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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

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<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Jacobi
<b>Forename:</b>	Rabbi Harry
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Male
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## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV173  
**NAME:** Rabbi Harry Jacobi  
**DATE:** 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2016  
**LOCATION:** London, UK  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

**[Part One]**

**[0:00:00]**

*Today is the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2016. We are conducting an interview with Rabbi Harry Jacobi. My name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.*

*Can you please tell me your name?*

It's Harry Martin Jacobi.

*And when were you born?*

19<sup>th</sup> October 1925.

*And where were you born?*

In Berlin.

*Rabbi Jacobi thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Project. Can you tell us a little bit about your family background?*

My... father and mother lived in Berlin, and unfortunately, I don't have many memories of my early childhood. But I do know that when I was five years old, my parents unfortunately divorced, and my mother did get a job as a secretary in my uncle's firm in Auerbach in Vogtland. So my mother ...got a flat in Auerbach, and I started in the *Primarschule* - primary school - in Auerbach, in...in 1930. Then in 1933 Hitler came to power, and there was certain discrimination of course. We were the only Jewish family in Auerbach, town of 25,000 people. The only Jewish pupil in school. And after Hitler, some of the teachers were Nazis, and some were more tolerant. Some made me sit at the back of the class of course you know and told the other children they should have anything to do with this Jewish boy. But there was one particular boy who was very friendly with me because the parents were anti-Nazi. And so... it was a close friendship, and I was lucky to have renewed the friendship in 1990 after the liberation of the Russians in- went to Auerbach. We went to Plauen, the nearest synagogue in Plauen was half an hour, by car, or bus, from Auerbach. And I received some religious instruction by a teacher, with a few other Jewish boys, who came once a week from Plauen to teach us. And my first impression of the Nazis was our flat was opposite a factory, and on a main street. And one day that the red flag, the Communist on top of the chimney. One day, the Swastika on top of the chimney and there was some street fighting between Communists and Nazis. But otherwise we- there was no discrimination. Except by 1935 or certainly 1936, we were not allowed to go to cinemas any more, you know. We were not allowed to go to swimming pool or any public place. Public places for entertainment there was discrimination. And... we were warned not to keep Jewish books, but we did. And we were warned, all the people were warned don't – you know, “you mustn't listen to foreign broadcasts”, but we did. But on the whole it was quite a happy childhood. Didn't suffer any personal anti-Semitism or, but discrimination of course, you know?

**[0:04:16]**

*In school?*

And while most Jewish population in large towns were always in fear you know, that they would be arrested. But the only Jewish family in Auerbach wasn't troubled. But my main change... was 19...36, when I was eleven years old. And when you're eleven years old just here you pass an examination to go to the secondary school. Now the *Realschule* [type of secondary school] in Auerbach was well known, a good school, and I passed the examination

to go as a pupil to the *Realschule*. The *Gauleiter* of Saxony was consulted and he said, “No, I don’t mind. But the *Bürgermeister* [mayor] of Auerbach, the Mayor of Auerbach was an ardent Nazi and said, “I’m not going to have a Jewish child in my *Realschule*.” So in 1937 my mother and I went back to Berlin, because she needed - wanted me to have a Jewish education. And in any case this firm she worked for, the factory, was threatened to be taken over by 1937. So we went back to Berlin. And I was lucky... that I was enrolled as a pupil at the Theodor-Herzl-Schule. Now I’m sure all AJR people know what Theodor-Herzl is, but it was the only Zionist day school in Germany, where Hebrew was taught every day. English was taught regularly. And the Theodor-Herzl was quite unique in Germany, because young Israeli Pioneers and Kibbutzim were on first- name terms. Uniquely we were on first-name terms with our teachers. And... we got a very good general education at the Theodor-Herzl-Schule in 1937. Until the Theodor-Herzl-Schule produced three very famous rabbis - I’m excluding me.

*OK. [half-laughing] Who are they? Who are they?*

That’s the Rabbi Jakob Petuchowski who became Professor in Cincinnati, the Rabbi Doctor Albert Friedlander became the Dean of the Leo Baeck College here, and did a lot of work of reconciliation following Leo Baeck in Germany. And Rabbi John Rayner who became the President of our Liberal Jewish movement here in England.

*They came all out from the Theodor-Herzl School?*

All from the – pupils from the Theodor-Herzl-Schule, yes.

*But they were a bit older than you. They were not in your class. They were a bit older than you?*

Albert Friedlander was a year younger.

Oh, he was a year younger.

John Rayner was a year older. I can’t remember Petuchowski; I think he was also a little older. But he became a very famous world-wide professor of Hebrew.

*But did you know them at the time?*

**[0:07:30]**

I don't so, because we were a year different pupils...

*Exactly.*

I don't think we did.

*Yeah. Just before we talk about Berlin, I'd like to go back a little bit, because you were born in Berlin... Can you tell us a little bit about your father, how your parents met? What their sort of circumstance was when they got married?*

Unfortunately I never asked, I never found out. But, but my father did re-marry a non-Jewish woman aft- during the war I think. And I asked my uncle in Amsterdam, "Was this the woman who caused the divorce?" Cause he said, "No, it wasn't her." So I did make contact with her after the war. And she lived in a spa town called Bad Homburg. She came- I visited her there with my wife. She came and spent a week with us here in London. And she said, "As you're the only... boy, I'm leaving all the valuables in my will." But she had no other children, but a nephew. And the nephew took everything from his mother and never let us have anything after the war. So that was a little bit of a shock for me.

*But when – so when did your father re-marry?*

I'm not sure when- exactly when. Sometime in the late Nazi period you know? Because many Jewish people did marry...

*Yes.*

Re-married non-Jews hoping it would save their lives, you know?

*Yes. And sometimes it did. But not in the case of...*

Not in this case.

*Of your father... So do you have any...actually, until five, do you remember? Do you have memories of your father? Or were you in touch with him when you were with your mother?*

Oh yes, I have very fond memories of my father yes. Because– Because firstly his parents lived in Luckenwalde, and they had a gents' outfitter shop. So I frequently visited with my father and see- saw my grandparents in Luckenwalde and all the time they'd been living in Auerbach, you know? And also some time from Berlin. But I believe they passed away. They were much older. And I believe they passed away already in 37 or 38. I should have been able to find out much more about them. I have some information about them. It's a wonderful story. That – that a man - a vicar - pastor, but an advert in the AJR, and AJR would be very interested in this story, because they were somehow responsible for having so-called *Suchanzeigen*. You know?

Yes.

So he said, "I'm a vicar in Auerbach, and I'd like to do some research in the Jewish people who lived in Auerbach. Anybody who has any connection with Auerbach, get in touch with me." So I told him about my grandparents. He replied. And he published a book, which I've got here, of all the 200 people in Auerbach, who lived there, what happened to them. So I could look up in the book, if we have time, if you're interested, exactly what happened to my grandparents, but also to my great-grandparents, through his research.

**[0:11:17]**

*But these are your mother's parents in Auerbach?*

My father's.

*Your father's parents?*

Yeah.

*So, your mother – I'm confused now. So your mother, she moved from Berlin to Auerbach?*

No. Did I mention Auerbach? That was a terrible mistake. It should have been Luckenwalde.

*Luckenwalde. OK.*

I mentioned in my- yes.

*OK. So the Mayor is of Luckenwalde... Who contacted you? The Mayor from Luckenwalde?*

Not the Mayor, the pastor. The vicar.

*The pastor from Luckenwalde?*

Yeah.

*Right. I understand. So- And just to come back to Auerbach. Why did your mother then move to Auerbach? Were her parents in Auerbach, or just the factory?*

No, my mother's parents were in Berlin.

*They stayed in Berlin?*

They stayed in Berlin. My grandfather was already much, much older. Had retired in Berlin. And we became very, very good friends with this Pastor Riemer [Pfarrer Detlev Riemer] who was an honoured guest at my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration last October.

*That's the pastor from Luckenwalde?*

From Luckenwalde, yes. So, I took my son also to Luckenwalde; he invited me to see the place. But it would be quite of some historic interest too, because the building where my grandparents in Luckenwalde had a shop, the building stood. I wanted to take a photo. And



the pastor said, "I wouldn't take a photo, because many Jews now go back now, take photos, and demand restitution of their property." You know? And they didn't like it.

*They got worried.*

They didn't- So, I never asked for restitution. I'm not sure even if this ...shop dwelling was their own or on a meter, you know. I never knew.

**[0:13:13]**

*How far was Auerbach from Luckenwalde? How far was it?[184 km]*

Oh, Auerbach in Vogtland is- it's on the Czech border.

*Yes?*

Half an hour from the Czech border. Auerbach is a small town. Luckenwalde is an industrial town. And Luckenwalde became very famous for making hats. The biggest hats factory in Germany was owned by a Jew. And this man - pastor Riemer - in his research, found out all about the occupation of the Jews there, when they were deported, what happened to them. And frequently invited Auerbach- Luckenwalde asked people to come back there to show them around.

*Yeah. So your father was born in Luckenwalde and moved to Berlin? Your father?*

Yes. Yes.

*And how old was he when he moved to Berlin?*

I'm not sure when. I'm not even sure. I should have found out exactly when my parents got married in Berlin.

*Yeah. And when you- your first five years, do you know, where did they live in Berlin?*

*Where- Where did they live?*

In Spandau.

*In Spandau. And your father remained in Berlin?*

Yes. He, he continued his, his work as a representative – *Handlungsreisender* for quite a number of years, until more and more of the firms he represented were not allowed to employ Jews anymore. So he really lost his job. And he must have relied very much on the non-Jewish woman he married... to keep going somehow. You know, because he didn't get a *Rente* – didn't get a pension. You know. Discrimination. It was terrible!

*What firms did he represent? You said that was his profession...*

I believe household goods.

*Household goods.*

Soaps...washing powder, brooms...

*So he travelled?*

He travelled around a bit. Yes.

*And you said you can't remember much about your first five years. What are your first memories, of growing up, whether in Berlin or in Auerbach?*

**[0:15:35]**

Well, the very close relationship with my mother and with my grandparents, even then. Because I rarely saw my father while I was in Auerbach - rarely. But I saw my father most often in Berlin. I think he took me out once a month always, you know, in Berlin. And we became quite close. And incidentally, one of my memories is he used to read the English 'Times'. He learned, wanted to learn English. He was quite educated and really wasted as a... job. He could have easily been a professional.

*And so he took you out. And what about Auerbach? Apart from you said you went to school...  
What else- What else do you remember?*

Well Auerbach was a very nice...small, cultural town. It had a theatre, and cinemas, you know. And a ski resort. For a little while, I learned to ski in the Erzgebirge. Erzgebirge is a range of mountains on the border between Germany and Czechoslovakia. It's not so well-known, but it's good skiing there. Yes.

*Yeah...*

And I remember vividly having to go to, to another small town for- where I said a rabbi or teacher came from Plauen. I remember going to attend High Holyday services in Plauen always. And we made frequent travels to Berlin, you know, to be there with the grandparents always.

*Yes. And were there other- You said you were the only Jewish boy in school. Were there other Jewish families in Auerbach?*

No.

*No. You were the only one.*

The only family was one- two other Jewish men who were employed in the same factory. But they weren't married.

*What was the name of the factory?*

...Zernick. Z E R N I C K.

*Zernick?*

Zernick had a big factory in - in the Jewish quarter of Berlin. And this was a Branche...a...a-  
What do you call it in English?

*A branch.*

A branch of it, in Auerbach. And my uncle, who in 1934 married the daughter of the owner of Zernick. And employed my mother. And he was going to open a factory in Auerbach, a branch. "You come and manage it." And two other Jewish men from Berlin too, who came and worked in this factory. It must have had well above 100 employees. It was quite a big factory, I remember.

It was a big factory.

*And did you and your mother and yourself stay with your uncle, or did you live separately, or...?*

We had a flat in Auerbach. We had a flat.

*You had a flat.*

And my uncle visited very often to see the premises how it was doing and stayed with us one night. And ...and I had quite a - quite a happy youth, apart from the discrimination in school later on.

*Yes, but you said you had friends in school.*

Only one particular friend you know, because...yes.

**[0:19:27]**

*And did you feel, yourself, the atmosphere changing or did it...?*

Oh very much so. Yes.

*And when was that? When...?*

Well... '35, '36, it became - especially after the so-called Nuremberg Laws. But we weren't actually personally attacked, you know? We weren't attacked either verbally or physically – never - because hardly anybody recognised us as Jews, you know?

*Yeah.*

And I was lucky in a way, because according to the Aryan principles you should have blond hair and blue eyes. I didn't look at all Jewish.

*Because it's an interesting situation to be in such a let's say rural...*

Rural, yes.

*You know, I guess it was a town, but it was different from being in a big city.*

I remember from this very nice, expensive flat... We were told we must leave. Because from there, we got a very tiny flat with an outside toilet, in the middle of town. Which was quite, quite small and primitive compared to the flat we had earlier on, on the main road.

*But you don't know why you had to move, or...?*

No. Probably, my mother was told... to leave. It could not have been a financial reason, I'm sure. Because my uncle was well off, you know, and paid for the flat. My mother earned quite a lot of good money looking after the factory.

*Your uncle took care of you?*

Yes, must have been.

*Yes. And was it a shock to you that you weren't allowed to go to the Realschule?*

Yes... Yes.

*You wanted to go?*

Well, I wanted- Heard it was a very, very good school. And that was my first evidence of discrimination.

*Yeah. And then how long was it from then until you moved to Berlin?*

Very soon afterwards... I was in the Theodor-Herzl-Schule only about eighteen months I think, until Kristallnacht.

**[0:22:02]**

*And what was it like for you to change from a completely, let's say, non-Jewish environment to suddenly come to Berlin and into a Jewish school - in that particular time?*

I already had some Jewish knowledge from my grandfather, who practised- went to synagogue regularly in Berlin. Who...who...holidays, you know, fasted on the holidays. I remember when he conducted a Seder in Berlin, we went sometimes to the Seder. He...he did even wear a so-called *kittel*, a white *kittel*, which traditional Jews do. So he conducted quite a traditional Seder you know. And so, I went to synagogue with him, very often.

*Which synagogue did you go to?*

In Pestalozzistraße, in Berlin. Do you know?

