came with was belongings, or it was small suitcases. But again, what she had done, she had a cousin - this one on her father's side - who was living in Berlin, but was married to someone with Swiss nationality. And they went back to- they went to Switzerland, but they agreed to take Mum's belongings. And the things that had survived from the raid by the bailiffs... her crockery and cutlery and personal belongings, went in one big crate to Switzerland and were stored there by the family, her cousin, during the war. And that came back after the war. I'll divert to that thing because the- this was a very important day for her, and ...this great crate came. And... the- the people who handled it, the rail authorities, just dumped it. And so, when she eventually opened it, all her- or large quantities of her beautiful beloved china and glass, were smashed. So that was a terrible...terrible day for her. We still have some of the things. Some of the things survived, but ...you can't imagine what that must have been like. Anyway, where am I?

She was concerned about your education...

Yes.

And you were speaking about your visits to the refugees. Did she speak in German to them?

[0:35:42.5]

Yes. Yes...that was a very...

...Opportunity to link up...?

OK. I must just say that ...I went, I was enrolled at the local ...primary school, Medway Street School, which was a couple of hundred yards from where she worked at Zide's

although later, as I say, she left there and worked at other places. But that was also walking distance from where we settled, in Gotham Street. And- So I, I, I don't know at what level I started at that school I mean, what year; I can't remember that. But the school had in it a lot of evacuee children.

Of various nationalities or primarily British?

No, primarily you know, Londoners. Yeah. But one of the people who's still a... good friend was there. And he, they were also refugees, from Austria. That's my friend Fred Kalb. Although we weren't close buddies, but we knew each other at that primary school. So... Let me just go back to those social things, 'cause we lived, as I say, close to the synagogue. At some stage – I can't remember when - Mum enrolled me at the Cheder. And I hated it. It was horrible. And... I actually played truant for many years. She didn't know. And it was three times a week, I think, Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays. And it was absolutely hateful to me.

In what way and why?

[0:38:00.0]

Well, ...because these, in my view, absolutely stupid and thoughtless rabbis who were in charge, had no idea- all they wanted to know was had you eaten any bacon that week. You know. It had nothing to do with my interests in life, and I found it hateful. And I also have got this terrible lack of ...ability with language. So, I couldn't cope with Hebrew ...at all. And ...that went on for a few years, me playing truant. Mum didn't... Mum had no idea, until many years later, when I told her. But ...they knew that I was playing truant. We lived there, right, virtually next door to the synagogue. I mean, on a Saturday I would see them all going to synagogue. And they saw me! If they had any real thought about things, they would have approached my mother and said, "What's happened to your son? Why's he not coming?" No. They weren't- all they were interested in was whether anyone had I eaten any bacon. So that was going on...

But your mother, did she go to the synagogue?

We were, the High Holy Days, yeah, she wasn't- there was no way she could have afforded to be a member of the synagogue.

How much did it cost, that...?

I don't know, but whatever it was, there was no- there was no... scope for that. But we would go for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we'd go to that- to the synagogue. And the big thing, this is later I suppose in life, but... the main thing was especially on Yom Kippur that the youngsters would all go and visit the local museum or whatever. But she did, there was no way that she didn't make clear ...our Jewish background. That was- it was absolutely understood. But, Mum never kept any of the food things, so...she enjoyed her ham and salami when it, after the war these things were available. The ...as I say... we did not mix socially with the English Jews. Because they didn't invite...we...I don't think Mum had any friends amongst the Anglo-Jewry. All her social life, in Jewish terms, was with other refugees who were mainly, not entirely, mainly single women.

[0:41:39.2]

Why were they single women?

Well, the husbands had either been killed or couldn't escape. I must add, Leicester had- its big industries were hosiery and knitwear. There was a similar city in Germany. Chemnitz, ok? A lot of the people who came to Leicester were from Chemnitz. Mum used to joke that anybody coming to Leicester and talking to the refugee community would think that the capital of Germany was Chemnitz. OK? So- But they came because they had business connections. One of her friends was the widow of the rabbi, the Community in Chemnitz, who had come over and in fact got a job as a sales lady in a clothes shop, so- in a dress shop. But there was a ...a separate community, as it were, who were also- There were two sorts of refugees. There were those who were strictly orthodox and were absorbed into the Jewish Community, because they could participate, in fact they could lead services. They were knowledgeable on Jewish matters. But then there were the... the others. And ...most of whom, apart from that one lady, came from Berlin. And I used to go along with Mum on the

Sunday afternoons. And I would sort of scream to her, "Speak English!" I wanted to know what was being said of course. Very frustrating. And it was very- I was the only child in that group.

[0:44:03.0]

And you didn't grow up speaking - in England – any German?

No. You couldn't - You couldn't speak German.

No...

Well, if I- if my father had come, presumably I'd have heard my parents speaking German, and I would have retained it. But Mum on her own, no. If you go out, you can't speak German in the public, in the middle of the war.

No...

So, it just wasn't on. I, I used to find it dreadfully frustrating. And you might say, well, anybody with any 'go' would have tried to learn some German to try and understand what was being said. But it wasn't my scene. So...that was that. Let me just go back a minute to describe where we lived in Gotham Street, 'cause there was the main room which served as a living room. It had a great big old grate. ...Making fires, cleaning up after fires, was a big part of the domestic routine. It had a large double bed, so it was our bedroom, our dining room and our living room. And I would go to bed and Mum would put a- something up...and later – we'd sleep together. Well, she realised that couldn't go on too long, and when another small room became available in the house, it was a very small room, she took that on for me, and that became my bedroom. So... you know, things were managed. Looking at it in hindsight, very, very well. And I, I, I think I've written in the book, as far as I was concerned, I had a happy childhood. The – the only bleak element in the childhood was that damn Cheder. [they laugh] But I was- I think it was a happy child. Content. On birthdays, I'd have a birthday party. I played with the children in the street. We were you know, there were no other Jewish kids in...in our neighbourhood. So, I, we'd play in the park, we'd play- we'd do

all the things that kids do. I was content. I kept up, or we kept up the relationship with both the Downings and the Stephens in Enderby. I remember that I had- I'd nagged to have a pet, and I wanted a rabbit. And we had this rabbit in the yard, and eventually Mum got fed up cause like any child I hadn't bothered doing- she was having to do all the feeding and cleaning. So, she threatened me, "You've got to do this otherwise I'm giving the rabbit away". And I remember going with a, a big straw bag, basket, and took the rabbit with me to ...secretly, on the bus to Enderby, to the Stephens's who had a big... thing and I thought they would look after my rabbit. And I was very dismayed some short time afterward, visited them and saw the pelt hanging up. They had killed the rabbit and no doubt had it for Sunday lunch.

The war...yes.

Yeah. But...you know, that's all part of- Any childhood, isn't it? I don't think it was a special thing.

[0:48:00.0]

If I may interrupt.

Yes.

You did ultimately go back to the synagogue, and you had your Bar Mitzvah.

Yes...

Your mother found out?

Not until long after. But before then then, the biggest, most important thing that had happened was that those were the days of the Eleven Plus. And Medway Street School was quite highly regarded. It was, and ...I was put in for the Eleven Plus. I think, and I'm pretty sure that I've got the memory right, I had to take it again. There were those who were borderline and had to take some things again. And I did that, and I got through the Eleven Plus. Great relief, celebration. I didn't realise the full impact of that. It was obviously very

important. And, you had to choose a school. Leicester had quite a few Grammar schools and the prestigious one was the Wiggiston School. All the Jewish families sent their children to Wiggiston, but I didn't want to go to Wiggiston. I wanted to go to the City Boys' School, which was where Brian Stephens, my hero, had gone. And... Mum didn't know any better or anything; she didn't put any pressure on me. So, we put down City Boys'. And as it happened City Boys' had a Jewish Headmaster, Mr Cramer. And it was the ideal school for me, as it turned out, because it was not pressurised and everything. And I had a very happy successful time at that school. And it was just right for me, and again, I was the only Jewish boy in the school for many years. And... each morning, the Assembly, there were some boys who would sit out and I never understood why. Then I realised that they were the Catholic boys, who wouldn't- who came in after the main part of the Assembly for notices. And I thought, if they can do it, why can't I do it and give me a bit more time for homework? [laughs] Not for any religious purposes. So, I applied and "Yes, yes, you can go into...", and we'd all assemble in the Prefect's room until the Assembly was over. So, I did that for the rest of my time. I was joined by another Jewish boy later, but most of the time I was the only... Jewish boy in the school. And I never...

[0:51:53.0]

Apart from your...your childhood idol?

