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**AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive**

**AJR**

**Winston House, 2 Dollis Park**

**London N3 1HF**

**[ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk](mailto:ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk)**

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### Interview Transcript Title Page

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<b>Ref. no:</b>	174

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Mendelsson
<b>Forename:</b>	Eva
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Female
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	27 March 1931
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Offenburg, Germany

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	18 May 2016
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	London
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
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## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV174  
**NAME:** Eva Mendelsson  
**DATE:** 18<sup>th</sup> May 2016  
**LOCATION:** London, UK  
**INTERVIEWER:** Bea Lewkowicz

**[Part One]**

**[0:00:00]**

*Today is the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2016. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Eva Mendelsson. My name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.*

*Can you please tell me your name?*

Eva Mendelsson.

*And when were you born?*

27<sup>th</sup> of March, 1931.

*And where were you born?*

In Offenburg...Germany.

*Mrs Mendelsson thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for the Refugee Voices project. Can you tell me please about your family background?*

I was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1931, the youngest daughter of Eduard and Sylvia Cohn. I had a sister Esther who was born in 1926, Myriam who was born in 1929 and I was born in 1931. We lived in Wilhelmstraße number 15, and we had a wine sale, alcohol business.

*And how did you parents, how did they get to Offenburg? Or your grandparents. Can you tell us a little bit about that?*

Well, I know that my father- I found an advert in the paper that it must have been an arranged marriage. Because how does somebody from Posen get to Offenburg, you know? So, I believe I'm right in saying it was an arranged marriage. My grandfather had four- five daughters and he had to marry them all and my mother was the youngest. She was ... an afterthought [inaudible] the family.

*And did he have the wine sale business, your grandfather?*

It was my grandfather's business.

*And what was his name, please?*

Eduard Oberbrunner.

*Yeah. And so which year...?*

**[0:01:51]**

He died in 1932 when I was one year old, but we lived in this lovely house and at the bottom you had the business. So I heard, one heard you know, the barrels moving around and it was a busy life. And he loved inviting people to his little - what do you call it's like a - gazebo, where people came and then they had a little drink with him.

*Your grandfather?*

Yes, un-unusual for Jewish people but yes, he loved whatever it was.

*Yeah. Can you describe Offenburg to us please?*

It's a small town. There were about 300 Jewish families there. I think my grandmother was one of the first girls born there in 1865. There was a *mikva* there, but nobody knew it until now. They only found it now, so it's a- So there must have been some Jews even way before 1865. We had a synagogue... There were Jewish... Jewish occasions. My mother might have written a poem for them. And we always recited it whenever [inaudible] left, or something like that. But we were not religious Jews. We weren't traditional Jews. And I think had we been more Jewish and less German we might have got out of the country. Because my mother was well aware that since 1933 things were going really bad... for us Jews.

*But were you aware of that at all?*

I went to school when I was... six, and I do remember that I had to sing 'Die Fahne Hoch'. One might have heard 'Judenstinker' but it wasn't, it wasn't a bad thing. Certain laws came in, and we were not allowed to sit on park benches, we were not allowed to go to the swimming pool. We were not allowed to have pets. We lost our dear maid Minna who was under forty, so she had to go and we had some horrible old Alsatian women – who were not nearly as nice. ...We knew things were happening and didn't understand it. I can only say that the first thing - The first thing I remember is 1938, when they fetched my father out of his bed... at seven o'clock in the morning. And I think when bad things happen in your life, you forget what was before because they were the most important things. My life starts more... since 1938 I would say. And somehow, my memory left them all deeply ingrained.