*Yeah. Can you describe that experience, and maybe the synagogue as well? What do you remember?*

Pestalozzistraße was regarded as a conservative synagogue in Berlin because it had a mixed choir, beautiful choir. And I always sat in the second row with my grandfather. And the more Hebrew I learned, the more I was able to follow the service, you know? And Yom Kippur the children were always sent out for the *Seelenfeier* it's called, you know? Memorial prayers. And it was a good service. The Pestalozzistraße synagogue was in a courtyard. And because it was roun- surrounded by flats, the synagogue was not burned out. Otherwise the flats would have also caught - been destroyed. So the interior was completely demolished, but the

synagogue was saved, and very soon restored after the war. So when I... went back to Berlin with the British Army, I attended a service in - in a small room, you know, soon after the war. And a boy was Bar Mitzvah and he was told, "Your parents have died; it's up to you to continue Judaism." It was a very moving ceremony by a young rabbi who'd come from America, to Pestalozzistraße.

*Yeah. So you said – So your grandfather was quite religious? He...?*

Not strictly orthodox.

*No...*

Of course, the Germans, Liberals were not strictly about kashrut, you know? And I don't think we ever separated *milchig* and *fleischig*.

*Yes. They were modern.*

More modern. Yes.

*And what was his- you didn't tell us. What did he do? What was his profession - your grandfather, in Berlin?*

Well, my grandfather was already very old. Late seventies, must have been. But he was a representative of a man who owned a factory in...[interruption]

*We'll talk about your grandfather.*

Yes. Now, in Auerbach there was a big factory called Sachsenröder. And part of this factory was let to Zernick, where my uncle, you know, founded this branch. The Sachsenröder had a lot of property in Berlin. And he made my grandfather responsible for looking after these properties. The people came to him; it was called a *Verwalter*. I can't remember the English title, but you know?

*Grundstückverwalter. ... Grundstückverwalter*

*Grundstückverwalter.* You've got that right. You got an English equivalent you call it?

*Property manager.*

Property manager. Yes.

*Sounds better in German than the English. [laughs]*

You're right. My grandfather was Grundstück- which he could do from this flat, you know? People came to him and he manged. So he earned a bit of money still, that way. My grandmother was a typical Jewish mother, who spent most or all the time in the kitchen, wonderful kitchen, and produced wonderful meals. A wonderful hostess.

**[0:27:00]**

*Where was the flat? Where did they live?*

In Kantstrasse 59, on the third floor. Now it was a large flat, but one small bedroom I had to share with my mother. And the lounge was occupied by another daughter, the sister of my mother, who had palsy as a child. And could not walk properly. But she also went to work, you know? But she - she was physically handicapped. And she stayed in the lounge as well in the same flat. So we were really five of us in that flat.

*And which area of Berlin was that?*

Kantstrasse, Charlottenburg.

*Charlottenburg.*

Where we made the Stolpersteine.

*Yeah.*



Now memories of my grandfather, is that he was already in his early eighties then, when I stayed with him. But he still went three flights of stairs; he did all the shopping. And was very active. And I played lots of games with him, you know? And he had a far greater influence on me than my own father, because we were very close, living together, and a great influence on me.

*Yeah. In which way? What games? What did you do with him?*

Well played card games. Mainly "Sechshundsechzig". That's a famous card game in Germany, you know? And then when my- another uncle came along. Another story. They played 'Skat', the German men always played the German game called 'Skat', which I never learned, but it was very, very traditional. Now the other man who came is as follows. My mother had a sister... Katy. And Katy was a spinster until she was already, I think, in her fifties. And she married a widower. And this widower had a furniture shop in Ostberlin. But it was a very happy relationship. And my grandfather and this son-in-law got on very, very well together. Played 'Skat' together. And so they had- He had one son from his first marriage. His name was Leo. And the son was able to go to Shanghai after Kristallnacht. This particular couple were also deported. I found out through the search bureau in Berlin who arrange *Stolpersteine*. They found out where they used to live, where they were deported. And I'm now waiting to hear from them to lay *Stolpersteine* in her memory- in their memory, in East Berlin.

*But the son, his first son, survived?*

Survived He went from Shanghai to America, but I lost contact unfortunately. Now the other... sad story for me is really the following. My mother had a school friend. And I used to call her 'the aunt'. And she was very friendly with my mother. Came regularly to our place, you know. They were very close. And... when I went back to Holland to my family in British Army uniform, I said- I asked about this aunt. So my uncle said, "I've got her address. If you have an opportunity to go - go to Berlin, see her." Because as far as I know, my mother left, before she was deported, left all her *Pelzmäntel* [*fur coats*], and jewellery – all her valuable possessions - with this aunt.

*She was not Jewish?*

Not Jewish.

*What was her name?*

...Oh, I wish I could recall it now.

*It doesn't matter.*

I used to call her by her name. Tante [aunt]...

*Don't worry about it. Don't worry. It might come back later.*

**[0:31:54]**

It could come back later. But this Tante you know, was in Berlin. And I managed to contact her at the same address my uncle gave me. So this particular aunt never expected to see me again. Suddenly saw me in a British Army uniform. I took real coffee with me then in 1947, when this was one of the worst winters ever. And so her in her flat. And- And it was part, partly destroyed by the bombs but it was still, she lived in it. And she had coffee and cake for me you know? So I asked her, "Nice to see you again. What about all the valuable things that my mother is supposed to left with you?" She said, "We Germans also suffered hardship, you know? I was hard up and I had to sell everything to survive." And that was one of the deepest shocks and disappointments in my life. So I left quickly, and never wanted to see her again. But obviously this – this aunt never expected to see me again. So that's, that turned me, the whole war... And that was one reason also why I began to hate the Germans, immediately after the war. In the war-time I said, "You know, war finished but there's no reason to have any hatred because you can't blame future generations." You know? And the Jewish teaching is, you shouldn't hate. But then when I went back to Germany, to Berlin after the war, and other places too. Cologne, I also visited. And we were stationed in Osnabrück. Not one German ever expressed any remorse or regret. They all made what in German is called *faule Ausreden*. You know? Same excuses. "We couldn't help it." "We were obeying orders." "We didn't know." Not one person ever expressed any regret or remorse to me. So for a long time afterwards, I really began to hate the Germans for this attitude, afterwards.

*Yeah. ...We'll come back to this topic. Now let's just go back to the late 30s, when you're in Berlin, with your grandparents and your mother. And you went to Theodor Herzl school. What was there— I mean, what was the atmosphere like? Did people, I mean in your class, were people leaving? Did people talk about emigration? What do you remember?*

Oh, very much. We're already in '37, when we went back to Berlin from Auerbach, there was strict discrimination. And we were not allowed to listen to foreign radio, of course. We were not allowed after the books were burned, you know, famous... the books by Jewish authors. And we hid some Jewish books of course. And we were really in fear of our lives...

*Yeah.*

...Because lots of people were – were *Razzia*, we used to call it. Raided and people were sent to concentration camps. I saw Hitler only once. We were on the balcony of our flat, and Hitler drove to the *Olympische Spiele* in 1936. Now that was a revelation to me. Not the games, but reaction – propaganda reaction – of the Germans. The early Hitler regime had signs all over: “Don't buy anything from the Jews”. You know? The *Völkischer Beobachter*, the German paper, had anti-Jewish... papers displayed everywhere. Jews discriminated against, you know, “Don't go into cinemas, don't go into theatres”, “Don't go into swimming pools”. Excluded from everything. And we lived in fear of our lives. I also heard stories, it's hard to believe, how many hear Hitler speeches and how the young people were indoctrinated by the love of Hitler. They worshipped Hitler like a god. Honoured Hitler more than their own parents. And one heard stories of any parents criticised Hitler, well their own Hitler Youth sent their own parents to concentration camps. So that was the indoctrination. And when I saw Hitler there, you know, the streets were lined with jubilation for the Führer going to the Olympic Games. It was shocking for us to see how he was worshipped like a god. So the world came to Berlin, to the Olympic Games and saw ‘Everything is wonderful! No discrimination. No sign of discrimination. Hitler is wonderful.’ As I grew older I began to understand. Because Hitler did save Germany and made, Hitler- made Germany great. There was great discrimination against Germany. Repatriation and compensation for the First World War, there was great unemployment. Hitler made sure there was full employment. Started the Volkswagen, motorways...the *Winterhilfe*, helping every city for the poor people. So from the point of view of ordinary Germans, I can understand why they loved Hitler.

Cause he did a lot of good. And they didn't care about concentration camps or the persecution of the Communists, or discrimination about homosexuals. The average German had a lot to be grateful for in worshipping Hitler. Until he started the war you know and then went down to ruin.

**[0:38:48]**

*How did you feel? Do you remember how you felt when you saw Hitler? When you watched, were you in a window? Where did you see it? How did you...?*

From the balcony.

*From the balcony, yeah. What did you feel?*

Horrified... Horrified to see this man being – being worshipped.

*Yes. So you understood the danger as an eleven year old? You understood?*

Yes. I understood what he was like because he was- He made no...no pretence. And he said it all in 'Mein Kampf', you know, he hated the Jews.

*What about Kristallnacht? Were you in Berlin?*

Yes. Kristallnacht had a great im- im- impact - impression on me as well.

*Please tell us about it.*

Because, I had no idea the actual night. But in the morning I woke up, ready to go to walk to the Theodor- Herzl- Schule. And at the bottom of our...our flats were shops in Kantstraße. One particular shop was a dairy shop. The elderly couple were very, very friendly. And even in the darkest days of the beginning of the war, they supplied my grandparents always with milk and butter and cheese and so on. I had joyfully when going back - through the British Army going back - to the same couple after the war and it was wonderful. How they- How they were good. On the other hand, the next shop was a furrier. An elderly Jewish couple

selling furs. Furs of course as you know were very fashionable in Berlin and in the world then. Well I came out of my flat and saw all this glass smashed. All the furs, the...furs had been robbed by the Germans, the Nazis, taken out of their shop! And later on in the day, when I got home from school I was told that elderly couple committed suicide. We knew them quite well. And so as a- as a thirteen year old boy, that was quite a shock. Went to the school... Now the Theodor-Herzl-Schule was built in the annexe or after the German *Rundfunkgebäude*, the German Radio. So the Nazis could not burn it down because it was property of the- of the radio station. But- So it wasn't completely burned down, but everything inside was taken out and burned. So when we came to school we were told, "Go home! The school is closed." And that's the last I saw of Theodor- Herzl- Schule. And...and- And I got a book here, which was published after the war called '*Aufstieg und Niedergang*'; it means 'rise and going down again'.

*Decline.*

Yes, but by one of the teachers of the Theodor- Herzl- Schule, which gives the history of the school. The wonderful Principal of the school, you know, unfortunately he died during the war.

*Was it the end of the school, the Kristallnacht?*

It had to finish. The school had to finish.

*On Kristallnacht? They never re-opened again?*

So from the end of '38, until I left in February '39, I had no education. I didn't go to any other school.

*What did you do in that time?*

Of course in October '38 was- I was due to celebrate my Bar Mitzvah. And we really were Reform, my parents- Well, my mother didn't practice very much. So we had it in the Friedenstempel [Markgraf-Albrecht-Straße in Berlin-Halensee, burnt down in November 1938] which was the so-called more conservative synagogue. Friedenstempel was a large

congregation. If you like I've got a book here called '*Die Synagogen in Berlin*'. Where you can take a photo of the synagogue. And conservative synagogues, just as today, yours too, men in the middle, women sit on the side. And my grandfather was called up to the Torah and said "It was not as bad as I thought, the service." He enjoyed being called up. And my mother- my father didn't come, you know. My mother was in tears, and ...I couldn't understand why she was crying. Why it was so emotional for her, to see her only son, you know, Bar Mitzvah. Well we couldn't celebrate Bar Mitzvah outside the flat; we just invited a few friends for – for tea, I think. Or German *Kaffeeklatsch*. I got sixty-four Marks as present, for my Bar Mitzvah, which had to be given up soon afterwards because the German population, as you probably heard from others as well, had to pay two million Marks compensation for all the damage done to synagogues and shops. And I heard just afterwards my father was sent to Sachsenhausen camp. He returned a few weeks later and because of his torture there, he must have aged twenty years. He was early in his fifties. And when I saw him again afterwards, you know...

**[0:44:40]**

*Sorry I missed that. Who was sent to Sachsenhausen?*

My father.

*He was sent to Sachsenhausen.*

Yeah, I heard he was sent to Sachsenhausen.

*When was he arrested?*

He came back; he survived. But he aged because he was tortured there. Suffered a great deal there. So that was my Bar Mitzvah experience...

*Sorry, just to interrupt. When was your Bar Mitzvah? What was the date?*

22<sup>nd</sup> of October, 1939.

1938?

Pardon?

1938?

Yes.

*Your Bar Mitzvah?*

Yes. Now the '*AJR Journal*' last month published a tribute to Rabbi van der Zyl. Did you read the '*AJR Journal*'?

*Yeah.*

Where I mentioned how van der Zyl officiated at my Bar Mitzvah in Berlin. Must have been very brave to say, "We now have discrimination in general benches which says, '*Nur für Juden*' [Only for Jews] He said, "Don't be ashamed to sit on these benches. The Germans should be ashamed."

*He said that in your ...?*

In my Bar Mitzvah, and of course he was arrested afterwards, because most German Jewish synagogues after, around that time, you know, had German spies there.

*Do you remember the speech? Do you remember the speech he gave?*

That part I remember very well.

*What else did he say?*

I can't remember much else of the speech. Of course he said, you know, "Be courage" and "Better times will come. Be optimistic and encouraging." There was another one which was—two at the same time, you know? That is why, if a Shabbat Bereshit at the beginning, some

other boy read the beginning; I read Chapter Four. And so interesting a sign of the times is that Chapter Four in Hebrew starts... [recites beginning of Chapter Four in Hebrew] 'Adam knew his wife Eve'. So I asked my mother, or grandparents, "What does it mean?" He said, "When you grow up, you'll understand."

*Yeah.*

[laughing] So we knew nothing about sex at that time.

*No. But your parasha was Bereshit?*

*Yeah.*

*Yeah. But as you said, you couldn't celebrate? It wasn't allowed to congregate?*

*No.*

*At that time, you couldn't.*

No. Well as I mentioned before, immediately after Kristallnacht, when I met my father again, and he met my mother again, and he said, "Let's emigrate together" and my mother refused.