No, he'd left I mean, he was a grown man and had a family. And they weren't Jewish, of course. No, I have no memories of ever having anything said to me or any unpleasantness because of my funny name or Jewishness. And in fact, to make matters worse, in terms of being different...soon after the war my mother's brother who'd been in the British – it's a whole different story, but he'd been in the Palestine Brigade. And had then been attached to the British Army and had come all the way through Europe during the war. He had sent Mum some *Lederhosen*. Can you imagine a- a little kid in Leicester wearing *Lederhosen*? But I did, and although I was quite a shy kid, I don't know how I put up with that. But I did. Nobody ever said anything. It was really quite bizarre, if you think about it.

Did you just wear it on one occasion?

No, no! I would wear it all the time. As long as I was- Cause the first few years at school you wore short trousers. So, quite what was going through Mum 's mind then, I don't know. But well, there was a money issue. So that was... part of life. Mum organised things. I'd no feelings of deprivation or poverty. I just took it for granted people lived – lived like we did. We would go to the pictures, Mum and I, on a Friday night. I'd meet her from work with sandwiches, it was a big thing, going to the cinema. We had holidays. We'd go out, often at weekends on the- you'd go into town and all the coaches were there, to provide mystery tours. And you'd go out somewhere. The countryside ...near Leicester is very beautiful, lots of it and you'd stop for a cream tea or something. We'd go to concerts. We'd regular- we'd go to the library, change our books. Mum encouraged me to read, so life was normal, and happy!

[0:54:55.0]

Did your mother invite fellow refugees to your home?

Yes!

Did you feel...?

...And the- and the English friends. Yes, there'd be inter-change, you know, you'd go there and then you'd invite them back. Tea would be made. High Tea in the... with cold meats and salads and...trifle

The traditional English way?

Yes!

And trifle also?

Yes, trifle. So, life- I just thought life was normal. I - as I say I - did realise that I was going to be in trouble soon. Cause as I was approaching my thirteenth birthday I knew enough to know what I didn't know. So... I got myself back. I turned up at the synagogue on Sunday

morning. “Where’ve you been?” You know. They knew, cause they’d seen me... playing in the streets on their way to shul. I’d been to London; I’d worked it out all in my mind, what I’d tell them. But we used to visit London to visit the old aunt. And... I was let back. They knew I was lying, but they let me back. It didn’t do any good. And Mum approached Doctor Heinemann. Doctor Heinemann was, I think from the Rhineland. A lovely man, very orthodox. Another of these men who had been a – a lawyer in Germany but came to this country, couldn’t work as a lawyer. I don’t know what he did, but Mrs Heinemann opened a shop with knitwear- knitting facilities. And he used to help the rabbis out and take services and things. Could – could he prepare me for my Bar Mitzvah? Well, he only needed to ask me a couple of questions and he realised I knew nothing. And he found the very shortest of portions; I think it was two sentences. And he couldn’t understand... How come you’re at grammar school and you’re so ignorant, basically. He didn’t say it as crudely as that but, he was a very sweet man. And he got me through my Bar Mitzvah. And Mum had got the...party up for me and everything. And, as I put in the book, they even- they even misspelt my name on the book they presented me. They said, to ‘Gungla’ Löwenstein. [laughs]

[0:57:52.0]

Could you tell us the name of the book please?

Oh, I don’t know it was some nonsense about... I- I just can’t remember.

The Jewish way of life?

Yeah, that sort of thing, you know. The sort of thing you’d - nobody reads these books do they? I didn’t...

You wrote about it in “The Jewish Voices”.

Yes, ...because this Jewish Voices, I felt, I was quite annoyed actually that I’d not been asked up for the interviews up in Leicester. But I felt it gave a rose-tinted view of life in Leicester and the reality. From my perspective, anyway. ...Sorry, can I... [sound break]

I was going to make a couple of points. One was that we used to come up to London, to see mainly the old- Aunt Bertha, who by that time was house-bound. And also see the, the uncle occasionally. The uncle had ...supported Mum financially a bit. I remember these registered letters coming, that would have a ten-pound note in it or something. So, as it were the conscience had been pricked slightly. So, there was that. But we always went to see Bertha and Bertha was trying to pressurise Mum, to go down and live with her and be her carer and housekeeper. Well, she had a housekeeper, but her carer. And Mum resisted that. And she used me as the excuse, ...saying that she didn't wish to interrupt my education. But it was a very important decision that she made there. And there'd been this other cousin who had met us at the station, Susan. And she was being pressurised by Bertha as well. She escaped and joined her brother in Australia. And this becomes quite important later. So, there were certain pressures which Mum didn't specifically discuss with me, you know, I was only a kid, but which I was aware of. And the other thing I wanted to say, was that I didn't know that Mum and my father had divorced, until many years later. And, we were with a – a, another cousin or ...uncle, an aunt by marriage in Holland. And they thought they were talking in English and I- they thought I was asleep. And then, I can't remember exactly but it was evident to me that there'd been a divorce, and I'd never known that. And it wasn't till many years later, 'cause I didn't ask Mum. I didn't raise it with her. But Myra and I had a discussion with her, and it all flowed out...then. So- and she was never- she was very angry with my father about the lies he'd told her and he'd obviously was terrible, if not criminal, in his financial management. But she was still in love with him. And... that- I don't know whether it was the cause, but Mum never married anyone else. And so, although later on we had those clashes which single children have with parents. But she never complicated our relationship by marrying or you know me having a step father or anything. So those – those are really crucial elements in the whole relationship.

How did you feel about this news?

No, I didn't...I had no emotional- it didn't have any emotional impact. It was just another piece of information, really. I never missed not having a father.

[1:03:06.5]

Ah. Did you ask your mother about your father and what had happened to him, or where he was, during your childhood?

...Much later, my father's sister, my aunt, had come to this country with her husband and they'd settled in Manchester. But... Mum vaguely kept in touch, but had no fondness for her at all. There'd been bad relations with the in-laws. But... many years later I was doing National Service and I found myself up – at the end of National Service in those days you had to learn to be a fire-fighter in case there was an atomic- [laughs] We were all supposed to rush down and put out the fires. And that was the training. And it was near Manchester, and I took the opportunity to get in touch with Siddi, was her name. And I made contact with her and visited them. An- So we kept up the relationship... somewhat, but she was a very funny woman and ...it, you can never be close. Can never have a close relationship, so I just mention that almost as an aside, cause that's what it was. Going back to life in Leicester, for me, school...I enjoyed school. I was a very slow starter, but by about the fourth form I was beginning to find my feet and get going. And... Mum was always encouraging...of that. And took much pride in going to, you know, looking at the reports and going to the parents' evening, those things. So, it became clear that I was going to go into the sixth form and in those days by the way, grammar schools you know for the people wanting people to introduce them. Only a small proportion went on beyond the age of sixteen. Most of the boys – it was a boys' grammar school - left at sixteen. They might have taken on an apprenticeship. They didn't go on, the ones who went on to university was [sic]a minority. And I had to make all new friends when I went into the sixth form because most of my friends were science boys and you know, never the twain shall meet when you go into the science sixth form. And I went on to do history and geography and English and I had great teachers, especially my history teacher was new to the school and he was enthusiastic about the course and ...Because my birthday's at the beginning of the school year I was always the oldest in the school, or, in my year. So, in... '54, was it, yes, 1953, '54, I- he put me in for some entrance, one in Cambridge and one in Oxford and I got a place at Oxford. So that was really... Mum was very proud. And, as it were, had ...she had the proof to Bertha that it was good that we hadn't spoilt my education by changing schools and things. And...So, it was- I enjoyed school and... it was successful.

[1:07:35.5]

Entrance at Oxford or Cambridge in those days meant that you had to do your National Service before going up, unless you were going to do Medicine, I think. So, I was faced with National Service. Again, I just go along and do as I'm told. And went- ended up in the RAF, and had two years, which at the time I was quite resentful of. Cause I saw that my friends, they'd gone to University first. You know, nothing that I was doing in the RAF – and I'll tell you later what it was - seemed to me to be mainstream to my life. And what I ended up was as, was a...I think it was called a PSA, but we gave the aptitude tests to all these recruits. To find out whether they were ...had the aptitude to do ...say, the engineering work. The engineering training in the RAF was very thorough and very- it took a long time, so it was expensive, so they didn't want to put people into it who had no engineering aptitude. So, we'd do these tests and also, the psychologists loved us, because they could try out all sorts of things on a huge part of the population. So, we'd be giving other tests out. I mean we just gave the instructions in the standard way and did the marking and sent off the results, but it was not skilled in any way. So did those two years. I did make a couple of friends, who were later on at university with me, and I still have those friends. I'm going to have a party shortly because it's my eightieth birthday and both of them will come along to that.