*Yeah. Before we get to '38, what other- What else do you remember? You said you had a maid. Tell us a little bit- Who lived in the house? What did the house look like?*

**[0:04:40]**

It was- It was a fairly big house. Now it's in three different flats but at that time it was a family home. We had lots of friends. Didn't matter whether they were Jewish or not Jewish. It's- Life was- There was a community, so people would have Jewish functions to which they would go. The maid was a lady from the country. A peasant, who wanted to improve herself and she loved to be with my mother where she learned a lot from. And there was some liking. I mean she gave her my old nappies, my old clothes in the hope that she would marry, but unfortunately, she didn't. But we loved her dearly. And if she did something nice-

She invited us to the *Vinzentiushaus* where they had- On the day off, on Sunday, she would take me, and I'd learn all the German folk songs there. And I loved- I really loved that. Or she would take us for weekends to her home in Neuweim which is by Bühlen. And they had vineyards, and they had plum trees, and the cows and it was just a totally different life. She cycled... maybe thirty-eight kilometres to- backwards and forwards. And she kept her relationship with us, although she worked for other people later on. But things got worse for us when we had to sell the house. In 1934 the house had to be sold.

*Why?*

Bad business. We got very little for it. Things had begun- Things had happened, so we sold it. I don't know what we got for it. I haven't the faintest idea, but it had to be sold. And then we- Our situation diminished more or less from that way on to smaller places, flats. My father had to go away to travel to- he came home at the weekends. He was trying to get business. I mean I've read postcards that he wrote to my mother, all that our maid picked it up later on. And it said he had a bad week. He didn't do so well. [ringing- sound break]

*Yes, you said your father started to travel. Doing what?*

He was a wine merchant, so tried to sell wine. And... life just carried on. It was- It was a happy family. Mother, three children. But they had problems because Esther got polio when she was four years old. And there were lots of, you know, hospital visits as she was growing, they always had to prolong the veins so that it grows with her. It was a terrible business. And people came to the house to give her electrolysis. I remember this funny kind of a machine that this lady had who came to the house. It was- I would say it was like any ordinary German family.

**[0:07:53]**

*Yeah, but you were- it quite rural, in a sense.*

It was, it was a small town at the time. There were perhaps 60,000 people. Now it's got, I don't know, it's huge.

*It's not that small. And what about the landscape? Do you have any memories of the landscape?*

Wonderful, surrounded by the Black Forest, by the mountains. It's a lovely place. Today, when I look back, I can see what my mother loved. She always said she loved the country. She didn't really want to- didn't want to leave. She knew they wanted to go to Palestine, but... there was not this hurry that most people had. Many people, many of the friends left bit by bit, but there were – I don't know how many were left at the time.

*But you said they wanted to go to Palestine?*

Oh yes. I remember we actually changed the furniture. We had metal beds instead of wooden beds. I don't know why that's important in Israel; I can't tell you. But I can still see these cold framed beds instead of the wooden ones, the old-fashioned furniture. I will tell you a very strange story later on. I have found furniture from my uncle from that time, which had been auctioned, and people didn't want it any more. Now in this time of life the parents had it. They bought it for nothing. But now in Emmendingen - I was talking there - I found this furniture. And I said, "What is this? It's very old." They told me the story that it was auctioned. Anyway...

*But they didn't manage to...*

They...

*Or it was too late by the time they tried?*

We, we- We had, it was just locked up. The flat was locked up. But that comes later.

*OK. What about, do you remember any friends from school? Any...at that time?*

**[0:09:53]**

The German school, I was only in there for three months. And there was one person, once I signed a book. Somebody came up to me and said, "Do you remember me? I sat next to you." But I hadn't a clue. Can't remember any of that now.

*So, for how long could you go to that German Grundschule?*

Maybe three months.

*And then what happened?*

Jewish children were not allowed to go to a Christian school anymore. So, we had to be boarded out, and travel to Freiburg which is six to eight kilometres. And three families - Jewish families - had to be found; one for Myriam, one for Esther and one for me. And every Friday we would go home, and every Sunday we would travel back to Freiburg. And Esther, being the eldest, she was in charge of us. But Esther had a problem seeing that she had polio. And she found it very difficult this travelling. At this school we had two classrooms. It was in what is today the Lessing-Realschule. They had two rooms which were devoted to the Jewish children aged between six and fourteen or sixteen; I can't tell you exactly. And we had Jewish teachers there. And... in three classes for ages six to sixteen you can imagine how you can sort that one out. How much you could learn. We were not allowed to go at playtime, the same playtime as the Christian children. We were totally segregated from them.