*So what happened, he came back from Sachsenhausen?*

*Yes, and [inaudible].*

*And he then said to your mother, to emigrate-*

*Yes.*

*But was he married at the time?*

*My mother wasn't married.*



*No, but your father.*

He wasn't married, no. He married early during the war, I think, or later. I'm not sure.

*He suggested to emigrate, and your mother...*

**[0:48:04]**

What was of course of impression to us, that the long queues at all the embassies. We knew very well. Every country had a quota after the Èvian Conference [July 1938 thirty-two nations convened to discuss the questions of Jewish refugees] you know where nations together decided they wouldn't let in any Jews. After Kristallnacht we knew the only country that would allow Jews to go without restrictions or every day with a guarantee: Shanghai. And there were long queues outside the American Embassy. Particularly every country had restrictions and could have been saved but were not.

*And your mother, what— She didn't want to emigrate with your father. What was her point of view?*

I don't know why.

*And was leaving discussed at that time with your grandparents in the house? Was it- do you remember any discussions?*

Oh, yes. We— we lived in fear of course. Lived in fear. And with the German sense of humour, there were quite a few anti-Nazi jokes always going around...

*Tell us one. Do you remember one?*

Can't remember much at all, but there were quite a few already, you know, and they kept our spirits up.

*Your grandparents were still around? You were still with your grandparents in the flat?*

Yes. I can tell you the story of my grandparents separately, or now?

*Just before you tell us, because there was something you said, and then we didn't finish it. You said you remembered your grandmother's cooking. That she was a very good cook. What dishes? What do you remember?*

Well... particularly Israelis today eat a lot of ...what do you call the fish...

*Carp? No.*

Carp.

*Carp.*

Yes, so I remember very well, very often I remember the Carp, especially for *yomtev* [religious holiday].

*Yeah.*

We. And ...and Friday night was always you know, always lokshen soup in particular. And always we had some hot soups always. And... cold soups. I remember those very well. And we, we - despite restrictions - we didn't suffer.

*No. And you had Friday nights? Every Friday night?*

Friday night was a special meal always. That's right. But we didn't do anything like Havdalah. That, very- very few Jews practiced that.

**[0:50:51]**

*Yeah. Yeah. So tell us about the grandparents now. Why not now.*

Oh yes, well, the grandparents were able... Now. Then I must go to my uncle, uncle Lutz Jacobi. Uncle Lutz Jacobi, who had this branch in...in Auerbach, the factory closed as I

mentioned in 1937, in Auerbach. But by that time he had already, in '36, arranged to form his own branch, his own- in Amsterdam. He married, and that's 1934. And they had one daughter. So the three of them emigrated to Amsterdam the year after. And my uncle did quite well. He started a small factory in Amsterdam called 'L-Ja' – L. Jacobi. And got, got in, able to guarantee the emigration of my grandparents in January 1939, from Berlin to Amsterdam. In February, he again was successful in getting permission from the Dutch government to let me come on Kindertransport from Berlin to Holland. My uncle had a very small flat in Amsterdam. And managed to accommodate his parents. But there wasn't really room for me as well. So when we came to Holland we were first in a sort of...sort of... it was 'quarantine' I think they called it in Rotterdam. My uncle came to see me there and said "We don't know what's going to happen to you, but you're fourteen years old, and you've got to decide" – no, I said I was just over thirteen – "you've got to decide what you want to do." I couldn't decide. You know, I had only six years of education. Nothing yet. So then the refugee comm-, Dutch government decided to send us to Gouda where the famous cheese comes from, in the old orphanage. The conditions in Gouda were very primitive. And we all, not all, but most of them unfortunately caught diphtheria. We could have died but they gave us injections and they saved us, but we couldn't go– stay in Gouda because we would have died. Meanwhile the Amsterdam refugee committee were able to find accommodation for us in the old orphanage in the Kalverstraat the main shopping street in Amsterdam. And the orphanage was not, no longer needed as an orphanage, so we went to Amsterdam. And then my uncle, together with this, the leadership from the refugee committee, enrolled me as a pupil in the ORT *Vakschool* [trade school], as it was called. The ORT schools, you know, is this organisation for rehabilitation and training. And they teach Jewish kids... some trade. And also general education.

*Yeah.*

**[0:54:45]**

So in...in summer of ... '39, I was enrolled in the ORT school there. And among many trades offered in ORT, was *banketbakker*, which is...

*Baker...*

Learn how to back as a confectionery baker. So I went to the ORT school every morning at eight o'clock. And a very good education but had to stop unfortunately, when Hitler suddenly invaded. Now the memories of, when I'm much older now I can remember quite well. First we [inaudible] of an indoor swimming pool, where we were taken once a week to learn to swim. Once a week we went to this famous Esnoga, the Spanish Portuguese Synagogue Saturday mornings. Most of the food in, in the orphanage was very primitive. We didn't get much to eat... and we didn't get much clothing, but one...once I was given the opportunity to get a new suit, suit with knickerbockers, you know, very famous then. And I was playing football around the grounds of the orphanage, and fell down and tore, the my new knickerbockers to shreds. So... so that was good and bad news.

*But your grandparents were also in Amsterdam?*

They stayed with my uncle, so fortunately...

*And your mother, what happened to your mother? Why...why...?*

She was still in Berlin.

*Yeah. She couldn't... go out or didn't want to come or what do you know?*

-----

No.no.

Oh, she would have loved to have come but... OK going to my mother, you know, in a number of... in summer of 1939, it was possible for Jewish people to come to Britain as a- to work in households as domestics. And I was told if a British family would give £50 in guarantee then the British government would let them come in. My mother had found a family here, in... employment, £50 ready to come here, and again, as I mentioned, when I spoke to parliament recently, the situation then and now is the same. No sense of urgency, you know? They took their time. It doesn't matter They didn't care. So my mother...If a few weeks later war had broken out my mother could easily have been saved. So that is why I feel, I feel understandably very ambivalent towards Britain. They saved me! But hey could have saved my parents – even my grandparents easily from Holland.

*But you found out that your mother had already, she the guarantor?*

**[0:58:07]**

Because my mother did, was able to send messages. Regular contact with my uncle. And Red Cross letters, once broken out, we got, we got Red Cross letters, twenty-five words from Berlin. So my grandparents were not very happy. But at least they escaped the Nazis. Because their daughter-in-law didn't like my grandmother interfering too much in the kitchen – understandably, you know. She had nothing to do and she wanted to cook again. It wasn't a very good relationship.

*Rabbi Jacobi, I'm aware of the time. I think we should take a break now.*

One o'clock – we should have been...

**0:59:00**

*We're continuing the interview now. And we were already talking about Holland but I'd like to go back a little bit to Berlin. And to the time just before you were leaving. When did you hear first that you were supposed to go on the Kindertransport?*

Oh, must have been a very short notice. Must have been only - maybe a couple of weeks beforehand, because it was done in a very quick... The decision was made very quickly from my uncle and from the Dutch government. So I only knew just very briefly before we left.

*And can you, do remember the leaving and your mother?*

Well I only took very... necessary things, you know, with me. And the German children, German allow, just... ten Marks to take out. And a little bit refreshments for the journey. We had... All I knew I was going to Holland but I had no idea where we were going. And the leaving from my mother was traumatic because she cried a lot of course. She knew probably we may not see each other again. Bahnhof Zoo, you know in Berlin. We said good-bye. The journey was really uneventful. And... we were surprised when we landed in a, in a camp just at the harbour of... Rotterdam. Rotterdam harbour. And it felt like a camp because there were, there were *Stacheldraht* [barbed wire] there, you know, and we saw ships go by and... it was

very, a great deal of uncertainty. We didn't get much to eat and, and we were there, I think, at least two weeks.

*And what was the date please? When did you get that train from Berlin?*

I can't, don't know the exact date. In February 1939 it was... Yes, yes. Then I mentioned that my uncle came to see me and they asked about what they do there. And then we went to Gouda. I mentioned that as well.

**[1:01:32]**

*Yes, I just want to ask you so at that time...*

*Obviously did you go to Holland because your uncle arranged it. Because at that time there were also Kindertransports going to England?*

I believe so, yes. But my uncle arranged for me to...

*So it was specifically to go to Holland. To join them.*

Now there's another part of the story that...that my mother had a younger sister. Called, called Tante Hanni - Hanni. She had a son three months younger than me. He was called Werner. And the father of Werner or husband of Hanni died from TB [tuberculosis] in the early 30s in Berlin, so she was a widow. So Werner and I were a close relationship like two brothers. And... my uncle must have made the decision do I rescue me or were to rescue Werner, from Germany. He only had the ability to save one, you know? But this Tante Hanni was persuaded by a Jewish man to go to New York with her, to rescue her. But she was told you can't take Werner as well. So tragic story is that the man as soon as they landed in New York, abandoned her. She was left alone in New York. And because she was an illegal immigrant in America, she never left America. I only found that out long after the war why she could never come because corresponded with me but why she could never come and visit, outside America. And she was a bit -disappointed is an understatement. She was of course... bitter, really. That her son wasn't saved, but I was saved. It's not my fault. But, you

know, I can understand her feelings. Because, because Werner was in an orphanage, *Jüdisches Waisenhaus* in Berlin, and he was taken to Riga concentration camp with all the other children of the orphanage there, he died tragically. But I, I should have gone to New York to see Hanni, you know, but we never met again. Tragic story. She had a second marriage in America. Very successful marriage. And she and her new husband died in old age in New York. Worked hard. But she never applied, she could never apply for American citizenship. She could have applied, I suppose, but you can't go back in history. That's another interesting story of mine, close relationship with a cousin and the loss of a cousin.

**[1:04:52]**

*Yes, so she made a decision to go without her child.*

Yeah. Or she was forced to make her decision. I don't know.

Next – what part of the story.

*Yes, so we are now in Holland.*

Yes.

*You said you arrived and you were put in this orphanage.*

*Can you describe the orphanage in Amsterdam?*

Well it's a very old building now, still exists. And is now the Museum of the History of Amsterdam in the same building. It's quite well known. And it was rather primitive because we slept in dormitories, you know, separate from the girls on another floor. The food was very scarce, not much food. But I mentioned before the outings to the swimming pool, the outing to the synagogue and the nicest outing I had as the oldest of the children there, was the husband of Truus Wijsmuller who was always rescuing people. Her husband was a banker in Amsterdam, did quite well. And Ams - the husband took us on excursions very often. Took us to their home for tea and Wijsmuller had no children. They had a housekeeper called Seentje and she was very friendly always, you know? And very close relationship with the Wijsmuller and with the children. So I had treats in Amsterdam. And every weekend I

could go and see my grandparents and uncle and aunt and cousin. Last Sunday...I was in Amsterdam...”Moederdag”, Mother’s Day, and the last thing I did at the, in May 1940, just after the invasion, as a *banketbakker*, I made a cake and inscribed “Voor Moeder” which I was able to send to aunt Eva and my grandparents. Wasn’t allowed to leave the Burgerweeshuis because of the invasion. You know, you never knew what’s going to happen. So that’s the last gift of remembrance my family in Amsterdam had of me until after the war.

*This is when you were, because you attended that old school, the vocational training?*

ORT school, very good ORT school, yes.

*And because your family was there did you feel it was, what’s the word. It was fair? Did you feel upset that you couldn’t stay with them? Was there any sentiment? Did you understand?*

I wasn’t upset, I quite understood the position. And was quite happy at the orphanage, really. I wasn’t suffering, well educated, you know. And it was a good time till the Germans invaded.

**[1:08:12]**

*And at that time did you have correspondence with your mother?*

Yes. Well my mother corresponded not with me very much but with her parents in Amsterdam. And her brother and family -regularly.

*And you said at that point she tried to get to England, your mother.*

Yes.

But it was too late.

*What was the time, do you, from the correspondence you found. When did she...get*



I wish I had any of her correspondence. I haven't any more.

*So tell us a little bit about the Wijsmullers. What their background was. Because they're quite important people in terms of the history.*

Their background really, only lately on google. You know, the exact person and activities. But it's all recorded. She - 1961 a book was published in Dutch. "Geen Tijd voor Tranen" which means "No Time for Tears". Which all her exploits, efforts- successful efforts rescuing people. And since 1961, I've been trying to get it translated. I have an English translation done for me, but the book is written by somebody else, not by Trude Wijsmuller. Very badly written, full of mistakes. And the English translation is also badly written, full of mistakes. So no publisher has ever agreed to publish it here. I tried many, many different sources. They all rejected it. And the latest news I have is, it was confirmed last Sunday in Amsterdam. There is a Dutch filmmaker....Prinz or Prins, who interviewed me, and he's quite willing to make a film of the experience of all the children of the – of the ship, you know, what happened to them. So, that will be another book.

*Wonderful*

**[1:10:43]**

Also paying tribute to Truus Wijsmuller her autobiography. And I have reviews, I have a lot of correspondence mainly in Dutch, with her. She took great pride in my... being trained for a rabbi here. She wrote to me a letter which I've still got, to say that because I lived in Holland I could have applied for Dutch nationality. But she wrote to me and said you take British nationality. It's much more valuable in the world today, than Dutch. Which I did. She also came to our *chuppa*...our marriage here, yes. An honoured guest. And, and the ORT invited her to the reception in the House of Commons. Granville Jenner's father, you know, was very active also in politics, and arranged a luncheon for us in honour of her not me, for Frau Wijsmuller dort? in the House of Commons. So instead of going on a honeymoon the day after, we went to the House of Commons in her honour. And her best hour, she always told me, was being invited by Yad Vashem, had invited her to plant a tree. You know well Of the Righteous Gentiles. In Yad Vashem she was invited to plant a tree there.

**1:12:33**

*And she was awarded.*

She was awarded, yes. She was awarded the medal of...of...of Oranje Nassau[ ] and the French gave her honour for her, Legion d'Honneur, they call it. Churchill refused. He had to say, I'm sorry I can give only honours to British subjects, and you're Dutch. So she never got an honour in Britain. But she deserved it. She became very active in Dutch politics after the war. As a local councillor. They gave patriot tributes to her, when she died, which I all got in Dutch. And a statue of her is in the Bachplein in Amsterdam.