[1:10:03.5]

So that was an interregnum, but in fact it was quite- it turned out quite useful cause I made decisions then. And I'd got my place to read PPE at Oxford but in the course of that – that's Philosophy, Politics and Economics. But I changed and switched to Law. And the only thing about that was that I had to do a lot of Roman Law so I needed help. And I found help in the RAF to let me struggle with Justinian. But that was all. So, I went up to Oxford. And that was just great. I had a, a...I enjoyed that thoroughly. And... again made - made friends. Not so much 'cause it was, it was not the sort of college that I was comfortable with, cause there were very few grammar school boys there, they were all from public schools.

Was there any...resentment or attitude towards Jewish students?

No, none at all. I never – never encountered any of that. I used to go along occasionally to the Jewish Society but again, it was for- awful meals on a Friday night and lots of prayer which

was not part of my background and I didn't ... wasn't happy with. Jewish people recognise each other. OK? So, you'd meet up with somebody and chat together, meet together. But I never came across any comments to me either about Jewish or my name. So, there was none of that. I didn't experience it; it might have been. But it wasn't...

Did you feel highly acculturated here in Britain by that stage?

[1:12:30.5]

Oh, yes, I was absolutely British. And in fact, ...

You had become a British citizen, had you?

Yes. Mum had- Mum had got naturalised in about ...I don't know- I've got the copy of the thing in the book. You'll see that it's signed by ...the Home Secretary then. But- And my name was added at the bottom. Now prior to going into the RAF, I was given the opportunity to say, "No, I don't want British nationality" and then I wouldn't have had to do the National Service. But I didn't feel that was right. I just went along with it. So that was an opportunity if I'd wanted, to have got out of it. So, I was absolutely English. Absolutely Leicester. [half laughs] Leicester City Football. You know...I still support them. I was totally acclimatised in that I...I think Myra needs to go.

So, all of - I was absolutely British. And at university the same; I participated in things. So- the fact that I had these foreign connections was not- not crit- not a big part of my life, really. Yes, I do need to go back to Maccabi in Leicester because that was a huge part of my life. Next to...not quite adjacent, but adjacent to the synagogue, was an old house which had been bought up at some stage - I can't remember when - and was the Maccabi Club. And of course, it was just across the road from me. So, from about fourteen, fifteen, I used to go there. I'd do my homework, go over, play table tennis. They had a television which we didn't. And that was the centre of my social life. So, I did socialise there, with all my Jewish friends and their contemporaries and they were Anglo-Jewry on the whole. There was Fred there, 'cause he was a fantastic table tennis player. There was one other - there was another girl there from a family who were Jewish...refugees. The really orthodox ones didn't come to

Maccabi. But on the whole, we reflected, Maccabi reflected Anglo-Jewry. And I participated in that. And I didn't used to go- They used to do visits other Maccabi Clubs – have a football match and a dance and things. I didn't used to go on those partly 'cause they were quite expensive, and we couldn't afford it. So that was a real big part of my life. At one stage I was the treasurer of the club so I participated. And that was really interesting cause I'd go to these committee meetings. I'd never been to anything like that, that organised the club. And...

Did you find that useful experience?

[1:16:26.5]

I did in later life, yes. And that's how I met Myra, because we had a- we would always have a dance at the beginning of the academic year and invite the new students in Leicester.

Which year did you meet, please?

When did we meet, 1960, was it or '61?

Myra: We were married in '61.

Yeah. 1960 it must have been. By then, I'd finished university. I'd come back to Leicester, somewhat reluctantly. In a way, that was a bit of blackmail by Mum. I'll explain what had happened. But going back to the Maccabi issue, we had the dance for the new students, and I was at the door taking the money, when this girl came through. So that was the beginning of that relationship. And Myra joined Maccabi and did things around the Junior group and things like that. So, the whole thing about National Service, I forgot a very important thing that happened. At the end of about my first year in the RAF, Bertha, old aunt Bertha died. And she was significantly rich woman. Now she had lost her only child in the war, this was Myron, the one who was a soldier. She had married again a white Russian money-seeker I think who was hoping to get her fortune but he pre-deceased her. So, this poor woman, who'd lost...she'd lost the, the people she loved. She left her wealth and as I say, she had quite- she was quite rich because she'd sold her business to ...one of the big perfume companies because she had all the recipes for perfumes. They didn't run, they closed it down but they

had her perfumes. So, and she'd- she left her- in her will she left it between my mother and this other cousin Susan, who had gone to Australia. What she did was a really very proper, correct thing to do. She had some nieces and nephews who were alone in the world, well not quite alone, but who needed who could use her wealth, and that she did. Well Mum was the only one around, so she had the terrible task of clearing up the estate and everything. But she did that, and that gave her financial independence thereafter. I couldn't help 'cause I was in the RAF stuck away in Shropshire. Mum ...in financial terms, she had had a German pension. Well, she had two parts of a German pension. She had her pension as a result of what we would call a National Insurance pension, 'cause she'd worked in Germany for many years. So, she had that. And she made a trip which she hated doing back to Berlin to put in a claim for restitution. Which she didn't have, she hadn't had any assets so there was no restitution in that respect but she got a small pension which - which helped out. And... I got a pension to help in my education, as long as I was in education. A few hundred pounds but that was worth a lot of money in those days. So, from about the time I was in the Sixth Form, Mum began to have financial independence. And she gave up, well, A: she moved out of Gotham Street into a, a, a better flat right by Medway Street School. And then, after Bertha died, she had enough money to buy a house and she bought a semi-detached house in Leicester and was independent. Became financially independent. And- But she didn't give up work. What she did, she got a clerical job in- with a, a Jewish firm of ...children's clothes manufacturer. And she became the buyer for the accessories, buttons, cottons... accessories on the clothes.

Would you know the name of the firm?

[1:22:35.5]

Gold.

Gold.

Gold. Yes. And we're still very friendly with the daughter of the family. So, she worked there for a few years. And then retired. So, and...but that was- it was Bertha's death that gave her financial independence. Sorry. Myra's going to have to go. Sorry. So, it was a lot going on

actually in that fifty...I was in the RAF from '54 to '56, and there was a lot happening. And I couldn't always participate partly 'cause I was away, and another thing happened in that I got shingles so I was laid up for weeks in the ...hospital at the camp and that was just as Mum was moving from Gotham Street. She had to do all of that on her own and I couldn't help at all. Sorry...I've come to a halt. What should I...?

Don't worry. That's absolutely fine. I'd like to ask you, what work you did after you came down from ...university?

[1:24:12.5]

Let me say, I'd always had a thing ...about law. I was interested in law, but as I explained before, I originally when I applied at university, I wasn't going to do law. And the reason for that was, all these people that we knew of, who were German lawyers who'd come to this country and then ended up as book salesmen or something- couldn't continue with it. And that- I knew about these people. I heard Mum talking about them. You know. And I thought it was a dangerous path to follow. But thinking about it, you know, it's a funny sort of thing. You know. It showed an unease. The feeling that perhaps you might have to run away again. But ...so, but then I decided no, I really did enjoy law and those issues, so I did my degree. And I would have really liked to do law, but ...we still didn't really understand. Bertha had only just died. We didn't know... quite what our finances were. I could have come to London, and got articles, and would could have managed. But in Leicester Mum was very ...demanding. And she really almost blackmailed me to come back to Leicester. After all I'd left. That was quite a big thing when I went into the RAF. It was the first time she'd been on her own. I didn't appreciate that until I looked back years later. That was a big, big problem for her. And...So I was sort of- came back to Leicester. And in Leicester in those days, to get articles, they required a premium. 300 guineas. It was a lot of money and I couldn't afford – we couldn't afford that. I suppose we could have done. The thing is, if I'd have wanted to be a lawyer above all else, we would have afforded it. But I didn't; I was ambivalent. Instead, I went into accountancy. Because I could go into accountancy. It was- Accountancy was a new profession for graduates. They were only just opening it up for graduates. And I got a living wage. And...I was the first graduate the firm had had. And we married while I was still at, while Myra was still a student and I was an articled clerk. So, you know, you could do it in

Leicester. And, so that's why I went into accountancy. Couldn't stand it. So boring. But...in fact Myra was quite worried cause I was doing this studies by postal correspondence course, and was not really very devoted to it. But then when Myra became pregnant, and she said, "Look you're not going to be able to do your studies when we've got a new baby so you'd better get on with it". So, I, I started in about the September, and I did- instead of one a week I did three a week – papers - and took the exams in November. And got through those, luckily. Cause if I'd have had to do re-takes, I don't know what would have happened. And Judith was born on Christmas day that year. So, as soon as I'd qualified, I started hunting for jobs...in industry. And again, there was quite a lot of pressure. We...we...with Mum's help we bought a little house, terraced house in Leicester. But I, I knew and Myra knew that we couldn't – couldn't stay in Leicester. We had to get out. So...we – I hunted for jobs, occasionally looking in the local paper but not really that seriously. And I got a job with Ford Motor Company. And we came down to London, and that was quite difficult cause the house price discrepancy...

[1:29:43.5]

Which year was that? Roughly?