*Yeah... And which family- Where did you go to?*

I stayed with Blochs, Myriam stayed with Franks and Esther stayed... I don't know. I can't remember who. Three different families. And they were more religious than we were and I learnt a lot more about my Judaism. I learnt to say the prayers in the morning when you get up and at night when you say the Shema. Because we only said...what do you say ...in German... it's gone. Anyway. We didn't say the Shema. And then we learned to say the Shema.

**[0:12:04]**

*So, it was quite a change.*



It was a change. I was- I was homesick. I mean I was still only seven, you know? And there was not the love that you get. They had their own child.

*Just before we- I want to go back just a little bit. You said you remember some of the songs the maid taught you. Do you remember anything? Any of the childhood songs?*

[Eva sings:]

*Horch was kommt von drauen rein...Holla hi, holla ho. Holla hi-a-ho. Wird wohl mein Schatzliebchen sein, holla hi a-ho. Geht vorbei und kommt nicht rein holla hi holla ho. Wird's wohl nicht gewesen sein holla hi a-ho.*

*Amazing that you remember this.*

Yes, well I just loved- I loved going with her. Wherever she went, that was, that was great.

*So, you were very close to her.*

Mn-hnn.

*Being the youngest probably as well.*

Yes.

*And you said you also remember the...the Nazi song, in school, you said...*

Yeah, But- *was war das?*... [But what was it?]

*You just mentioned before...*

[Eva sings lines of 'Die Fahne hoch. Die Reihen sind geschlossen. SA marschiert im ruhigen festen Schritt. Kameraden der Rotfront und Reaktion geschlossen, marschier'n im Gleis nana ruhig mit. Zum letzten Mal wird zum Appell geblasen...Weiß nimmer viel mehr (I don't remember much more)]

And that was not a nice feeling, and ...I don't know.

*When was this sung? When was this?*

In the mornings you went out in the open place, and they raised the flag and... that was sung.

**[0:14:00]**

*And what did the Jewish children do when this song was sung?*

We had to- We just joined in. You didn't...

*You joined in; you sang it. Hence you remember it, because you had to sing it.*

That's right.

*And this was in - in Freiburg?*

It was in Offenburg.

*In Offenburg, in the Grundschule?*

In the *Grundschule*, which I was only in for a short while.

*And do you remember the - on the personal level, once you had to go to Freiburg - the relationship between the locals and the Jews or your mother and ...?*

In Offenburg, I remember my mother being hurt when people went to the other side of the road because they were not allowed to greet them anymore. And my mother had so many friends, and the pain, that suddenly people would listen to this, you know? That I recall. And I remember Minna taking me to the swimming pool which I was not allowed to. But she just managed to get me in there, and we got in. My mother was very hurt that she couldn't sit in

the Rosengarten which she loved. She loved the flowers there. And they were very simple things that you couldn't do anymore.

**[0:15:18]**

*Such as sitting in a- on a bench.*

On a, on a bench. And you couldn't go to the cinema. You couldn't go to the swimming pool. You couldn't do all the things... Very gradually, they dehumanized you, bit by bit.

*And tell us a little bit about your mother because she wrote poems.*

My mother, she was...one of the stories, 'Mother who are you?' Because I really got to know her through her poetry, by reading and trying to understand what her life was like. I think she had a difficult life. She basically had to look after her father who had a- he was left. His wife died when she was fifty-six. So, he had- she had a lot of- she had a hard life. And then her father died- Her father died. And then she married my father, and at first that was- this was a wonderful relationship. They had a honeymoon in that she wrote a poem about Chianti when- on her honeymoon. That sounded really very good. But I don't know too... you know. I wanted to know. I went to Offenburg, and I asked if somebody can tell me something about my mother. And one lady who was an artist, she remembered my mother. She was a couple of years younger than my mother, and she tried to tell me her expression and what-have-you. But as she was talking, this lady, she was telling me about... her husband who was a Nazi you know, whose Nazi boots were standing outside, you know. And then I wanted to get up; I didn't want to stay there. My friend said, "Come on. Sit down." But actually, as I can tell you... I remember there were three of us, and Esther had polio, so Esther would never be punished, because Esther was the poor little girl. So, we'd not sleep; after lunch we were supposed to sit down and sleep. So, we would run around the table. And when we heard our mother's footsteps we'd go into the nearest bed. And you hoped if you were in Esther's bed you wouldn't get smacked. Fantastic imagination, you know. They did believe in smacking of course in those days.