*So tell us, what are your recollections of her and her husband? You talked about the husband.*

*You said, she travelled a lot. So did you see her at the time in the orphanage very much.*

I didn't see her often, amazing. I saw more of her husband. She was always active. But she became... But her husband died... soon after the war. But she and I became very close. She wrote affectionate letters to me and a sign of her regard for me was when she came to our wedding here.

*Wonderful. And how many kids were there in the orphanage, roughly?*

I think we were about forty, forty children, yes.

*And were the children all from Berlin. Or were from other places?*

From all over Germany. But only from Germany.

*And what ages were they?*

Well I was the oldest, at thirteen at that time. They were a year or two younger. Most of them. Some were much younger. But they weren't babies any more, you know. I think the youngest must have been nine or ten, when I was thirteen. We were very close.

*And did she think at the time that you would stay in Holland? Or was that assumption or what. Did you she try, did you know from the beginning that the attempt was to go to England or?*

**[1:14:54]**

No, no, yes, fully prepared to be in Holland. Now then, when I got demobilisation from the Army in 1948, my uncle said to me, my daughter who's in school, still in school is not interested in my business. He started another business when he came out from Belsen camp. And, and in, in the centre of Amsterdam. It was called Pyjama and Lingerie Fabrik/Fabriek Favorit. Making pyjama and lingerie and he had about twenty-twenty-five people working on... sewing machines. He was a very good business man and textile designer. And he said come and, to my business, because might, could succeed it. My uncle was an autocrat but a very good businessman in a way. And all great credit to him. He said, in Belsen concentration camp, if I'm rescued I won't work on Shabbat anymore. So also after the war in Holland everybody worked on the Shabbes, he didn't. He became very active in the re-building of the Dutch liberal Community. Also I also remember before the war he wasn't at all very religious. But somehow ever he felt he must do his bit to rebuild the liberal Community in Amsterdam. And he became the President of the congregation for many, many years. His finest hour, and I've got a photo on record. Wearing a top hat at the consecration of the first Liberal Synagogue after the war in Amsterdam. And then he died when he was seventy years old. Quite young.

So while I was working for him, he made me go to a school, pattern making for his business. So I did some pattern making in the cutting room but he never gave me an opportunity to learn anything about his business. He did the same with his own son-in-law later. Wanted him to be in his business but never gave him the opportunity and ran the business himself.

*When was that? When did you go and work there?*

From Forty-seven, end of forty-seven till the summer of forty-nine.

[1:17:47]

*After the war. But we are not after the war yet. We need to go back a bit when you were in Holland, and there was the German invasion. So please tell us your recollections of that.*

Well I, I left to go to the ORT school in the morning and the streets were empty and I was told, “The Germans have invaded us.” Amsterdam was lucky. Because Rotterdam was completely destroyed. You know. Amsterdam was just two bombs. So when I got to the ORT School they said, the Germans have invaded us, we can’t teach you anymore. Because – now got home. So I went back to the orphanage. After five days we were waiting what was going to happen to us. We were very anxious to hear reports of the German invasion, you know? And, and we heard that the Dutch were completely unprepared. They hoped to become ... Or to stay neutral as they stayed neutral in the First World War. Completely unprepared. So the Germans invaded quickly and May 15<sup>th</sup> then we were told, “Take your pyjamas and your best clothes, and leave the Burgerweeshuis and on the Lijnbaansgracht in Amsterdam there were three buses ready. So we boarded the buses. And Truus Wijsmuller was there to see us and took us to the port of IJmuiden which is the Dutch port on the North Sea. And she persuaded this captain of a cargo boat, called the “Bodegraven”. I’ve got a photograph of that too, to take us away, quickly. Which he did. The recollection of people who were with us, remembered that she left her handbag on board, but went back, wouldn’t come with us. Although she had an opportunity to go to England as well on the boat. She refused. And on my last impression of leaving is firstly were British soldiers were landing, to fight the Germans. And the last, the picture too of the harbour of Amsterdam. The Dutch Shell had big oil tanks there which the Dutch set on fire, because they didn’t want the oil to go into the German hands. So the smoke of these big oil refineries saw us off as we left. Soon after we had left the harbour, some German fighter planes came over. Luckily they had no bombs. They would have gladly bombed us, sank the ship. So I dived on the rescue boats and I wasn’t hit by the machine guns fortunately. Now the journey was... traumatic because we never knew what was going to happen, where we were going. No idea. And the sad part was an example of intolerance, because the Dutch crew was willing to give us some food. And all the orthodox people who were on the boat said, No, it’s not kosher; you can’t eat it. So for the days from leaving Holland until landing in Liverpool we had... dog’s biscuits and water, you know. We didn’t starve but the great under-, the great...understood, realised intolerance, you know, of the very orthodox not, not, not rising to the situation.

[1:22:00]

*But was the orphanage orthodox? The orphanage?*

No.

No.

Well I'm pretty sure they didn't serve, they didn't serve *chazer* [non-kosher]. You know, what we call...but we never had separation of, of meat and milk, we wouldn't have dreamed of it, we just barely...

*So who on the boat made this decision? That's why I am curious. Who?*

The orthodox people on board. You know, there were few orthodox adults also rescued.

*That's my other question. Do you remember the other people on the boat apart from the children?*

No the children and the adults were kept apart on the boat.

*So you didn't meet of the other...passengers?.*

Don't think so. No.

*Because...*

There were several other people, I think including Ralph Kohn who remembers things much more vividly what happened on the boat than I do.

*He had a different experience.*

Yes, a different experience.

*He was with his parents. Did all the children from the orphanage make it onto the boat?*

*Was it the entire group?*

Oh yes.

*The entire group came? Did you have an opportunity to say goodbye to your grandparents or to your uncle?*

No. From the day of the invasion until we left we couldn't see them. But my uncle told me later that Truus Weijsmuller phoned him up and said, "I got busses to take people to Ijmuiden, but I don't think I can take your grandparents, your parents as well. So my uncle said to Truus Weijsmuller that they are over, in their eighties and "I can't leave them. So sorry, I can't come." So he and his wife could have been saved! But he didn't of course, didn't want to, couldn't leave his grandparents who hardly spoke any Dutch, you know? They were in their eighties He couldn't leave them. And at that time of course he didn't know about concentration camps, being deported and so on.

*So she didn't want to, didn't have enough space for everyone?*

No, didn't have enough. Another famous side story about the family Goutstikker. Have you heard about them?

*Please tell us.*

**[1:24:20]**

Well apparently this man Goutstikker [Jacques] was a very famous art collector. Had a big art collection in Herengracht in Amsterdam. The most valuable paintings collected and I didn't know anything about him. Except we saw an American... Lincoln car...arriving. He and his

wife stepped out and went on board. And then we were told later on, that because the passengers were in the cargo down there, you know, very hot, you open the door thinking you get fresh air. Instead he fell down the bottom of the boat and broke his neck. And a sailor fell down with him but he was saved. But ... when we landed in Falmouth the following morning they had to arrange a burial. So his coffin was taken from the boat to Falmouth, was buried there. In Falmouth we waited three days, what's going to happen. No idea. And finally the British government must have given permission for us to land in Liverpool. I mean the Dutch ship wasn't given, wasn't given the authority to sail anywhere and the Dutch colony, you know, Sumatra, Curacao but very far away. No fuel and no food, so we finally landed at Liverpool. And in Liverpool must have got well-known that a ship arrived with refugees because we got publicity. I went to the Liverpool newspaper years after the war and got a picture of us, the ship landing there on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May. Next week, we're going to have a reunion of the people saved on the "Bodegraven" on the docks in Liverpool. And then, have I mentioned from Liverpool they send us to Wigan?

*No. Tell us first of all just to stop you a little bit. What were your first impressions landing in Liverpool?*

The sense of freedom already, you know. And friendliness. The Police they asked me there "do you speak English?"

Just one phrase. Just enough to make myself understood. But in a Lancashire accent he replied but I could not understand a word so we reverted to German, yes? But that showed me I mustn't show off. Anyway a very friendly welcome and the people of Wigan were very hospitable you know? Invited us for tea, let us go to the cinema. Marched us all to the Coop and the Coop gave us a hot meal every day.

*What was in Wigan? Who was in charge of you?*

I don't remember really who organised it all. Whether it was the local population. Or anything... There was not so many Jews in Liverpool, I don't think they had a refugee committee but the Manchester refugee committee must have been informed soon after we landed, that weekend. So they quickly bought some accommodation. A girls' hostel and a boys' Hostel in Manchester and accommodated us.

*Where was your hostel? The boys' hostel?*

**[1:28:28]**

In Whithington, quite a fashionable suburb in the south of Manchester. Now...I was just fifteen, school leaving age was fourteen. Couldn't go to school. If I'd been a year older I would have been interned. We were given the title of friendly enemy alien. But I got permission to work, at fifteen. And then got a job as a...an errand boy, in a shop. Not knowing very much English but willing to work. So I quite at once in this job learned quickly and was very helpful so they very quickly left me in charge of the shop. And they said if you stay with us we'll open another shop for you in the end. So I could have been a greengrocer all my life, but I was crazy on cars as a youngster so I got myself a job as a car mechanic in a garage. And they put me in charge of the, the store there. And because it was also an ammunition factory, part of it was taken over so that was regarded as a reserved occupation which stopped me from being, being taken to the army 'cause I volunteered very quickly to the Air Force, as soon as I was eighteen and passed the examination. And the Reform Office, War Office refused because they heard my parents were still in Berlin. I couldn't bomb my own parents. So I was refused the Army and the Air Force and volunteered for the Jewish Brigade. But by the time I...I...I joined the Jewish Brigade the war had stopped. So I really can't say I served during the war, although I was called up during the war. So Manchester Refugee Committee was very, very good. When they had a Viennese cook who made war-time rationing, cooked very well. They got a man out of internment camp who was an actor really in Hannover. Not trained for looking after children, but he looked after us very, very well. And... and I became a member of the...member of ...

*Careful...one second...Sometimes the light blows and then it might...we have to change the light. [interruption]*

*OK. Yes?*

*Which Youth club was that?*

**[1:31:05]**



So life in Manchester was really very pleasant.

*So you were together in a hostel, you stayed throughout.*

The boys' hostel and the girls' hostel, yes. And the Jewish Refugee Committee joined up after the orthodox Chief Rabbi wanted us to be more what he called *shomer* even more observe Shabbat and kosher, which the, which the very wonderful Viennese cook couldn't cope with. So we joined the Reform Congregation Manchester, the father of Rabbi David Goldberg now. So we joined that congregation. I conducted *sedarim* [first two nights of Passover] in the hostel because Jewish knowledge, you know we had seder, went to synagogue regularly.

*So were you, were you among the children the one with the most Jewish knowledge?*

Exactly. Exactly.

*And you had a Bar Mitzvah.*

And I could conduct a Seder which was nice. We enjoyed, the Manchester Community was very good to the refugees. One example was the local cinema in Withington let us go and see cinema pictures free every week. Refugee children Freeman Hardy and Willis, was a big shoe shops all over. Let us buy a pair of shoes once a week. Burton, the tailors, let us buy a suit every year, free, the refugees. They also gave us hospitality because I stayed with an English family for over a year. Lovely family except they had one son of ten who could not distinguish between German speaking...name and the Germans bombing Manchester. It was horrible. A ten year old boy couldn't understand the relationship between being a German refugee and a German who bombed Manchester. So frequently we were under the beds rather than in the beds during the war. Heavily bombed.

*Yeah. And how did it manifest itself? Did he say nasty things?*

Air raid sirens very often.

*No you said the boy couldn't understand it. So was it...*

No he was just nasty. We had to share a bedroom.

*He was nasty to you?*

Not at all friendly. And of course the parents favoured him to me... in many ways. The only boy and the only boy, I was only a refugee. But, so I went to the Manchester Refugee committee and said, "I'm not very happy. I'd rather go back to the hostel." Which I did. I was there for just about a year. With that family.

*So I asked you how long did you stay in the hostel before you went to the family?*

**[1:35:14]**

Only a few months, I think only.

*And then you went there for a year and went back. So the experience wasn't very good with the family. And was it a Jewish family?*

And was it a non-Jewish family...

*Did they have any understanding of your background?*

Oh very much so. What a refugee is. They were very friendly, you know.

*But you were working when you were with them.*

I was working, yes. I was buying a bicycle. It was thirty-five shillings. And they took half a crown every, every week from my salary to repay the money for the bicycle.

*So...they received some compensation...*

No, that's right. I was earning some money as an errand boy. Shop assistant.

*And what was their motivation do you think for taking you in?*

Just to save for a child refugee, hospitality. I wasn't anyone. Quite a number of kids were in a family then.

*But why did you prefer to be in a hostel than in this family?*

It was because of... I liked the life in the hostel, you know. We were independent. Well looked after.

*You preferred the communal life?*

The communal life. I liked this man, Alexander became a very good friend of mine after the war.

*Who is that?*

**[1:36:50]**

Siegfried Alexander, you know, who looked after the children. And he went to London and back to Germany: He, he came to my wedding and we became very close friends. Also he was more like a father or uncle in age difference but we became very, very close.

*Because it is one thing that comes up in the interview whether it was almost easier to be in this communal situation with people from a similar background. Then being in a family where you are the odd one out -in some way.*

I wasn't the odd one out, one of the kids, yes. Formed great friendships. That's right. Yes.

*And are you still in touch with anyone from that time?*

Yes, a number of children.

*And you said the hostel became affiliated with the reform synagogue?*

Yes.

*So that means the Viennese cook could stay on?*

Yes, she did. She did very well.

*So what did it mean? So the Kashrut wasn't observed but Shabbat was observed?*

No, no. We switched lights off on Shabbat.

*I meant...*

The younger children went to religious school as well. Locally or ...synagogue. We observed the festivals. But certainly strict observance on the Shabbat. I had to work on Shabbat evening.

*You had to.*

*Was that a problem ever for you, or...?*

No, no. I was very happy with that family, you know. I saw them again after the war, you know.

*Did you stay in touch with them?*

Yes.

*What were their names? Just for the records.*

Jones. Jones. I've got a picture of the shop. I will show you if you like.

[1:38:55]

*That was the shop you worked in?*

The shop I worked in, yes.

*So then what happened. You went back to the hostel. And then how long did you stay before you then joined the*

Jewish Brigade?

*Yeah.*

September...September '45.