Let's see...that was about '63. But again, with hindsight that move to Ford Motor Company was hugely lucky cause Ford's were just at the forefront of management accounting in this country. So, it was fantastic experience. We managed to get a house eventually in Hornchurch. And we settled there. I don't think Mum ever forgave us for leaving Leicester. But she used to drive down to see us, and 'cause we had the baby. And then we had another one while we were there. Robert. But- And after two years...We used to- If you wanted to be successful in Ford, you had to be 150 percent for the company. And I – I enjoyed it. The motor industry was very interesting. The work we were doing was interesting, but I couldn't cope. We were doing 100 hours a month overtime. Being paid for it, but still... So again, I started to look around. I used- I went for lots of interviews and that had an impact later. But I managed- Eventually I was interviewed by a small American company that had just started in the UK, called Conoco – you might have heard of them. Jet Petrol? So- And I was interviewed by the senior American financial comptroller, was offered a job, and accepted.

And came up only to find on the first day that the person I was reporting to, didn't know anything about me... [half laughs] and was none too happy to have me foisted on him.

But you became, ultimately, the planning manager.

Yes, I- What we did there... To be fair, Dick Ramage whom I worked for, made the best of it. I could under... sympathise with him. But some years later I thought to myself, you know, if I'd have been interviewed – 'cause I had lots of interviews - and I never got anywhere with them. And I had a very good CV, you know. Oxbridge, accountancy with a top company, worked with a really major company. And I was going for interview after interview, and not getting through. I know I was quite timid in some respects but I'd have thought I'd have got something. And this eventually led to us deciding some years later, that... to change the name. Cause I mean a lot of jobs I never even got interviews for. And I- it didn't make any sense to me. With that CV I should have been on the interview list at least.

[1:33:22.5]

Why do you think you did not...?

Well, I think the British are very conservative about these things and didn't... "Oh, funny name. Put it aside". And...In fact, what- with Conoco I gradually moved up. And I was actually taken on board to do the accounting for a – a shipping company they had. Never done any shipping before so it was all new to me. But we got that under control and then we started having to do forecasts. And doing forecasts then led to the management accounting. And that was more interesting than debit and credit accounting; I can't stand that. And at one stage I got sent to America, or we got sent, and spent a couple of years in the New York office. And you look in the New York telephone directory, and there's dozens of pages of Löwensteins. Yeah. Nobody in America takes any notice about a name. And coming back to this country...So by that time, you know, the kids were a bit older, and we had a family discussion to change the name, and anglicise it.

Yes.

I never changed the Gunter. [laughs]

Which year would this have been?

So that must have been, when we got back from America, that was in the early seventies. About '72, something like that. But ...we did the time- We timed it, just when my daughter started her secondary school. That was it, 'cause we thought well, let her start, not have to go through a change as it were. She started afresh... with the name.

This leads me back to the issue of continental Jewry in this country, and British Jewry. And your wife is British born.

Mnn.

Do you, or did you observe any cultural differences or were you aware of them and have they impacted, perhaps on the children, in any way?

[1:36:03.5]

I don't know that there was any impact on the children. There was a huge impact on my mother's relationship with me. She found it very difficult to accept Myra... and I don't know what she was expecting. I suspect – I strongly suspect if I'd have married a non-Jew it would have been easier for her. But you look at the photographs, the family photographs all together, and there's this glum-looking woman. She really was not- She found it very difficult and it made life very difficult for Myra as well. But Myra's family is archetypal Anglo-Jewry. Her mother was born in this country. First generation. Her father I think had been born in Holland because that part of the family came to the UK via Holland. But...but I always got on OK with everyone, and just accepted it. But ...and Myra was brought up in a family that were quite orthodox. They were serious synagogue attenders. It was an important part of her life. But when we, and when we got to London, moved in to London of course you could choose. You didn't... There were other things to choose from. But initially we joined the local United Synagogue in... it wasn't in Hornchurch, it was...I've forgotten the name, the next town along. We joined there. But... when I left Ford, there was no point in staying

on in ...in Hornchurch, in Essex, so we did some hunting and we eventually came to this part of the world. And here, we could choose our own ...candle power.

When did you come to... Finchley Central?

We came here... well we were first of all in Woodside Park area... about '66, something like that. And ... Myra in particular. I have no religious... emotional needs, let's put it that way. But Myra, it was an important part for her. So, Myra undertook a consumer survey. She went round to all the different synagogues in this area. Every ...yeah...one. To see where she was comfortable. By the way, when we were in the New York we had joined a local equivalent of a Reform Synagogue there. But that was because it was the nearest one to where we were living. But she did this survey. She liked the Progressive Synagogue. She felt comfortable there. So, we joined. There was no question but that we would join a synagogue. The issue was which one. So, we joined the Progressive, and having children you participate. Your involvement is much greater. And Myra ended up as Chair of the education – the Ivriah there - and did some really good... good things. And I... I did for over thirty years, the ...bookkeeping for the Covenant, you know, the tax claims.

All your accountancy experience became really useful...

[1:40:44.5]

Yeah. I did that, and I also did the- I used to be the auditor. I would never undertake to be Treasurer – they were always asking me to be Treasurer and I wouldn't – 'cause I knew the Treasurer had to do things like negotiate with the rabbi and these things - I wasn't going to touch those things. But I was quite happy to do the bookkeeping, and I did the synagogue book accounts for thirty, thirty-five years or something. So, we participated. And the kids were brought up there. They went to Cheder. They did...Judith did her Bat Mitzvah, and later on the Confirmation classes. And Robert did his Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation, so we participated in that. And that was an overwhelmingly an Anglo-Jewry situation but there were other families with my background in there as well, so quite mixed. So, we've always ...that...[coughs] – excuse me – that involvement has diminished over the years because

we've grown up and you know you make way for younger people to do things. But I still run a bridge group every Monday evening there. So that's you know, part of, it's part of our life.

Yes. Did you feel that you were brought back into the Jewish religious fold partly by your wife and perhaps her parents? How did her parents respond to you?

Well, I never knew her- Her father died before I knew Myra. Her Mum was a sweet woman and we got on very well. I think it's quite common, isn't it, despite the jokes that the son-in-law and the mother-in-law get on OK. I got on OK with her. It was a real problem with my mother. My mother was so antagonistic.

Did she feel totally alienated?

Yes, she didn't find- she didn't accept those... that culture. I mean, for example, when we got engaged. We got engaged before I'd ever met her mother. Her mother, when told that my name was Gunter, said, "Yes, but what's his first name?" [laughs] So...and she- Myra had a brother, older brother. We always... We were OK. But managing that relationship was quite difficult. But...I had no difficulty. As we've got older, the religious aspect has diminished. I mean it couldn't diminish for me, 'cause I was at a zero level. But Myra, for Myra the religiosity aspect diminished. We still run a kosher household... much to our children's amazement. But that's because it's so much part of Myra's life. It didn't make any difference to me, but I go along with it cause it's – it's for her. She sets the tone, basically, and I go along with it. So we've become not quite High Holyday Jews, cause we do go along and participate. We will have a kiddish, to mark my birthday and things. But it's not a big part of our lives any more.

For me, the, the Israel connection's much more important. And the political aspects of that. So... there's been that – a change. By the way, talking of Israel, I must just ...go back. I'm sorry, this...

[1:45:31.5]

No problem.

We went – two years ago we went to Israel, and it was the first time for over thirty years we'd been to Israel.

When was the first time you went?

Well, thirty years before, but... we'd just- we'd gone on a holiday to Israel just like one goes on a holiday to Italy. We'd just gone as tourists. We didn't have anyone there. We didn't have family there. I think Myra had some distant relatives, but I didn't. And we just had a tourist holiday... with the kids. No. Well. There was one aspect of it that wasn't quite the same and I... I need to tell this story. Go back to Leicester. And Mum was very hospitable to my friends. And I, I'd made a friend who had come from Leeds to Leicester. He was working as a research engineer and... Jack. And Jack was over one Friday. Mum made a nice dinner and we were chatting. And for some reason a photo album was brought out. And there was this photograph of me as a baby being pushed in a pram... by a boy a bit older than me. And Jack says, who's this? And Mum explained that it was the son of her best friend from school days, who'd been adopted by a family in Wales.

The person you mentioned earlier?