*Yes so you stayed quite a long time in Manchester?*

Yes.

*And did you have any ambition, maybe it wasn't possible at all to do some more schooling Or was that not an option?*

Not an option. By that time I was already eighteen.

*And you said you wanted to join the Air Force?*

Airforce - and then I volunteered for the Jewish Brigade, yes.

*Tell us what happened when they accepted you?*

Well they sent us to, to training, you know, to Maidstone. Enrolled me and several other boys from England, Royal Kent in Maidstone.

*Yes, the Jewish Brigade.*

Yes, so we were there for a few weeks. We had the initial training in Maidstone. Then we were sent to the Jewish Brigades who were then stationed in Holland. And we had very little work to do in the Brigade, at that time. And we looked after DPs, so called Displaced Persons very much. And they knew I could drive because I drove in Manchester at seventeen, you know. You had no provisional licences then during the war. So they made me driver...in the Brigade. I was very popular because one of my duties was to go from a place called Termunten, in French... to Antwerp to the headquarters to collect the mail for the regiment. So I was very popular bringing in the mail. And it was really no hard duties at all, you know. The Jewish Brigade was very relaxed. Officers and non-commissioned officers and Privates, you know? But I went, after arriving there I was anxious to see my family in Holland again. And my best friend from England in the Brigade went on French leave to Amsterdam to see my family. And that was a most emotional adventurous trip. And I took 200 cigarettes with me because...The great value after the war you could buy anything with cigarettes in Amsterdam. To see Amsterdam again after the war was shocking, because the winter of '1947,sorry '49, no sorry, '47...'44 to '45, the last year of the war was...Amsterdam was starving, you know, and the Dutch....

**[1:42:30]**

*Yeah, just what I wanted to ask before we go on the journey to Amsterdam is, at that point, what did you know about the fate of your mother, your father, your uncle and the grandparent?.*

Soon after the war there was a German Institute through the Red Cross who notified anybody who was sent to camps. I knew my mother and father had been sent to the camps. We also haven't gone back to telling you what happened to my grandparents.

*Now you can tell us.*

Because my grandparents of course, when I escaped, May 1940, they were left behind. And then my uncle and they went into hiding. And my uncle told me afterwards they had to pay a lot of money to go into hiding in Amsterdam. And one betrayed them to the Gestapo, you know many Dutch women, persons did that to get money from the Gestapo. But my uncle

overheard that and left quickly. So I'm not sure when grandparents or when my uncle and aunt were, were sent to the Dutch camp, Dutch camp... Westerbork. Lots of Dutch Jews landed up at Westerbork before deportation.

*So they all were deported?*

Sorry. My grandparents must have been sent first to Westerbork, because one of my most precious possessions. Is a letter that my grandfather wrote to his son in Amsterdam. How they observed – couldn't really celebrate it, their diamond wedding in camp. I've got that letter. And three weeks after reading that letter, my grandmother and grandfather they were, they were sent to Sobibor camp and died there soon after. So my uncle and aunt were sent to Westerbork and the Germans sent them to Belsen camp. Now in Belsen camp, you must have heard as well, they had a special section for people who were supposed to be exchanged for the German prisoners. So they were not treated – in inverted commas - quite as badly as the rest of the refugees. [...]

Until the Germans sent them by train to... Tröbliz, I think it was called Tröbliz, the town. The Russians liberated them...end of the war the Russians liberated them and then they had a terrible long time to recover and because he caught typhoid as most camp, people in the camp did, you know. Took them a long time to recover. But they then returned to Amsterdam and then I mentioned how my uncle became president of the congregation. But my uncle had the first plastic operation done in Rotterdam because the wounds wouldn't heal up. And my aunt had, had a leg, leg bandaged up all the rest of her life because of the wounds from the camps.

**[1:46:29]**

*But you said they were deported later. So were they in hiding together with the grandparents or did they..*

No, they can't have been. Probably, probably soon after my grandparents were already deported to Westerbork camp.

*And you said they were in a special camp in Belsen.*

*Did they – do you know maybe - have any Spanish papers? Or did they have...any other papers?*

No papers. No.

*But they were exchanged. They went on a train- from Belsen?*

From Belsen they sent them, the Germans sent them. Must have been April, just before liberation.

*To Trönitz?*

To Tröbliz. Trebliz I think.

And what was in Trebliz? Was it an internment camp?

Oh no. They were going to send them all the way to Auschwitz [inaudible] ...but, but half way the Russians liberated them.

*So it wasn't an exchange? They were supposed to be deported from Belsen to Auschwitz.*

They went East.

*And they were lucky enough that it was so late that the Russians..*

But the conditions on the train must have been horrible. More people died on that train journey than arrived.

*When you did you actually find all this out? Was it before you went to Amsterdam?*

After. Only by bits and pieces because my uncle and the family never talked about it. Other people liked to recall their stories. They didn't tell their children or grandchildren, anything what happened to them. They refused to go to Westerbork. I went to Westerbork with my



wife. And, and, and documentation there, had the exact date of my grandparents staying there and being deported.

*But they didn't want to?*

They didn't want to this day they don't talk about it.

*But you said they had children. Did they go with their children into the camp?*

The only had one daughter. Annelies.

*And what happened to the daughter?*

She became like a sister to me. I saw her in Amsterdam last Sunday. And she is just over eighty years old as well. You know and she has children and grandchildren.

*So they survived together?*

Yes.

*So you didn't know much about the conditions because they came back and they wanted to...*

They never talked about it, no.

**[1:49:12]**

*And did they want to stay in Amsterdam? They didn't want to go elsewhere?*

The family settled there.

The parents of my aunt became very close to me because they left, they emigrated from Berlin to Holland, went to America. Must have been soon after the outbreak of the war they came back to Amsterdam and we became close because they and I and my aunt in New York

had lots of correspondence during the war. So kept me informed what's happening. I told them what is happening. Yes. The Americans could still correspond, America only joined the war in 1941, as you know. So there is some correspondence, some knowledge of what happened between 1939-1941.

*And was that the aunt who married, who left her son behind? That aunt?*

Yeah. I've still got quite a number of her letters from America. And from the other aunt.

*So tell us about that trip to Amsterdam.*

We had to first hitch-hike. A boat and a train. Amsterdam was bare, you know. And only a few bicycles there. No more cars. All the trees were chopped down for firewood. And the...and the only transport was coach and horses. And they went around, the coach and horses wanted a lot of money from us or cigarettes from us. We refused. And we walked to my aunt and uncle's house. We only spent a few hours with them really. But we gave them cigarettes. Was a wonderful reunion. And then we got back to the camp the following...late at night, you know. Our, our, our pretending to be in our beds wasn't, was discovered that we weren't there. And I told the commanding officer, we got – of course - penalised for being absent without leave. I told them that three times I had applied for compassionate leave to see my family. After the war I hadn't seen them during the war. Wanted to know what happened to them. And you wouldn't give me compassionate leave. So he took pity on me and he gave me eight days stop pay for punishment. I could have been court martialled.

[laughs]

*So you really just decided, the two of you?*

The two of us decided to go.

*Didn't have allowance to go?*

[1:52:00]

No, no. French leave, just left.

*Were you close to your uncle when you saw him?*

No, I was much closer to my aunt. We became... Like a substitute mother to me, really, in the post-war years. Yes.

*And tell me a little bit more about the Jewish Brigade. What were their- was their mission, if somebody doesn't know about the Jewish Brigade.*

First their mission was to kill as many Nazis as possible. They started life in Italy and fought in Italy, you know. And when it was found out that they killed too many Germany, you know. And there was revenge. Also my finest hours from the Brigade, I wrote the account in an article, was also published. We went then...I was told as a driver to go to Paris. And we smuggled British arms to the Haganah, to the Israel Defence Force to help them in the war of Independence in 1948.

That I regard as the best thing I've ever done in my life...to help. And the Jewish Brigade I remember well. The Army gave you lots of cigarettes. We didn't get any of this and I found out later when I was asked to drive to the Displaced Person's camp. Near Brussels. And that's where all

**[0:00:00]**

*So did you have any contact with the DPs?*

Not directly, no. But we had contact with some DPs when the organised a trip to Belsen. It was an official tour to see the camp and to visit. Nazi officers left. We saw them there and I just finished reading a book by Dan Stone. Have you heard of Dan Stone? He wrote a book about the liberation of the camps. I met him and he gave a copy of that book.

*Did you meet any Nazis yourself?*

Nazis? No. I met a few Germans we had contact with the Germans. And then some of them were very friendly. The anti-Nazis. The majority of them, and still anti-Semitic at that time, after the war.

**[1:55:03]**

You were not stationed in Germany?

Yeah.

*You were stationed?*

Yes, after the Jewish Brigade finished, in Ghent.

*Yeah?*

I was transferred to a British Interpreters' Pool - British Interpreters' Pool in the British Army on the Rhine, Osnabrück- Bielefeld. No the headquarters was at Osnabrück; we were in Bielefeld. And once again I didn't get the job I wanted, because as an interpreter they found I could drive, and ride motorcycles. So I became a driver again! They were obviously not short of interpreters, but they were short of good drivers. So I didn't do any interpretation as I wanted to do and could have done.

*Yeah. And what, what, what was it like to be- come back to Germany as a British soldier at that point?*

Well as I as I said, I – I hated the Germans at that time, you know? Mixed very little with the Germans, you know? And also got two shocks in a way. Because in Leverkusen, have you heard of Leverkusen? ICI there. ICI you know, big factories and Leverkusen wasn't bombed. And went back to Siemens. Siemens outside Berlin has a very big factory - wasn't bombed. Why not? So in one area of my life I was seeing how international finance influences decisions, even in the war.

*Can you explain this to us?*

I mean you couldn't miss Leverkusen, on the Rhine. It's a very big- I think produced a lot of ammunition. Siemens was also very much involved during the war, in Berlin, and still I think in Spandau in Berlin. It wasn't bombed!

[1:57:12]

*And why do you think is that?*

Because of international finance!

*But do you think they were thinking of a post-war situation or...?*

Yes.

*Of the post-war?*

That's right. Yes. And Krupp was bombed of course, Krupp. Because was only German. It wasn't international.

*And did you go to Berlin at that point? When did you go back to Berlin first?*

Well first my uncle sent me to Berlin. Then we were also stationed a few months in Berlin. And... and but it was interesting. The German Kultur...we were stationed in Bielefeld. A small Jewish community. Synagogue was almost completely destroyed, but they kept small Shabbat services. They welcomed us on a Friday evening in Bielefeld, and I met one family who invited us for tea. And they became very close friends for the rest of their lives. They went to America, to St Louis. We met each other. But what was interesting: half of Bielefeld was destroyed. But the Theater, the Stadttheater produced wonderful performances, operettas and plays and opera. And concerts, you know?

*So you went to those?*

I went frequently, because as a British soldier we didn't have to pay anywhere, you know. We could go anywhere. But this is interesting how German Kultur was quickly revived.

*And how did you- Did you, when you spoke to ordinary Germans, did you say- did they ask how come you speak German? Or did you ask...?*

Yes.

*And what did you answer to them?*

Well, I told them my story, you know? Which embarrassed them.

*Yeah. You were open about it?*

**[1:59:14]**

Oh, very much so, yes.

*And how about the other British soldiers? How did they behave to you as a refugee? Did you ever have any...?*

Oh, no. We were British soldiers. You know.

*And did you change your name before you went into the Army?*

No, after demobilisation, I was still in the Jewish Brigade where a name like Hirschberg wasn't unusual, you know [laughs]. But after war I found out that out of the Jacobi family I was the only survivor. Because my cousin in Holland, you know, she was - Anneliese Jacobi in Holland - but I was the only male survivor in my family. I didn't like the name of Hirschberg at all. It's very difficult to pronounce, to spell, you know. It's typical German, named after a German town, because most German Jews, I believe, in the last century became Hamburgers, Berliners, you know and so on. And so we were named after the town of Hirschberg. So I took on the name of Jacobi. My mother's maiden name, my grandparents'

name. My uncle in Holland wrote me a letter and said he was so proud that I've done it. I've still got that letter. Proud of me that I've done it. The men at the Home Office registering my new British nationality, said, "OK, Jacobi, what about your first name?" I said "Oh, good idea, make it 'Harry'." So Heinz became Harry in a spur-of-the-moment last quick decision.

*So you were Heinz Hirschberg...*

**[2:01:01]**

Before.

*And you changed to Harry Jacobi.*

Yes. No, Heinz Martin Hirschberg. The name Martin I was told was given to me after an uncle, who was also a represent- Handelsreisiger [Handelsreisender]. And in Thüringer Wald, he was robbed and killed. A young man. And I've seen his gravestone in Weißensee cemetery, Martin. So soon afterwards, they named me Martin in his memory.

*So what about- So you changed the name later, not when you were in the Jewish Brigade.*

Yes, later.

*So just to come back to your time in Germany. So how long did you stay in total in...?*

In where?

*In Germany. You said after the Jewish Brigade was finished, you were stationed...*

Well, I could have been demobbed already end of '47. But then someone told me wisely, if you apply for British nationality while in the Army, you don't have to publish in The Times newspaper, you don't have to pay. You just... get an interview with your commanding officer which makes you British, and you swear loyalty to the King! So I stayed in the Army for another two months, so that I'd get British nationality. That was one of the wisest things I was advised and did ever do!

*Tell us about this Times. Why- What would you have done if you hadn't been in the Army?  
What did you have to do otherwise?*

Well, if you apply for British nationality, you have to apply, you have to pay some money and you have to put an advert in The Times newspaper or The Telegraph to say, 'Any objections?' It had to be publicised. I'm not sure it still is.

*Oh, I haven't heard about that! That is very interesting.*

No, that was right through the war, and after the war. I'm not sure whether it's still necessary; I don't think so.

*I haven't come across that. So what wording did it have? What wording would it have been?*

Well, this man's name – "So-and-so has applied for British nationality, any objections for anybody?" If there's no objection, then it was granted!

*Very interesting. Nobody has ever mentioned that.*

**[2:03:21]**

And that cost money...to the newspaper, yes?

*Sure. Right. So you saved that?*

I saved that when I became a British national; that's right.

*And where- Do you remember who interviewed you?*

At the Home Office, yes. I've got the certificate still, yes.

*And were you happy to become British?*



Yeah sure.

*But you said you had the choice at that point to become either Dutch or British. Or that was an option...?*

I had the choice after the war, yes.

*But did you want to- Did you ever plan to stay- You said you went to Amsterdam. So was it after you were...*

I was with my uncle, yes.

*Yes, so after you were demobbed, is that when you went to Amsterdam?*

**[2:03:55]**

Yes. Soon afterwards. Now the turning point of my life was in 1949 when I said I'll work for my uncle. He re-built the Dutch Liberal congregation. And Leo Baeck and Lily Montagu came to Amsterdam to help in the revival of the small Liberal Congregation in Amsterdam. You know, very few came back from the camps. So it was revived; my uncle became active. And another person who was very active, and who became very friendly with me, was Otto Frank. The father, who gave me the first edition of 'Het Achterhuis' - Anne's diary. So he and I and another personality who is quite well known in England now, Eva Schloss.

*Yeah.*

He came from Amsterdam to London in 1949 to the World Union Conference. Leo Baeck was our President. And Leo Baeck spoke to us about the need, God waits for us and the world waits for us to... to fulfil our Jewish mission. You know? To make good what we have lost in the war. But I came from Amsterdam not having got on very well with my uncle, as I've said. In 1949 I went on Aliya because I had no family in England, I had no education, no job. And there were no prospects of anything. So I said, "From the Theodor- Herzl-Schule onwards to the Jewish Brigade, I became a Zionist." I said, "I'd like to go on Aliya!" So Leo Baeck and Lily Montagu persuaded me. I didn't need much persuasion. I went to see

them and said, well, I wanted to go on Aliya. But Leo Baeck said, “We should help. Any way I can help?” Lily Montagu said, “Sure! Teach in my religion school.” You know? And got involved. And that was the cause of the change in my life. In July 1949. If that hadn’t, I would have gone on Aliya and hardly been known anywhere.

*You wouldn’t have become a rabbi.*

I don’t think so. No, I don’t think so..

*So it was just- It was Lily Montagu and Leo Baeck coming to Amsterdam?*

Yes.

*They made a conscious effort of coming to Amsterdam and talk to people?*

Talk to people, yes.

*And what do you remember? I mean they’re both - Lily Montagu was very important in helping the...*

[2:06:40]

I don’t remember Lily Montagu coming, but Leo Baeck...meeting was at my uncle’s house, you know, the first time I met Leo Baeck. And he was wonderful after Theresienstadt. Cause you also know his story. AJR knows the story very well, what happened, what he did. Yes. So...

*How old was he at that point when you met him?*

Just over seventy. So I had a hard time in London. Firstly I had no education. I had to start work and I wanted to learn, study. So it took me a... long time. And I start a full-time job but I was teaching in the religion school, you know, not really getting very far anywhere.

*But is that- Was it the Liberal Synagogue in St John’s Wood?*

No, I was attached to the Liberal movement.

*Yes, so whatever...*

Started teaching in Brighton and another religion school Southend. But for very little extra income, you know? I was working hard in the timber trade and brick laying. Very hard work and very nearly breaking my back. I had two back - back operations as a result. So it was hard and finally an opportunity arose for me to go to Aberdeen, in 1952. Because the Aberdeen Community is what we always called Einheitsgemeinde – ‘one synagogue’ - eighty people there, eighty Jews there, all mixed. Lovely synagogue. And they offered me three pounds a week, accommodation in the synagogue building, and the Jewish Memorial Council gave me another three pounds a week as a sub for looking after small communities. So I stayed three years in Aberdeen, working for the Community there, which was a very...challenging job. Because the small Community had strict Orthodox Jews, Liberal Jews, most didn't care, didn't know. And very few children in the religion school to teach. So...so I did quite well in Aberdeen, and I could have finished a degree at University. But in 1953, Israel Mattuck the great – great Liberal leader, died. There were hardly any Liberal candidates for the Rabbinate and for all our congregations. So they had a scholarship fund. And three – three pupils ...applied for and got money from the scholarship fund. So in '55 I came to London and started studying at university. And then as I mentioned before you know, after an easy degree Hebrew, Dutch, German and then another honours degree later on, and finally was ordained in 1961.

*So you got a scholarship with two other people?*

Yes.

*Who were the two other people?*

**[2:10:06]**

One was Lawrence Riegel, who became a rabbi, and the other rabbi was David Goldstein, who became very well known in Anglo-Jewry because he was a scholar, and he got a job

looking after all the Jewish manuscripts in the British Museum. He published quite a lot and he died in his early 50s unfortunately. Very sad. Lawrence Riegel only died a few years ago, but he was no scholar. But a good man. Looked after the Community... and a few congregations. But I must go back to 1953. In the World Union they had a youth section. Young people getting together.

Yeah?

We founded the Youth Section already when I came to a 1951 conference of the World Union. And the Youth Section had meetings in London and all over Europe. And the secretary of the Youth Section turned to me once and said, "By the way, you are in Aberdeen. I have a request from a girl in Bombay for a pen friend. She'd like to have a pen friend maybe." So I said, "Yes. I'm interested. I'll write to her." So I wrote to her from Amsterdam. She replied from...from Bombay and sent me her beautiful photo. And I said, "This is the girl I'm going to marry." And so for two years we corresponded. [19]55 my wife had an opportunity to come to England. She was the Secretary of the Anglo...Anglo- some British...

*Anglo-British?*

It was tobacco. Anglo- something – tobacco company. In Bombay. A good job. And another girl worked with her because her parents were Indian too. They were Christians. She said, "I'm going to get married in Bedford in England." And the two girls said, "Wherever you get married, I'll be your bridesmaid." So having already corresponded with me she said, "Ok, I'll come to Bedford." Well I, to this very day, I'm not a very correspondent but she was. I had a letter every day, every week from her - from Bombay. And so she came. I met her London Airport and very soon became engaged, you know. And the following April we got married in London.

*Amazing!*

Yes so we were- Through the World Union. The World Union changed my life and got me, got me a wife.

*And she was willing - happy to come to England?*

Yes. Yeah.

*And the parents also supported that?*

They came later.

*They also came?*

Get the wedding photos. We can look see it up there. Her brother and two sisters all came.

*They all came. Because they were British at that point, is that correct?*

They were Indian.

*Yes, but they had British...It was a colony so I think it was no problem...*

A colony...They could come to England. They could come to England easily.

*That's what I mean.*

That's right, yes. Their parents couldn't come, but they came soon afterwards.

*So it must have been interesting for you, because it's quite a different cultural context?*

Yeah, because – you're right. I was the only boy and suddenly I've married a family of eight!  
[Bea laughs] Five girls and three brothers. You know, it's a big family, you know. We became a very close family. Yes.

**[2:13:57]**

*And which languages – What did they speak?*

They spoke perfect English. My wife went to Catholic school, so had a good education...

*Yeah.*

They all spoke perfect English. So...

*That's quite amazing, that she, through a pen friendship... that she came here.*

Yes.

*And then where did you settle, once you- when you married?*

We a very small flat in Cricklewood, in London. She worked as a secretary, and she really kept me because I had a scholarship with very little money. The scholarship I got from the fund was thirty-six pounds a month, nine pounds a week. And she got more money as a secretary, fortunately. And then Mark, it was soon afterwards in the same- end of the same year, in December he was born. Rose had to give up work, and that was pretty hard for us. In a small flat – small room really, only. Until...until I got ordained and then I got a full-time job as a rabbi and things became easier. But I was ordained as a so-called 'Reverend' you know? At that time most rabbis in England were ordained 'Reverend'. And the leadership of the Liberal movement were very English. David Goldstein for instance was a boy educated in Oxford. And if you were either Oxford or Cambridge, you know, you were their favourite student – favoured boys. A kind of snobbishness. And...

*So what. Sorry to clarify. So 'Reverend' was a sort of second-class, or?*

No.

*No, so why...?*

Many also famous Orthodox leaders were also 'Reverend'.

*Right. What is the difference? Because that's one of the questions I never understood.*

Well...Anglo-Jewry made no difference, because the Chief Rabbi wanted to be the only rabbi at one time. Chief Rabbi Adler. So you had Reverend Saul Amias, Rabbi Hartman from Hendon. So many 'Reverends'. Good rabbis, but still called 'Reverend'.

*Right.*

So I hated that title.

**[2:16:27]**

*Why?*

Because English is not really a Jewish title at all, you know? 'Reverend', yeah? Toastmasters always say, "Reverend" first when they introduce you.

*Yeah.*

And it took me ten years to study part-time for Rabbinat; in '71 I became a rabbi.

*But that was long after you had a congregation?*

Oh yes.

[phone interruption]

*Yes, we were talking. You said you studied to become a rabbi...*

Yes.

*And you were ordained in '71.*

Yes. As a rabbi.

*And were you- You were always with the Liberal movement?*

Yes, Lady Montagu had a great influence on me and helped me a great deal. Encouraged me. While the leadership of the Liberal Jewish movement were rather more English than Jewish. And... had no confidence in me really, except for Lily Montagu and Leo Baeck too encouraged me. But I persevered you know, got my degree. And I had success in Southgate. Southgate... That Liberal congregation at that time was about 200 members already. I was there as a student... helping out. And then they kept me as a Reverend for ten years, and then a Rabbi. So I was there for eighteen years in Southgate. And built up the congregation to 800 members and became one of the largest congregations in North London.

*Wonderful.*

And my wife proved wonderful not only as a wife and mother, but as a so-called 'Rebbetzin', you know looking after the congregation. Was very popular.

*Is that the term used in Liberal Judaism? Rebbetzin? [laughing]*

No...no, not really. Not really, no... But in '75 I had an offer to go to Wembley. Because Wembley congregation was larger than Southgate. Wembley Liberal offered me a thousand pounds a year more in salary than I got in Southgate. And I accepted, but I can confess now, it was a mistake. Because Ruth and the children loved Southgate; the congregation liked me and persuaded me to stay on. But I gave my word to Wembley, and Wembley was very, very – very LIBERAL, with capital letters. While I was always more traditional from the Continent, you know? So there was a bit of friction there.

**[2:19:12]**

*Just to clarify, you were a more traditional than liberal?*

Yeah. [phone interruption]

*Yes we were talking about your move from Southgate to Wembley...*

Yes.



*... and that you regretted it slightly.*

Yes.

*Because you were more traditional than the community.*

I made Southgate much more traditional, you know, over the eighteen years I was in Southgate. My wife was happy in Southgate - a lot of friends. My children were in schools in Southgate with their friends. They just didn't want to come to Wembley. So I stayed seven years in Wembley, until suddenly I had an offer to go to Zürich in Switzerland to become their rabbi. So from '82 until '90 – eight years - I was the rabbi of the Liberale Community in Zürich.

*Can you just explain to us what it means that you were more traditional? In which way? What, for example? How was it manifested? What were the issues?*

In Southgate the Liberals didn't allow Bar and Bat Mitzvah. Only Confirmation. And where there was some Confirmation or Bar Mitzvah was only boys, not girls. So my daughter was the first Bat Mitzvah in Southgate. And then much more English in the service than there used to be. We walked around with the scroll which was - you know - we'd never done before. I introduced Chazzanim and Simchat Torah ceremonies. And I made Yom Kippur much more traditional than it used to be. It was a very, very short service always, the Liberals with a long interval you know, in the afternoon. Tea break or lunch break. So... many aspects. I observed Tish'a B'Av, you know, and Tu BiShvat and other ceremonies.

*What about Purim? Because I know that was a thing that the Liberals- At some point got rid of Purim.*

One of the first things- It's interesting that you ask, because one of the first things in Southgate, on Friday evening we often had an Oneg, you know, during the meal, a service. And I said one evening, "I'll tell you everything I know in favour of Purim. And I'll tell you everything why we should not keep Purim. I don't care; the decision is yours. You want to

keep Purim?” And the majority, a large majority of the congregation said, “We don’t want to keep Purim.” So all the years in Southgate I never observed Purim.

*And in Wembley?*

[2:22:09]

Wembley also.

No...

No Purim.

*But I think now, they have reintroduced it.*

Oh, they have fancy dresses, you know. They don’t read all of the story. But they’re all observed to my dislike, because it’s most successful and most disliked.

*Right. So you were in a way like the German Liberale?*

Yes.

*Sort of similar to the Belsize Square Synagogue tradition?*

Correct, yes.

*Did you have any contact with the Belsize Square Synagogue at all, in your time?*

Oh, after, oh yes. We have lots of friends there. Very friends with- Rabbi Kokotek used to be the rabbi there you know. And even before, with [Rabbi] Salzberger.

*Yes? Do you remember Rabbi Salzberger?*

The daughter of Rabbi Salzberger became a good friend of mine.

*Which one?*

With Ruth.

*Ruth.*

Have you met her too, or you know about her?

*I haven't met her, no.*

Yes, so I know the congregation.

*Did you feel you were of similar - similar to them? You felt an affinity?*

Well... not any more now. I like the traditional service, but they still discriminate far too much...

*For your liking.*

For my liking. Yes.

**[2:23:23]**

*But in terms of background...*

Yes.

*So while they I guess kept more of the music, than in your case, the music.*

There was music, but they rarely called up a girl to the Torah. It's very rare. It was along fight in Belsize Square. It still is.

*Yes. You are more in favour of completely egalitarian services?*

You are right. Now one of the successful jobs I did after retirement in Zürich. After eight years my wife was homesick for - for England because she didn't speak German. She made friends there but she felt out of place there, so on my sixty-fifth birthday, I said, "I want to come back to England." So I retired quite early at sixty-five. But because I fortunately was still active at twenty- seventy – at sixty-five you know. Early retirement. So I became a Chairman of our Beth Din for ten years. I helped out congregations. For five years I was part-time Rabbi of the Amersham Liberal congregation. So I did a lot of helping out. I've got more involved in AJEX and B'nei B'rith, as I am still today.

*Right. But did you leave to Zürich by yourselves or did your children come as well? Or by then were they already..?*

Already at university. One reason we left for Zürich was that the children were independent. They were already at university, qualified; they didn't need us anymore. So we were free to go to Switzerland. It was a challenge.

*Yes, Yes. Did you enjoy it?*

I enjoyed it very much.

*And were they more similar- how liberal or Liberale were the Swiss?*

Well, the Swiss are very conservative. Not only in the service but in money matters and everything. You know, a long time before they gave emancipation to women even. It was only when we were in Zürich that one last Canton gave equality...