Yes. And she said, "It's a great... sadness for me that I've never been able to find him". I know... I had tried several times to get in touch with the family, and I can understand that they didn't want the child disturbed by other things, you know, old memories and things. And she said, "It's a funny – funny name. Something like 'Foner'". And Jack said, "Well, I know someone called Foner, who was at university with me at Leeds, and who comes from south Wales". And it was, you know, one of these serendipity things. So, he – he let Mum ... I don't know how it was but Mum wrote. And by that time, Henry Foner was doing a PhD in Leeds and was married to an Israeli girl and they were living together in Leeds. And Mum went up to visit them. And they were just amazed, and they loved her, and... like a grandmother. She was their grandmother. Meanwhile... this best friend of Mum's who had committed suicide, had had a sister who my mother knew vaguely - wasn't a big friend of, but knew had come to this country. And another coincidence was that she was at a social gathering in Leicester and someone had a friend over from Cambridge, and said how the Cambridge community was so upset because one of their members had died. And it was Dodo's – that's the sister – Dodo's

husband. And Mum recognised the name, and got in touch with her. So, Mum knew the aunt of Henry Foner, and the aunt didn't know Henry. So, Mum put aunt and nephew together. There were these funny coincidences - are amazing, aren't they?

[1:50:10.0]

They are.

So anyway, Henry Foner and his wife emigrated to Israel, and have lived there many years. So, when we did our holiday, in Israel, thirty-five years ago or whatever. We did it as a house-swap with them. They came here – we were in this house by then. They came here and we had their house in Jerusalem. And we've always kept in touch. And whenever they do visit here, they do get in touch with us. And so, when we did this trip two years ago to Israel that was very important for us. Partly we hadn't gone because we were very unhappy about the situation in Israel, politically. And we'd, we'd got another couple who live in Rehovot, who we'd met the husband originally when he was in Leicester as a vet, and we'd always kept in touch. And Merton and Ruth are longstanding friends, so we had these two families that we visited in Israel So that made that arrangement – that holiday, so good. And re-asserted for us our commitment to Israel. It's an important part of our, not, say, un-critical commitment. So, and in fact Henry Foner has just published a very, very successful book. You might have seen it. Because his father who was the lawyer who'd advised my mother... his father used to send him postcards. Cause Henry came out in the January of '39, so for about nine months the father was sending postcards and the Foners, the family he was with, had the sense to keep these. And he's put together a book of these postcards, which are very evocative and very ...they just bring the tears to your eyes. And it was published, it was a very successful publication. And I think the Independent virtually reproduced it. So that was quite an interesting little aside. So... these Jewish connections, they're all- they're all sorts, aren't they?

It's amazing how they all link up.

Yes, but those two coincidences I thought were amazing events.

Yes. But you, yourself have written a book. The “Anuta Lowenstein 1904-1993. Her life and family”. What prompted you to write it?

[1:53:40.5]

Well, [pause] I don't know what prompted it. A, I had all these photographs, so I had something. B: When we came back from - I forget where it was, but - we came back and I tackled my mother. And we got her to write the names of the people in the photographs, but we also got her to talk about her life... at the latter part, in Berlin and that, all the trauma of the divorce and the, the, the death of her friend. Looking after the...the elderly...parents of her friend. So, and I scribbled down notes at that time. So that was the basis. And then at some stage, and I forget when, I started getting quite interested in genealogy. And ...so I was able to put quite a lot together. At the back of the book, you'll see family charts. And my daughter-in-law, that is Robert's wife, Melanie, stumbled across a web- the part of the American Jewish genealogy - site, about Latvia. And what has happened is that someone gave a lot of funds to convert a lot of the archives from Cyrillic to western- so you could read them. And Mum 's maiden name was Fromhold, which is not that common a name. So, you look up Fromhold, and it can find loads of information about the identifiable family in Riga, in those archives. And these archives are mainly made up of tax returns, but for some reason in the tax return you had to give the information about your parents and grandparents. So... you get something and you've got the information. I've gone back to 1812, as far back as that, on the Fromhold side. So, I was able to put together a quite significant family tree. Now, I had, the Horowitz's, Mum 's maternal side, pretty well sorted out. Cause I'd met them over the years. I knew them. So...and she told me stories about them and things. But the Fromhold side, her father's side, I didn't, I was, had less information, and ...was able to put quite a lot together there. So, the only ones that I actually know physically is this cousin in Switzerland who gave me his mother's ...Victor, his mother, Irma who'd gone to Switzerland. We were good friends. She and Mum were friends as well as cousins. And we'd met them many times and in fact while I was in the RAF, I had a holiday and I took the train to Lausanne and visited them. So...I just had the interest and wanted to put it together, as well as, you know, once you start having grandchildren you want them to understand what's happened.

[1:58:17.5]

Do you feel that's important?

Yes, I – I do. They have only a very superficial interest, in reality. But I think it comes later in life, doesn't it? But at least they've got as much as I know. And... one aspect ... Mum, when she became financially independent, she started enjoying life. She learnt how to drive. She said, "I've been told that you should have as many goes at the test as you have years. So, I'm going to give it that number". Which she didn't quite need, 'cause she was about sixty when she learnt to drive. So, she didn't quite need sixty, though she did need a lot. But she learnt to drive. It gave her immense independence. And she used to like- She loved travel, and she went on various cruises. Now, she had one cousin...yeah...in Australia. She'd had two, because this other cousin, Susan, who'd been her fellow...beneficiary of Bertha's will, had gone to Australia to be with her brother. By the way her brother had asked Mum to go to Australia after the war. He said, "Come and set up life here". And Mum had been quite tempted by it.

Were you tempted?

[2:00:01.0]

Well, I was too young to know about it. But... Max, her cousin said, "Come and visit us". So, she went there; she went to Australia. And I- after she died- Mum used to keep diaries, and I found this ...diary...and in it there was a visiting card. And the visiting card was - and I've forgotten the name now - but it was for someone whose name I recognised from the family tree. And this was a distant cousin of hers on her father's side. And there were three brothers together and they'd all ended up after the war in Australia, well two in Australia and one in the Philippines. So, I looked this up in the telephone directory, and there was still – that's it, their surname was Landau – and there was a Landau in the telephone directory. So, I wrote and said, "I think I'm a distant relative of yours" and then spelled it out. Well, it came back and it was the widow of the man on the card. And she had no recollection of ever having met Mum. Well, Mum must have met him to have been given his card, I think. So, some years later...I kept up a relationship with this lady, Natasha, a wonderful woman who has three daughters and loads of grandchildren. And in fact, we did a visit to Australia. I forget now

when, five or six years ago, perhaps a bit longer. And we met up with her and her daughters. So that was nice. And they told me about another branch of the family... in California. So, this all opened up. They're pretty distant, but again, one of the grandchildren, of the California people came here. They were on a visit to London and they came and visited us. And what is so frustrating: The Californian branch...that they came about, because this cousin of my mother's had trained as a dentist in Germany, in Berlin. They must have known each other in Berlin, the cousins. Might not have been good buddies or anything but they would have been aware of each other's existence, I'm sure. She qualified as a dentist just as the Hitler laws prohibited Jews from being professionals. She married a rabbi. An Orthodox rabbi. And they, escaped as soon as they – basically as soon as – and they went to...I'm getting confused now, but one of the Greek islands. I think it might have been Crete. I forget now. It's all set out in the book. And he became the rabbi there. And... that island eventually was attacked by the Italians and taken over by the Italians, but they managed to escape. But we've been to that island and there's a synagogue there. And details, you know, you get pictures of the rabbi and everything. So, he was head of that community but then they had to escape. They had a daughter born on that island about the same age as me. They managed to escape to America. And one thing, that they ended up ...in...I think it wasn't Phoenix, Arizona – yeah, I think it was Phoenix, Arizona - one of these places which was a godforsaken nothing at the time that they went there, but became a much bigger place. It wasn't Phoenix; I'll remember late. But- And ...they ...set up home there. So, all the family...And I didn't know about this. And if I had of done, I'd have got in touch. And by the time I knew, she'd died a year before. So, you know it would have been fantastic to get in touch with her while she was still alive. And all those memories, and contacts and information. So, her daughter, who's a contemporary of mine, is still alive in California. We had a falling out which was entirely my stupidity but I won't go into that. [laughs] You don't have to – this isn't a confessional!

[Jana and Gunter both laugh]

[2:06:05.5]

No, but the family and the sense of family means a great deal to you. It's important to you perhaps partly because you grew up...

Without. Yes.

... without family around you, as a refugee here in Britain. At what stage did you or your mother learn about the people who had perished, and perhaps family members even more distant family members, and your reaction at the time to the Holocaust?