*The vote, the vote. Yes.*

The vote for women. Very, very conservative. It wasn't an easy congregation. But a challenge and they put up with me for eight years. When I left they gave me this lovely picture of Rotstein...

**[2:26:03]**

*Yes. So that's interesting. In a way, the history of the liberal community and that you felt that the leadership, that it wasn't easy to be not British.*

Oh, not because I'm not British, but I'm just a foreigner.

*Yeah, well...[laughs]*

Yes. It's very difficult in Switzerland to this very day, to get citizenship.

*Yes, - no, I mean...*

You've got to have a lot of money.

*Yeah, I meant now, coming back to Britain that you said, within the Liberal movement, it wasn't so easy for you... because of your background.*

Well, even though it was difficult, I gradually made changes. Made it a bit more Liberale, but with certain things I draw the line, you know?

*Where do you draw the line, for example?*

Well, the first services at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue mainly all in English. Very little Hebrew.

*Yes?*

They had no... 'Even had service on a Sunday sometimes. Very Liberal, you know? And... And very, very short Haggadah, very short service. First prayer book had twenty-five services mainly in English. And... And that was more English than Hebrew, than Jewish, I could say. I'm exaggerating, you know, but it was a very, very shortened, very Liberal service indeed. Hardly anybody at the Liberal Synagogue when I first went in 1950 wore any Kippah or Tallit. Now they mainly all do.

*Yes. And how do you see the influence of the Continental Rabbis, in the various movements? How - How does it compare? I mean you had on the one hand the Munk Synagogue, German tradition. You had Belsize Square. You had ...quite a few rabbis in the Liberal movement.*

Very few except John Rayner...

*Yes?*

... and Hugo Gryn. Similar influence, you know? Continental influence. Continental... certain qualities ...of leadership. Had a great deal of influence. John Rayner in the Liberal movement. Hugo Gryn in the Reform. And Salzberger and Kokotek - Belsize Square.

*Yeah. And how do you think that it changed the landscape of British Jewry, British... rabbinical leadership? Do you see?*

**[2:28:52]**

Well, we over the years became more united, and much more tolerant. But I wrote an article in Jewish News. Have you seen it?

*No.*

For my 90th birthday, where I complain bitterly of the discrimination against the Liberals, which I suffered, since my ordination.

*By the Orthodox, or...?*

By the Orthodox.

*Give us some examples. For example?*

Well, when the AJEX service or the Orthodox synagogue I attended they refused me an Aliya because I'm a Liberal rabbi. And another example I gave was at a certain funeral where the rabbi hardly knew the family, and the family asked whether I could say a few words. Said the

rabbi, “No.” And Chief Rabbi Sachs at the Cenotaph - I asked whether I could recite the – you know the Cenotaph I take the service now for eleven years.

*Yes.*

Sharing with the Chief Rabbi. And Sachs didn't, when I asked whether I could do the memorial prayer, because my parents and grandparents died, he said, “It's not appropriate for you to do it.” Not appropriate for me! Which was the biggest insult I've ever had in my whole life. So I said to Jonathan Sachs, “My parents and grandparents died, and it's more appropriate for me to recite the El Male Rachamim than anybody else here.” And then he gave way.

*He did?*

Yeah, he had to, I think, because I would have – would have, you know, would have created a fuss at a National Memorial Service if he had said, “No, you can't.”

*Good for you.*

Well, but - but this is a sort of discrimination, you know? The Orthodox rabbis in the 1950s, so-called ‘Reverends’ were much more tolerant. We met each other very often and shared platforms. Now it's impossible!

*So you think it's become worse?*

Much worse. Except there's some hope in the new Chief Rabbi Mirvis...

*You think?*

...who is much more understanding and tolerant. He has already you know let me have El Male Rachamim without anything. Much more friendly and tolerant. He's met our Liberal leader Danny Rich – informally, but there.... He's come to *Limmud*, which Sachs refused. So there's hope for Anglo-Jewry now, that things will improve.

*And what identity, when you raised your children, what identity did you want to pass on to them?*

**[2:31:37]**

Only my own Liberal identity. But another successful thing we did. My wife Ruth started the B'nei B'rith... local in Southgate. I started also CCJ Group, which I led for many years in Southgate. They got quite well known in Southgate, the CCJ. You know CCJ?

*No... What's CCJ?*

Council of Christians and Jews.

*Oh, yes. Yes.*

So B'nei B'rith, a year later we had a men's lodge, of B'nei B'rith. And this was just after Ben Gurion died so we named it 'Ben Gurion Lodge' in his memory. And it was very, very successful for many years, until most members have died away, passed away, or too old. And we closed a few years ago, but we were - for about thirty, forty years we got excellent good work.

*And how would you define yourself in terms of your identity today?*

Well, I'm just a retired Jewish rabbi, you know? I hope to become more and more rabbi and be still involved, you know? And... And I could do much more but nowadays they've- The services are conducted meaning we have so many younger rabbis already. More women rabbis than men rabbis - in our movement. And the students are being encouraged to take services, so I do very, very little. I only helped out when people ask me, people I've known, or married or Bar Mitzvah-ed. So, so- so I help out very little.

*And which synagogue are you closest attached to at the moment?*

**[2:33:37]**



Well, I'm in between. I'm most close at Southgate. They acknowledged me in Southgate when I retired. And, and Finchley I like. St John's Wood is rather too - too cold and liberal for me, because like Upper Berkeley too, you know, it's a very large congregation, and rely - rely on the choir to lead their service much more. So the congregation doesn't join in so much. It's not the same friendly congregation, the same 'ruach' in Hebrew - spirit - as you have in the local synagogues. Where my son is in Woodford, you know, everybody joins in. In Finchley too, the synagogue, with lunchtime, everybody joins in the service. Very -very warm, loving congregation.

*And two of your children became rabbis...*

Yes.

*...which is quite extraordinary.*

Extraordinary and unexpected. I never told them they should or encouraged them in any way. Because they made great sacrifices for it which I greatly respect. My son has run a very successful management consultancy. My daughter was a very, very successful doctor, scientist. Because she did two PhDs already as a medical student and went on to doctor. And PhDs doing quite well in a medical field, suddenly decided she'd like to become a rabbi. And my son was doing quite well; has his own management consultancy doing very good. Suddenly came and said, "I'd like to be a rabbi too." And they both made sacrifices, because they had a family, and had to study for five years. So- wholly unexpected.

*But did you support their decision?*

Sure! I was very proud of them, very pleased - and ordained them of course, as rabbis.

*Yes. So you have started maybe a rabbinical dynasty, or...?*

Don't know!

*What about the grandchildren?*

They might do. I don't think I'll live to see it, but they might, yes.

*Yes. How did that experience do you think impact on you, that separation from your mother?*

**[2:36:13]**

Well it must have an influence in my life, because very early in my life I had this kind of speech defect, you know, I hesitated sometimes. And I was always, my whole life, worried I couldn't get my words out properly. And all sorts of treatments were suggested for it but there's no cure. Just something psychologically going back to my early childhood – must do.

*Did you always have it?*

Yeah.

*Or just after you came here, or...?*

No, always had it, in early childhood, yes. Yes we consulted a doctor already in Berlin when I was a young in school, and said, "Put your hand on your tummy and breathe out slowly...", you know? And so many, various treatments including hypnosis, you know, they tried. Never mind. Because strangely enough, psychologically it doesn't affect me when I take a service. When I conduct any sort of synagogue service, you know, I don't think about it.

[interruption]

*We were talking about your speech and that when you give a sermon... you don't feel it.*

No, it never affected me, fortunately. Yes.

*Maybe it's just the- Maybe it's the synagogue environment or...?*

I don't know. Psychologists can explain it. I can't. Yes.

*And in any other ways? Did you talk about your past with your children, for example?*

**[2:37:54]**

Yes, they all knew about my past. Because of stories told, you know, films taken, interviews, you know. They take great pride in my achievements. They came with me to the Stolpersteinverlegung in Berlin of course, you know?

*Tell us about the Stolperstein please, because we're on camera. What have you arranged?*

Well, the Community arranged a certain date, finally, on which we could all come to Kantstraße. And it turned out to be quite an event, because nine of my family went with me there. Three rabbis, local rabbis and friends of mine. The Mayor of Berlin came and spoke and welcomed us. And then this Pfarrer Detlev Riemer, from Luckenwalde, who was now retired in Berlin, he came too. So it was quite an event, which was also reported in the 'Bild-Zeitung' the following day. Now what was wonderful about this ceremony also, that where my grandparents used to live on the third floor was a rich American who has family in Berlin. So he showed me the flat. And he took a film of the event, and photos welcoming us to the flat, which was very nice. And he offered to pay for the next Stolpersteine for my uncle and aunt I mentioned in East Berlin. So it was a very emotional ceremony and, and – and my daughter read the Kaddish in German. My son recited the Kaddish in Hebrew. I made a little speech. Very, very nice. Very moving ceremony.

*Was it important for you to have the names there?*

**[2:37:54]**

Yes, yes, important to me. I've very glad I did it, yes.

*In the location as well. Maybe that brings us a little bit, because you didn't tell us exactly what happened to your father. Because there's a Stolperstein for your father as well.*

Well, all I know, is that he re-married, you know, and – and then was sent to – to Kovno.

*And you think together with your mother?*

Yes.

*Which is interesting...*

I never knew they went on the same date.

*But you didn't get- because there are some instances where if a Jewish man was married to an Aryan wife, that they were not deported; they were exempt.*

If you know the Rosenstraße- Do you know the Rosenstraße in Berlin?

*Yes. So for example, yes.*

That was a wonderful example.

*Yes. But that apparently didn't apply to your father.*

No. No – no.

*When did you... Was that also- You found that out after the war?*

**[2:41:04]**

Only after the war, yes.

*That he had passed away. But you kept in touch with his second wife?*

Yes, as I mentioned, his wife.

*Yes. How do you think your life would have been if it hadn't been for – for Hitler coming to power in Germany?*

Well, I would have somehow finished my schooling in Berlin, became a very proud German too, you know. Because my father was such a proud German, you know. Because he served

in the First World War. Was always proud of his Red Cross – Iron Cross – sorry. Iron Cross and said, “I am a *Deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* [I am a German citizen of Jewish faith]...,” he used to say. Very proud. He said, “They won’t touch me. I’m completely assimilated. No Jewish practices.”

*So the Judaism in you comes more from your mother’s side?*

And grandparents – really more from my grandparents’ side.

*And do you think would you have become a rabbi?*

No. No. Not even when I went from Holland in 1949. I never thought of becoming a rabbi; it never entered my mind. I thought of going on Aliya as a mentioned, yes?

*And how do you feel towards... maybe both the British Jewish Community and the British Government regarding you, you think? Did they do enough, or should they have done more? And that brings us to today’s situation as well, but...?*

Well the British Government they gave me British nationality you know. The Refugee Committee looked after us very well during the war. The spirit in wartime in Manchester was wonderful. Everybody helped each other. And I’m so sad to see conditions today. In Manchester during the war, nobody would dream of having their bicycle locked up where they’ve parked it. The- Cars weren’t necessarily locked at all, you know? There was no - no vandalism, no robberies, no violence. Everybody helped each other. And that wonderful war-time spirit is gone. We live in fear now. You know? Everybody’s being locked up, you know. Security. Terrorism has returned. Who would have believed in the early flights in the 1960s, that you would have to go through the agonising... security at each airport? You know? You wouldn’t dream of it. It wasn’t necessary! It’s a terrible situation in the world today. Who would have dreamed then that you would have guards outside the synagogue? Each synagogue.

*But do you think that the British Government should have done more in - when they could, in the late 30s?*

[2:44:27]

At that time they could, but nowadays... It's not the British Government only, but the whole of Europe and pretty much the whole of the world!

*Today, with the refugee crisis?*

No, I mean in general. General civilisation. We don't think we're civilised any more. I mean every time I go now into the city, I sometimes walk down the Strand. Have you seen how many people sleep rough?

*Yes.*

So in the twenty-first century in the most civilised country in the world, people sleep rough at night! I mean it's hair-raising. It's makes me cry, we see them there, and we can't do anything about it? We could. We should. Nobody was sleeping rough in wartime, 50s or 60s, or even in the 70s I think.

*Yeah... Tell me, because there was a vote in Parliament, and you were involved in some way. Can you tell us a little bit about that?*

Which vote was that?

*With Lord Dubs, the meeting you had.*

Well I was shocked and disappointed, yes. I was upset and Lord Dubs was upset and my children and everybody was upset at the British Government's attitude. Last Monday fortunately, you know, a few days ago they amended it somehow that they should have – shouldn't have a certain number of refugees. Or few as, as possible- Not as possible, as... as they see fit, shall I say? The Government will let in people as they seem appropriate or fit. Without numbers.

*But you had a meeting to lobby the government. You had a meeting to convince them that they should let in...?*

That meeting took part in the Houses of Parliament, yes.

*Yes. And who did you speak to?*

Well it was convened by Yvette Cooper and Lord Dubs. And they had a few people from Refugee organisations that spoke as well.

*And you gave testimony?*

I gave my testimony. I was asked how I felt, and I told them, yes, how I still feel.

*And what do you feel about the situation today? What should the British Government do?*

They should be much more generous in letting in the refugees. Spend much more money on them. Because refugees, I'm convinced, and we Jewish people have proved it, how – how such great benefit refugees could be. Most of the refugees coming here are only anxious to work. There's restriction; many of them are not allowed to work. I don't know why. Many are interned for a long time, you know. For how long? How long they are interned for? They don't know when they're going to be released, what's going to happen to them. It's all rather narrow-minded and expedient and inhumane. We are doing ...I don't know.

**[2:47:25]**

*And you are going to Calais in fact next week?*

Yes.

*And what are you going to do in Calais?*

Well we are going to be meeting the refugees there in camps and also meet the organisations who are encouraged to try and help to see what they can do, to make their lot easier. Grant some relief. Supper. And help them... to get ways to emigrate.

*And who is organising the visit?*

I'm not sure which organisation, but it's led by Lord Dubs you know. He's coming.

*Yeah?*

I think it's some refugee organisation that's involved. Yes.

*But it's a cause dear to your heart.*

What?