My reaction at the time...was... was just a level of sadness. Nothing more. Now what happened was: I think... Mum made enquiries about my father, through the Red Cross and didn't get very far. But the- his sister, Siddi up in Manchester had made further enquiries. And in fact, Siddi was a very naughty girl. Because she had made enquiries, found out what little there was about my father which was that the last he was heard of, was on a transport to Warsaw. But nothing further was heard. I think that was about 1942. But Siddi... made a claim, restitution claim, for her parents. Her parents had been ...rounded up, in Berlin...there was a major round-up of the elderly in '42 I think and went to Theresienstadt. She, Siddi, claimed without mentioning me. And at some stage, I don't know how, Mum found out and blew her top and said some of that is due for me. It wasn't much. I can't even remember what it was. Now I was a bit more forgiving. Mum wasn't. Mum never forgave her for that. And it was very naughty. The grandparents, this is the Löwensteins. My mother's mother had died before the war. My grandparents... were rounded up in Theresienstadt. Now, one day, I was googling. I just googled Löwenstein, cause there's thousands of Löwensteins. But I Googled Emil, which was his name, Löwenstein. Now there was a website, and this was a man – this website was run by a man who was very interested in the Holocaust. Initially about stamps. He was a philatelist, but from that he'd moved to documentation about the Holocaust. And he'd found a document about Theresienstadt. And you know the Germans made the Jews run their own death camps, really. And there was a whole sort of paraphernalia of government within the camp. And he showed an example of the madness of it, which was a court proceeding, in the camp, where Emil Löwenstein was sentenced to seven days in prison - I mean it doesn't bear...you know it's so bizarre – for recklessly and carelessly leaving a mattress out so that someone fell on it. And I've printed it in the book. I wrote to the guy but he never responded, and said, "I'm sure that's my grandfather". Cause although Löwenstein is quite a common name, Emil, isn't. And he would have been – if he was alive, he would have been there - in Theresienstadt. Jenny, his wife, my grandmother, had died before. He

was a tough old nut. My mother hated him. He was a horrible man she said. He'd been a soldier in the First World War. He was...

[2:11:14.5]

Gassed?

No, I'm sorry, I've gone blank. [interruption] No, I mean there were certain things which I won't – I'm very uncomfortable about and I don't like. I'm not a reader of books about the Holocaust. I won't- Not... keen to go to the cinema and see things. And I wouldn't- I've no desire to visit Belsen or Auschwitz. It isn't that I'm indifferent to them. I just ...don't want to be... personally accosted by it, as it were.

Do you want to put that part of your life behind you?

Not particularly, no. I mean, I don't feel involved... because I was too young. It was- I was aware of the general things from hearing Mum's conversations, those which I could understand and the discussions they'd have about family and what's happened and these sorts of things. But it never... it never seemed to be part of my life. And I know it might sound funny but I- I wasn't personally done by...I think I used to have dreams. When- I can remember going to the cinema when those films were shown about the... the release of ...of Belsen. And I ...it- I had all sorts of dreams and fantasies about that. But I think anybody might have been- had those invoked. I – I did read. I read that Primo Levi book, and that really... I didn't want to read anything else after that. Cause I thought that was so - so perfect an enunciation of, of the...events, as it were. So that was the last of my reading on the subject.

Have you been to Terezin at all?

[2:13:58.4]

No...no.

Or Theresienstadt?

No, not to any of them. No.

And your children?

No, they ...I'm sure they've read the book. You know. I presented it to them. Robert in particular likes to ask questions about family. He gets confused about things. And we all went to Berlin. Not together. We took Judith and her girls, on a trip to Berlin. Which were not all together successful cause where we stayed and one thing and another. I took off half an afternoon to try and find my grandparents' flat and it was a long, long walk and one thing and another and it turned out to be a modern flat. You know, it had obviously been... bombed during the war. Destroyed.

Was that terribly disappointing for you?

No...no, it wasn't. I'd have been a bit amazed if it was still there. And...I didn't tell you what had happened. I...my company that I was with, they had a conference. We regularly had conferences. And they had a conference in Berlin. And it was in 1989, fifty years after I'd left. And we went; I went there. And... this was before the fall of the wall. And they put on a - a thing for us whereby we went out with a guide, and we went through Checkpoint Charlie into the eastern... thing. And he showed various things around. And actually, at one stage we were outside one of the major buildings in East Berlin and he said, pointed out that it was the offices of the... whatever the... party name was...the East German Communist party head offices. He also ...someone must have told him that I was Jewish and was interested. So, he stopped off at that place - that very moving little place, I don't know if you know it in Berlin - where there was a, which was the site of the Jewish Welfare offices, where they collected all the elderly before shipping them off. And now there...it's like a, an old bomb site in London, except it's grass seeded. And there's just one grave there and it's the grave of Moses Mendelsohn. And there's a statue there. So, it's a very moving little place. So...I had - I had made the arrangements to stay on in Berlin after that - after the conference was over. And I made my way to the cemetery. And I found- No I think I didn't- I can't remember now whether I found my grandmother's grave or whether I failed, and found it on a subsequent

visit. But it's a – an incredibly moving place. Huge, huge place, all overgrown. And, 'cause I'd had to get a taxi and I had to get the taxi to wait there for me.

[2:17:57.3]

Was that the Jewish Cemetery?

The Jewish Cemetery in... Weidensee is it? [Weißensee] Something like that. Anyway...so that was all interesting. And I sort of wandered around and explored both and West Berlin I went round and found there was this, what they called the Polish market, where the Poles came with meagre things to try and sell. Anyway, when we- We got back to the hotel, this was before I'd done this trip. I came down to breakfast and there were some people running around very busy, with t-shirts on. And the t-shirts said "Support Leicester Market". And it was a campaign by the Leicester Chamber of Commerce, to promote Leicester and the thing they decided to use was the market. I don't know if you know Leicester, but in the centre there's a covered market – very big. And I went up to one of the guys and said, "What's all this about?" And he explained it to me. And I thought that was an amazing coincidence for me that two places in my life you know, had come together. And ...sometime later, someone wrote in our synagogue magazine, that they had been back to Germany on invitation. They were from some small town in the Rhineland I think, welcoming back Jews. And they'd been at a clearly very moving ceremony for themselves. This was someone who'd come here when they were perhaps in their early teens. And it was a lady and she'd written at the end of the article, "It made me realise where my home really was". Meaning this place in Germany. So, I wrote an article about my visit. And what - how it - the feelings it invoked. And I finished up saying, "I know where my home is, and it's Leicester".

[2:20:33.3]

You've answered the question that I was going to ask in terms of your self- your own feelings about your sense of identity, and where 'home' is for you.

Yes, well given the age, it's not that surprising, 'cause I have no memories of Berlin. You asked whether our children went. Robert took his family there separately and later. And- but I

don't think...the feelings about Berlin. I was comparatively indifferent. Myra didn't like it at all, the whole atmosphere and everything. We went again to Berlin, and met up with this cousin of mine from Switzerland who's ten days younger than me who was also born in Berlin and he found the house that they'd lived in. They- They'd been quite well off and we all went together to the cemetery, and we found his grandparents' grave with a tree growing out of it. They'd died in the big influenza epidemic after the First World War. So those were quite, you know, comparatively older graves. But...That was interesting going with them as well.

Was the graveyard desecrated?

No...no. It wasn't. But it had not been. You've never been there? Ever seen...?

No.

[2:22:19.5]

Well, A, it's vast. Absolutely vast. Secondly, it was not desecrated in any way, but nor was it looked after. And as a result, there were trees, some trees obviously planted there, and their seeds grew trees wherever they fell. So, you have this bizarre spectacle of trees growing out of graves. And things like that. My cousin's grandparents, that was the situation there. The one part of the cemetery that was properly looked after, were the First World War military graves. They had been...were in pristine condition. So...

Even though it was Jewish cemetery, and given the Nazi regime, and the damage?

Yes, the Nazis had obviously left it. And I never did discover their reasons for it. When I first went there, that was in, as I say, fifty years after I'd left, there was a booklet there which, and the East German government – 'cause nothing was done without government permission – had started getting volunteers in to try and clear it up. And there was talk about that. What I forgot to mention about that visit was that after we'd come back from our little tour of East Berlin and came back and they were handing out in the streets of Berlin flyers, and Honecker, it was announcing his resignation. So, while we were outside the building, he was being

given the push, by the East German government. We didn't realise and I kicked myself 'cause I never kept the flyer that I had.

Historical moment, yes.

I thought it was quite interesting, you know, the coincidence of those things. But, no, Berlin basically left me flat. You know, we went to the mus- we went to the new Jewish Museum. What was it? The architect? Liebeskind's – we saw it before it was filled up. It was more or less empty. It had just been built and we saw that.

[Myra speaks. Inaudible]

Yeah. The Holocaust Memorial in the square near the parliament building, we visited that with Judith... and the girls and that was quite interesting. Her oldest girl. They weren't very happy about the younger one coming in 'cause they've got an age limit. But the older girl, Jordan, sat down at a computer and looked up the name. I mean, I thought that was quite interesting, you know, a few years' difference makes a lot of difference.

Indeed. Speaking of difference in years, in retrospect now, you've spoken about your earlier life. How do you see yourself now? What is your self-perception? Do you still feel in your heart of hearts a refugee, or do you feel that you've really moved on?

[2:26:23.5]

No, I can't recall ever feeling a refugee. I suppose I was too young realise. And I think as a child you - you just accept where you are. I've told you I help out at the school....

That's the local school [inaud]?

Local school – yeah – primary school. And every year they have a, a Refugee Day or something. I mean this is a school with fifty percent or more English as a second language, so they've got a lot of children there. And I was once asked to- would I talk to the kids. And someone asked me what I felt. And I said I never felt a refugee because as a young child you

just accept where you are and what it is. It's the norm, isn't it? You don't think of yourself as different - except when I was in my *Lederhosen* pants. [Jana and John laugh] But otherwise I never thought of myself as different.

Would you have a – a particular message to pass on to anyone seeing this film in the future?

No...I don't think I'm the one for messages, no...

Something from your point of view?

No...Meaning of life...no.

And...in retrospect now, as a mature adult, do you think that life was harder for a lone woman than for a man coming to Britain in the same circumstances, or similar circumstances?

Well, I – I think it was... much harder than I gave Mum credit for until much later in life and realised what she'd had to put up with. I think if you're going to compare it, you've got to compare it with a man with responsibility for a child... because that was the issue around. She wasn't just looking after herself, she had a child - responsibility for a child. So, I should imagine there were difficulties, you know, problems and issues around to be overcome, but Mum...it was not easy at all. And...but, I never felt that. She never, you know, she didn't moan to me about it. And... I was aware occasionally you know there'd be some tensions, but these were evoked by...well, there was a whole break-up with her brother, which I haven't addressed at all, which perhaps I ought to. Mum had two brothers. The older one...committed suicide at the age of about twenty-one, in Berlin. And Mum had to cope with all of that cause her mother wasn't up to it.

Do you have any idea why he did that?

[2:29:48.5]

No. She never explained and I'm not sure she necessarily knew. But it was all very horrible and she had to deal with that. She had another brother, much younger. And again, her mother was not a very... able person. And ...this younger brother was basically brought up by this granny woman that we- that was the family...And by the way, after the war...Henry, Mum's brother, saw Granny in Berlin, and found out from her, that my father had been to see her just before he must have been taken away. So that was also...but I've jumped a lot. Mum ended up with the responsibility of bringing up her younger brother. And he was ...he was thrown out of school and all sorts of things. Not surprising cause, he had no - nobody bringing him up properly. But she was determined to get him out. And she got him out, by signing him up for a Zionist agricultural school in Germany. And he went on to that and from that, went on to Palestine. So, he got out and went to Palestine before the war, well before the war, obviously. And...Then, with the outbreak of war he joined the Palestine Brigade and he ended up as a Sergeant in the intelligence corps because he- because of his languages. Although he always regretted that he could never speak Russian, although he was born in St. Petersburg. And he followed the Eighth Army – was it the Eighth Army – through Italy and then into Austria, and ended up in Berlin, and then later in London. And there's photographs in the book of Mum and him in Hyde Park. I think I must have taken that photograph. So, he was there. And he, because he was in the British Army, had been in the British Army, he was entitled to... education, to training. And he went...Was lucky and was sent to Lausanne to the hotel college and it was the key premier place to learn the hotel business. And he was there, I think, two years. And subsequently, he came back to this country, and was- got jobs in various hotels. I had a lovey holiday with him in a private hotel, well all hotels were private I suppose. In a hotel in North Devon. And he gave me a lovely time, and I've got somewhere these photographs of me wearing my school cap. [laughs] An English boy would wear a school cap. But I had a lovely time. It was partly because Mum had had an operation and you know in those days you had an operation and it took forever and there was the convalescence and everything. So...that was the rationale for it all. Anyway, Henry, he later took to calling himself Hal, but Henry...married, or announced his engagement, to an English non-Jewish lady. And Mum was furious because the first thing she heard about this was an invitation to the wedding. And she knew that he'd taken her to see Aunt Bertha. And Mum's comments were, on hearing that the father of the bride was...a ship owner, Mum said, "Very likely a barge". [laughs] Anyway, they - they just could not, although Mum had basically

brought him up, because she'd brought him up, they were, they just rubbed each other the wrong way.

[2:34:49.5]

Despite the fact that your mother was not a strict observer of the faith?

Oh, no. It wasn't to do with that.

Ah.

This was...

Purely personal...?

This was purely personal, plus... [laughs] No, it's nothing to do with her not being Jewish, no. It was the fact that he had not had the courtesy, and she had not had the courtesy, to see his, the person who'd brought him up and who'd saved his life and... that. Anyway, they then went off to Canada. He had a job there. And she had a miscarriage, and the marriage broke up. And he led a wandering life thereafter in North America. But- And he didn't communicate with Mum and vice versa. But he did keep in touch with another cousin whose life is so extraordinary I don't have time to tell you about it. But she had ended up in California and he ended up in California. And eventually he was...he was a very charming man. Very charming man, and he had lots of artistic talent. And he ended up as a designer working for a big store like Selfridges, you know. He would design your house or your dining room, what have you, for you. That sort of thing, he did that. And later- That was in Canada, in Vancouver. Later on, he moved to California, and he worked, and he became a quite renowned ...ceramic artist. Produced pottery of all sorts. We have some bits and pieces round here. And...He was quite well known. If you Googled him now, you'd find pieces of his work.

Could you repeat his name?

[2:37:04.0]

Well, he was called Hal Fromhold. And... meanwhile he had ...teamed up with a partner, male partner, so...and they ran the business. The partner did the commercial side, and Hal did the artistic side. Mum had met him – met up with him once, on one of her ...cruises that stopped in that part of the world, and they'd met up for a few minutes possibly. I don't know. But... that was it. In 1970-'71? 1970 or '71, I get confused. I was sent to- by my company to their head offices which in those days were in New York. That was a lovely adventure for us all, and we were there for just under two years. And so, as we were in America, forgetting that it's a continent, I made contact. I contacted Hal, 'cause I'd kept out of things. And we... anyway. At the end of that stint in America, we ended up in Ponca City, Oklahoma which was the business headquarters of the company where it had started. And we'd had a month in Ponca City, and then we rented a car and headed west. And we had a wonderful holiday, all of us. And the object, partly, of heading west was to meet up with Hal. And we stayed with him and his partner. And we all had a wonderful time. And he was great with the kids and they loved him. And...so the relationship was restored...I'm not sure that Mum ever really ...felt that- that the hurt was mended but we were OK with Hal. And you know at the end of the day if there had been a conflict, my loyalty was obviously with my mother. But they came over here, and visited us. So that we had another holiday several years later. We went over and had a holiday with them in America and so it was all a lovely relationship. And - and then he – he suddenly died, comparatively young, of a heart attack. And that was that. The ...he was an extraordinary personality. Very powerful personality. And of course, what we noticed, living with them, was how like my mother he was. You know...we'd come, we'd have breakfast and he'd sit at the table, watching us and talking to us just like she did. So, you know those - I don't know whether they're inborn or they come - nature or nurture, but it was very strong. You could see that they were brother and sister, from that.

[2:41:02.5]

Did you feel that this lapse in the relationship between your mother and her brother went so deeply that it depressed her, got her down, over the years?

I don't think she...I don't think she thought in those terms but... it was sad. It was sad, looking at it now, more objectively that they both of them. He lacked understanding of what her problem...what... what her problems were in life, in terms of what she had to overcome. And you know he would glibly say, "Well why don't - you can speak all these languages - why don't you become an interpreter?" Well, you can't just become an interpreter when you're living in Leicester and...eking out a living as a machinist. It's not that easy. And she felt he never understood, and it was very hurtful what he did. So- But it wasn't something that she harped on about or...no.

Did she ever show signs of depression, or...?

Well, she was very depressed - yes - there were occasions, or more than occasions. And life got quite difficult because of her... I don't know what you'd call it – almost jealousy. I know it's a cliché, but nobody could be - was good enough to be her daughter-in-law – her son's wife. So ...it was not easy... managing that, and ...and there were periods of...quite a lot of difficulty and you know, we racked our brains about what to do. When we were in America- in fact, well, no- She came and visited us, as did Myra's mother. That all worked OK. But later, some years later, I was offered a job - which would have been a very attractive job in some respects - in America, with the company. By which time, both Mum and Myra's mother, was widowed and living on her own. We – I don't know whether we felt it truly, but the move would have been to Houston, which is not an easy place for... In New York, you can live OK. You can lead a life. Houston, unless you drive a car, you can't live a life there. And I think in reality, I used the mothers as an excuse not to accept the job. ...I realised that in some respects the job would not have been right for me. It would have been as personal assistant to a man I knew very well and was very fond of and that I had a great admiration for. But I knew that working for him would be an absolute nightmare, and he would have been checking everything I did, and that sort of thing. So, I knew it was not - not for me. But ...I suppose any elderly parent on their own...problems or issues arise, and how to balance their independence and ...and one's responsibilities. And I think we managed it quite well with Mum. Mum didn't. We had thought at one stage about bringing her down from Leicester. She had a very nice flat and lived on her own, and was independent. But clearly things were not going right. And- she'd been out to Israel to visit the Foners. Had been very obstinate about insisting on travelling when she had a cold. And you know when you have a

cold and you're in an aeroplane, it's not the best thing. And when she came back, she was really not well. She had to stay here several weeks. And it was obvious that there'd been quite a substantial deterioration in her mental faculties. And... So how to deal with that. Contemplated bringing her to London, finding her somewhere, somewhere for her to live. And that was an absolute disaster. And I made a big mistake; I went out with my daughter looking at places. We found things which we thought might be worthwhile. And took Mum to it, and she hated these things, and sort of blamed Judith partly. I don't know. It was not a good idea. Anyway, meanwhile Mum had been having an agency send us somebody to help her, and look after her. And one of the ladies she really, really became fond of. And that lady also became fond of her. So, we made an arrangement with her to come full time, and live – live with Mum and look after her. And her name was Jean. And Jean was just wonderful with her, and she loved Jean. So... that worked as well as these things can. I think it was- it was the right thing to do, and it worked very well.