*It is a cause which is dear to your heart, to do something...about today.*

Yes. Oh, yes. Not sure if I can personally do very much more than I've done, except protest. I think I have an impact.

*Yeah. And maybe – can you just tell me? For you, what is the most important part of your continental background? Jewish background?*

**[2:48:45]**

The most important part of my continental background?

*In terms of your heritage, if you see it...*

Well one thing I'm... convinced of, I'm multi-national. I don't believe in patriotism, or in 'My country right or wrong'. I feel myself- I have a British Passport, but I feel myself very close to Holland where I have an affinity. Very close to Israel. And I've become reconciled to Germany too, because the Germany now is so different than it was fifty or sixty years ago. Because Germany is trying to be democratic. And Germany is a country that outlaws anti-Semitism much more than we do. And Germany is trying its utmost to make up for what they have done, now, to the Jewish people. So I have a much closer affinity to Germany than I had many, many years ago. And I'm following the example of Leo Baeck- my great hero was Leo



Baek – influenced me, but, you know the story? He went back soon after the war to Germany. He became a Großes Verdienstkreuz in Germany; he became a very close friend of the first Präsident of post-war Germany, Theodor Heuss. And he came back, and he believed in - in reconciliation. Another one of, talking of reconciliation, is Martin Buber.

*Yes.*

He went back soon afterwards. So, lectured in Germany, became a Friedenspreis of the Frankfurt University soon after the war. And the third of my heroes is very much in the news at the moment, is Yehudi Menuhin, who also went back as a Jew to play in the camps and play in Berlin Philharmonic. All signs of reconciliation, which I think was achieved... after the war.

**[2:51:01]**

*Yeah... And also Rabbi Salzberger.*

Oh, that's- You are right. Another good example.

*Yeah. Which is interesting, because they probably did it at a time where a majority of British Jews would not go to Germany.*

Oh, yes, that's right. That's right. Yehudi Menuhin was very much attacked you know, for going back and performing there. Yes.

*Is there anything which we haven't discussed which you'd like to add, which I haven't asked you?*

No, you've asked me so much, I don't think we left anything out of my life- from my life story, anything - no.

*Is there any message you would like to give to anyone who is going to watch this interview, based on your experiences?*

Well, it's always said, 'we don't learn from history'. I hope I've learned something from my own history. And I hope my children and grandchildren, I'm very proud, you know.

Whatever I've achieved, the greatest achievement is always to keep your family together, and inspire them, you know? Without much- trying hard, but I managed to do that. They followed very much in Liberal Jewish footsteps, and teaching and practising, you know, which is very rare, even among the Rabbinate, nowadays. So... So my famous passage is the last passage in our Bible. Prophet Malachi says, the last sentence in our bible says, 'Elijah will come and will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents'. So very often, even conducting funerals I quoted that. 'If you do nothing else', to quote Elijah, to bring the Messianic age nearer, 'you keep the family together.'

*Can you do that in Hebrew? What's the Hebrew wording for that?*

Rabbi Jacobi quotes the Hebrew passage in Hebrew

כי־הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם בָּא בְּעַר פְּתֻגּוֹר וְהָיוּ כָּל־זוֹדִים וְכָל־עֲשָׂה רָשָׁעָה לָשׁ וְלִהְיוֹת אֲתֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר:  
יָשׁוּב לְהֵם עֵרֶשׁ וְעִנְיָ:

Returning – or turning the hearts to the parents and the parents to their children. That's my final message.

**[2:53:33]**

*That's a lovely saying. And just the last- you said you learned from your history. What did you learn?*

From my history?

*Mn-hnn. You said yourself you learned from your history.*

Well, that we should be much more tolerant and understanding, you know?

*Rabbi Jacobi I'd like to thank you very much for this interview, and now we're going to look at some of your photographs and documents. Thank you very much for sharing your story.*

Thank you very much for letting me recall my life. And...and your questions – yes? – your interest. Much appreciated.

*Thank you... Thank you.*

[End of interview]

**[2:54:12]**

**[2:54:43]**

[Photographs]

Photo 1

This is the first- This is the first picture I have of me of my youth, taken in Berlin. I must have been two or three years old then.

Photo 2

This is a photo of my first primary school class, in Auerbach in Vogtland, and I was as a Jewish boy usually confined to the back, so you see me on the fifth pupil, back row, from the right. That was when I was six years old, in '31, 1931.

[This a very quick deterioration when you're younger. My wife was first diagnosed, you know...]

Photo 3

My cousin Werner, on the left of this photo was born three months after me. And also in 1925. As we were both single, lone children, we became known as 'twins' and we became very close together as - not as cousins - as brothers. He unfortunately- Werner was deported to Riga during the war and died. And this photo must have been taken when we were about eight years old.

Photo 4

This is a historic picture of the wedding of my uncle and my aunt in the Brüdervereinshaus, in Berlin in 1934. The young bride was only twenty years old. My uncle was seventeen years older. And... And my, my mother is standing just behind the bride. I am standing next to my grandmother on the left of the picture, as a pageboy. And next to me are my grandparents on my mother's side. Oma [grandma] Klara and Opa [grandpa] Otto - Jacobi, yes.

**[2:57:16]**

And what was the name of your uncle, please?

Louis Jacobi und Eva Jacobi. They survived Belsen and he they emigrated to Holland soon after their marriage and rescued me from Germany to Holland. And I again stayed with them in Holland after the war.

Photo 5

For six years, we stayed in Auerbach in Vogtland near the Czech border. And this picture must have been taken in Auerbach when I was about eight years old or older. I'm in front of my mother. And on the left of the photo is my aunt, who unfortunately was disabled. And in front of her is again my cousin Werner, who visited us very often in Auerbach.

Photo 6

This picture was taken certainly in Berlin, and I'm in front again with my cousin Anneliese. She was born in 1935, so this picture must have been taken when it was late 1937 or '38. My grandparents are behind the children. My mother on the right. On the left is again the aunt, and on the back are Lutz and Eva the parents whose wedding photos you saw earlier. And at the back is Käthe and Leo Salomon. Käthe Salomon was an older sister of my mother, who married a widower, Leo. So it's a very happy family reunion in Berlin.

Photo 7

This is the only photo I have of ...[repeated below due to bad sound quality]

This is the only photo I have of Mijnheer [J. F.] Wijsmuller, who was a banker in Amsterdam, the husband of Truus Wijsmuller who rescued us from Holland. And he was very good in looking after the refugee – refugee children in Amsterdam.

## Photo 8

After last minute rescue escape from Holland, we first stayed in Falmouth Harbour, and then on the 19th of May 1940, our boat the Bodegraven – the Dutch freighter – finally landed – was allowed, got permission - to land in Liverpool on the 19th of May 1940. This picture was taken by the, a local newspaper, and I went to the archives of the paper and got this picture... printed out for me.

**[3:00:32]**

*And is this really- It's basically the last boat out of...Holland?*

Holland.

## Photo 9

This picture is taken in the boys' hostel for refugee children in Withington, the Heaton Road in Manchester. And must have been taken when I was eighteen years old. On I'm the one wearing glasses on the left of the photo. One on the right of the photo with a white coat, was our excellent cook from Vienna. On her right, is a couple, who looked after the children, the wardens. Unfortunately I have lost contact with most of the children now. But some of them are still alive, and I've still contact with some of them.

## Photo 10

This shop [owned] by a very nice English couple, Jones, employed me as an errand-boy and shop assistant when I was fifteen years old. My first place of employment. They took a shine to me and looked after me. I loved them, and very often was trusted to manage the shop myself. And... very often saw them after the war.

## Photo 11

After two years working in this fruit shop, I left the shop because I didn't see any future there, and I wanted to - to be a car mechanic. And so I got a job at the Grosvenor Garage there, and started to drive, and looked after the store up there. And as the Grosvenor Garage also part of it had a small ammunition factory, it was regarded as a Reserve Occupation. So I

worked there until I was called into the Army, and I'm the fourth from the left, in the back row.

#### Photo 12

In 1945, I joined the Jewish Brigade Group. Part of the British Army. And drove a 1500 Dutch Truck which you can't see clearly in the picture, but on the wing on the right-hand side is the blue and white stripes with the Magen David - the sign of the Jewish Brigade. And so I drove the Jewish Brigade all over. We were stationed in Dendermonde, a small town between Ghent and Antwerp. And— And I did quite a lot of driving with this truck, once all the way to Paris... to smuggle arms to the Haganah from the Jewish Brigade.

**[3:03:55]**

#### Photo 13

After the Jewish Brigade disbanded in 1946, I was enrolled again in the Royal West Kent Regiment, who sent me to the British Army on the Rhine in a town called Bielefeld in Germany. It's part of the British Interpreters' Pool. But as I could drive, again they appointed me as a driver rather than as an interpreter. But I did excellent Jewish work there, and met the German Jewish Community in Bielefeld, and we became very, very close friends here in Bielefeld.

#### Photo 14

Soon after the war, I re-joined my family in Amsterdam. And this picture taken in Amsterdam, must have been in 1948 with my aunt on my right-hand side and my cousin Annelies on my left-hand side.

#### Photo 15

Maccabi, that's the Jewish sport organisation all over the world. Very popular. And I joined Maccabi when I stayed in Amsterdam, and we did quite a lot of sport.

#### Photo 16

In 1949, the Dutch Liberal Community sent me as a youth delegate to World Union Conference of Progressive Judaism in Amsterdam, where I first met the Honourable Lily Montagu. And she influenced me to become a rabbi. Instead of going on an Aliya to Israel I

stayed in London. She was most helpful to me and sent me this greeting card. She is on the right. At the bottom of the picture, her sister who was two years older. And these two sisters never married. And did wonderful social work and were honoured by the King. On the back standing is another sister, the Honourable Helen Franklin, who married very well into British industry. But the three sisters were always very close together and helpful to each other.

#### Photo 17

In 1952 I moved to Aberdeen in Scotland. In 1954 I began a correspondence with Rose Solomon who lived in the B'nai Israel community in Bombay. She came to London in 1956, and we straight away got engaged. And this is our first engagement photo, 1956.

**[3:07:31]**

#### Photo 18

This is our photo at our chuppah, or the wedding, on the 7th of April 1957. And... as I was an only child, I married into a family of eight. So- So four of the eight are actually in this picture. There are two of Rose's sisters... there, her eldest sister, Sarah, and her younger sister Winnie. And behind the boy in the back row is her younger brother Joey who died unfortunately. They all died quite recently in London. Rose's parents could not come from Bombay so the family was represented there. So on the right of Rose is one of her uncles in England, Uncle Sam. And then on the back row, standing at the back is... Bobby Marks, who I married in my Wembley Congregation when he was already a confirmed bachelor in the 50s. But I recently attended his 40th – 40th wedding anniversary. He is now ninety-five years old and is still doing well. At the bottom on my left you will recognise now my uncle and aunt who had come from Holland especially for my chuppah.

#### Photo 19

Now this is a lovely family photo taken on our 25th wedding anniversary. On Rose's right is my eldest child, daughter Margaret, who was also born in 1957. Behind her, is our eldest son Richard, who was born three years later. And next to me at the back, with a left arm around me, is our younger son David, who was born the following year. ...At our home in Wembley. We lived in Wembley at that time, and it was taken by a photographer at our home.

#### Photo 20

I was ordained at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue on the 16th of December 1961. And the following day I was inducted as a Minister in Southgate - Southgate Progressive Synagogue, accompanied by the Reverend Herbert Richer, on my right, who also officiated on our marriage. And on the left, is... is our Lay Minister, Joseph Ascher, who was one of the leading organisers and rabbis of our Liberal movement then. I stayed at Southgate from this day onwards 1961 until 1975.

[3:11:06]

#### Photo 21

In, in 2006, I got a surprise from the Lord Chamberlain that I'd been recommended for an MBE awarded by the Queen. Member of the British Empire, completely out of the blue, and here you see the Queen giving me the medal for the MBE at Buckingham Palace. It was my – my happiest moment, as you can see. I admired the Queen very much because she stood for one hour shaking hands with 100 people. And the Lord Chamberlain said to the Queen, “Rabbi Harry Jacobi for services to the Anglo Jewish Community.” And she nodded and didn't know what to say. So I said, “Ma'am” – you're supposed to say ‘Ma'am’ to the Queen – “Ma'am, we are both the same age. We have both reasons to celebrate.” And she said, “Oh, that's wonderful.” And shook my hand. [laughs]

#### Photo 22

This photo was taken in Stratford-on-Avon. I took Rose for her 70th birthday to a weekend, to Stratford. We stayed in a hotel. Of course we saw a Shakespeare play. And all the family came to Stratford to surprise Rose and give us all lunch in this hotel. The persons on the photo are of course on my far right is Richard, my son. Next to him my daughter-in-law Lynn. And their first – their first child...is Abigail. Next to Abigail behind my wife is Margaret, our oldest daughter. And in front of Rose is Richard's younger daughter, who is now in Canterbury studying music. And next to me at the back is my younger son David. And then on the far left is the other David, my son-in-law, Margaret's husband in Birmingham. In front of him is their youngest son Yoni, who is already seventeen years old now. So there, my other younger granddaughter, born of Margaret and David Ehrlich, is not in the photo; she wasn't born yet. And my great-grandson, born last November [2015] of course, isn't on the photo either. But it was a very nice family gathering. Complete surprise for Rose.



Rabbi Jacobi, thank you very much again for this interview. Thank you.

Yes please, one more photo.

Photo 23

In March 2015, nine of us from my family went to Berlin for the laying of the Stolpersteine in front of our house, Kantstraße 59. We laid Stolpersteine for my grandparents and the people felt I should be included too. And another set of Stolpersteine are for my parents. These are the ones for my parents, yes?

Yes.

My parents and myself, and another lot are for my grandparents who lived on the same premises.

So now you know these will be there for a long time.

This is perfect. Because we have no gravestone at least it will be remembered at least for- I hope for a long, long time. It was a very emotional ceremony, the Stolpersteine, with the Bürgermeister, the Lord Mayor from Charlottenburg came, three rabbis from the local community, friends of mine, came, you know. And it received a lot of publicity, and did us a lot of good, I think.

Again, Rabbi Jacobi, thank you very, very much. This is really the end of the interview.

All right, Bea. You did well.

[End of photographs]

**[3:16:18]**