[2:47:28.5]

And when did your mother die?

...I always guess - was it '83? Yeah. I've put it in the book. I always get it mixed up. When did Mum die?

Myra: She was eighty-eight, so you can work it from there. She was born in 1905, so...

Yeah, 1983 [he means 1993] it would have been, I think. So... that was...she, she was content. She was not...I don't know. You know, she didn't have her full faculties but she was content and happy - happy enough in those last two years. I think. That's my assessment.

Myra: The last six months

Or six months, yeah.

Myra: ...six months she had a stroke.

Are there questions that come to you now, that you wish you had asked her about the situations or people or places connected to your life and family?

Well, not about me. But there were- when I tried to tell her life story. I don't understand what the real rationale was for coming to London, in the 20s to work for Bertha and why that finished and she went back to Berlin. That's a whole mystery to me, and I kick myself for not asking. And the mystery about the distant cousins, the Landaus. Did she meet Landau and what was that all about? So those are fairly practical things. I think those, we did pretty well and of course I realise that the pictures that I got – we got – were her take on things. It's almost as if, could in-laws have been so awful as her in-laws were? I don't know. And you know, the whole take on my father, it was her perspective of it. She was at the sharp end of it but there might have been other elements. But I – those are the, the issues that I can think and kick myself for not asking about. And ...there is another mystery. Mum was very good at keeping up relationships. She was good. She kept her friends. But I never knew whether- I never knew that she kept any contact with the Greens, the people who'd enabled her, us, to get out. And I - I find that really – really surprising. It wasn't like Mum. She kept up relationships, kept in touch with people. So, had something happened... to cause that to break down? Cause she owed them everything, really. So, I never heard her mention them even. I've got the address in her book. I've got her old address book, but that was the address book, that was the address she must have put in – it was written in the black ink, that she used in Berlin. So, it wasn't a post- war, or start of war situation. So those are perhaps the mysteries it would have been nice to resolve.

[2:51:20.5]

Are there any other aspects that perhaps we've touched upon earlier in your interview that you would like to return to and expand on, or some fresh points that you would like to add?

I think we've covered things pretty well. Yes, I...the... Mum's knowledge about the Fromhold, her paternal side, are really quite limited. And I do know that the, the uncles...her uncles who'd been partners of her father in the business, they financed and looked after her mother while she was in Berlin. She never had to work or do anything. But I'd have liked to have found out more about that side of the family. And even my cousin, Paul, in Switzerland,

and they're his great-uncles as well, he doesn't know anything about them. So, and as one cousin on that side, who with her husband and daughter emigrated to America and we cannot find any trace of them. And normally you know you can find something. Paul thinks that the girl died comparatively young and that's why we can't find out anything. So, there are those mysteries, but they don't keep me awake at night. [laughs] That sort of thing. Because you look at the thing and you say, "Oh! It would have been nice to know that". And Mum has this one cousin, first cousin, who is still alive, living in California. And who had an amazing life, which would make a Hollywood film. Marvellous, but essentially, she was a teenager and escaped with her parents from ...Germany. In fact, her father had been Mum's- had given Mum away at her wedding, so she was very fond of him. And she went with her parents to France, which was not a good place to go. But they managed to get into the South of France and they managed to survive in Vichy France through all those years. The story is, that as he was a jeweller, he was able to take quite a lot of his assets with him, and they slowly sold those off to have new passports made and this sort of thing. Anyway, when there was an invasion on the...French Riviera, wasn't there- mainly American ...troops there. And she was involved in looking after her parents and through that, being involved with the Resistance, so late teen-age. She had a mad love affair with an American, and married him, only he turned out to be a deserter and already married. So, that was not a good arrangement. All this and lots more I haven't put in the book because she's still alive and it's not my story. But it is a fabulous story, and other things going on. And as a result of that there were three children. She had three children, all by him. And we're in touch with two of them. One who's become a Christian missionary. Her...her, her bigamous - husband was not Jewish, but luckily her children are. One's a Christian missionary in America, and the other lives in Australia, because they'd all gone to Australia at one stage because the successful brother had looked after them all. And we exchange emails and they came to Paris a few years ago and we met up with them via Eurostar. And, so there's that...family. And a few weeks ago, we went to eastern Holland. Zutphen. Where another cousin of my mother's, his son lives. And we'd never met his wife or children. And again, I like to keep in touch so we arranged to go and see them. We had a very nice, interesting short break, and met up with them and that was all very lovely. You know, there's something about family. So, that all went nicely. So, these were all different parts of the family, that are not unusual I suppose in the diaspora that we're scattered from California to Holland to Switzerland and Australia.

[2:57:14.5]

That link is there. That means a great deal to you.

Yes, it does. I feel that's all part of me, so that's why I've followed it up, and done all these family trees and this book and everything.

Well, thank you very much for sharing your life experiences with us.

It's my pleasure.

And agreeing to be interviewed for AJR. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

[2:57:14.5]

[End of interview]

[Photographs]

[2:58:14.7]

OK, well this is the book that I wrote about my mother and her family, as a record for the next generation. And the cover is my mother, her mother and father. Which would have been taken, I assume, in Riga in about 1906.

Well, this is the original photograph, with the sign of the studio...on it. You can see they used to take quite a few copies, and quite often make them into postcards to send around to all the family. But...this was not made into a postcard.

This is Mum and me in Leicester. I think it was taken at Jerome's. Mum used to take me at least once a year to the photographer, for a session. And I assume this must have been about - when I was about ten, certainly not at secondary school, otherwise I'd have worn my school tie. [laughs]

This is my parents' wedding in 1928. A Registrar wedding. Mum was very proud of that fox fur, and I think the ...embroidered bag, she had for many years. And ...it's actually cut out from a broader photograph which had on my grandfather - that is Arthur's - my father's father. And my mother's uncle was giving her away. Interestingly, there's no photograph of my paternal grandmother. She would, we don't have a photograph of her, and she wasn't in that family group taken at the wedding.

In Berlin, at the Registry Office. 1928.

The...I'm reminded by my - my father's very natty outfit that he was a tie salesman. So, this is my mother, in the middle, as a - I don't know about eight or nine-year-old - with her father. And Kima, her brother, in a sailor suit. I think almost every photo I have of him as a child is in a sailor suit. This would have been taken I think in St. Petersburg. About 1912. Something like that. Before the Revolution, before the start of the war.

[3:02:01.5]

Yeah, well this is Mum and her brother Henry, who by this stage, which I take it to be about 1945, was a Sergeant in the Intelligence Corps. He was involved in interrogating senior German officials. Possibly military people. And it's taken in London, in Hyde Park, I think. Mum and I came down to visit - visit him.

This is Mum. I'm putting it just after she left school, but before she came to London let's say about 1920...so. I don't know in what circumstances the photo was taken, or anything, but there she is, very smartly dressed enjoying having a photo taken, I think. It must have been in Berlin, or surroundings.

Well, this is again, Mum, Anuta, with her mother this time. And again, her brother not in a sailor suit. And I'm trying to think when this would have been taken because she's clearly older than in the other photograph in the studio that we saw. But... I've no idea where it was taken. And if it was after 1918...Hal would have been born by then. So, why was the mother just with two of her children, not all three? So, I don't know quite where or when it was

taken. But...it doesn't look as if it was taken in troubled times, does it? And Mum's got this fantastic bow in her hair. So, I don't know when.

This is Myra's and my wedding photograph in- on Christmas Eve, 1961. At the Finsbury Park Synagogue. And...note how slim we were [laughs]. But...it was a very selfish decision to get married on Christmas Eve, 'cause it was very difficult for so many of our friends and family to make it there. But it was a happy occasion and... we've never looked back.

[3:05:41.2]

[End of photographs]