*But was she very educated? Was she...?*

**[0:17:34]**

She was educated. My mother got prizes even in her...as a child, she wrote poetry. And some of it was published then...

*What was her maiden name, please? Your mother's name?*

Sylvia Oberbrunner.

*And later Sylvia Cohn.*

Yeah. I think- truthfully, I think she married beneath her. I don't think her husband was her equal. But I'm telling you all this more what I've read, and tried to understand. I don't really know that. I can't remember what they were like as a - as a couple. It seemed, everything seemed perfectly good.

*Yes. Yeah. And you were very young.*

Well, yes, I was, I was seven. I was eight years old when my father left Germany. 1939, yes. I was eight years old.

*Yeah.*

But as I tell you, when nasty things happen...

*You remember.*

It makes a tremendous impression, even if you don't quite understand.

*Yes, so what was that in your own memory? What is that cut? What is that ...special...?*

**[0:18:46]**

Kristallnacht.

*Kristallnacht.*

Kristallnacht. When they came at seven o'clock in the morning. And they yanked my father out in his nighty. Nighty they used to wear. And they took him away. And what was wrong with him? What did he do? What was... you know. And there came two of those...two- I don't know whether they were SA or SS. And they took him away. And then my mother rang round and said, "What's happened?" "What? Did it happen to you?" "They've taken Ed away." And they found out that everybody else was in the same boat. All the men had been collected. They did not desecrate the synagogue then, because it was attached to another building. But they took the Torah, threw it out of the window. And my picture there will show you, they didn't even know how to draw a *Hakenkreuz*. They didn't make a good job of it. To desecrate the portion - it's just horrific, yes?

*Of a synagogue...*

Of the synagogue. My father then disappeared then for six weeks. He went on the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> [November 1938] they took him to prison. And I had to sing, „*Muss i denn, muss i denn zum Städele hinaus und du mein Schatz bleibst hier...* [I have to leave the town, I have to leave the town, but you, my darling, you stay here] *Wenn i komm, wenn i komm, wenn i NIE wieder komm*“ [The song goes, „when I come back”, but she sings “when I never come back”...]

And he took the journey that takes ten minutes to the station, took an hour. And people were looking at them. Those who had a- they made them wear a top hat, so that they could make fun of them. You know, not very- not very nice.

*Oh, so, they had to sing it?*

**[0:20:20]**

They had to sing it.

*They made them sing it?*

They made them sing it. And then what happens after the Dachau- After the, you know, the journey to Dachau, I can't tell you. They were kept at night in a prison. And ...the first thing my mother got a fortnight later, she got a postcard. "*Es geht mir gut. Bitte beobachtet die Beschreibung* In other words, twenty-five words we're allowed to write. And there again, it's on my picture behind which shows you the...the postcard. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, there was a - a ring- a ring on the bell. And I went down, and I saw my father. I was afraid of him. And I shouted, "*Mutti, Mutti, ich glaub', es ist Vater!*" [*Mum, mum, I think, it is Dad!*"] His head was shaven, and he had lost so much weight. And I was a bit frightened of him, somehow, this bald head. It was just, you know, I was seven. And my mother she came of course, and they had this reunion. And apparently that's the only time that she'd seen my father cry. And then she went out and she did some shopping. Sauerkraut and *Wüurstchen*. That was rather funny, that that made an impression, you know? And then during the lunch he explained that he had to leave within six months or else they would harm the whole family. Six months later, my father went on a [inaud.] certificate to England, on transit to Palestine. And the idea was to bring the whole family over, afterwards. But bear in mind, that was in June '39. And war broke out September 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> September. You had July, August, so you barely had eight weeks. And in those eight weeks he could not get us out. So, my father went to England, and he landed up in the Kitchener camp in Deal. They had – They had correspondence, but once the war broke out, you can't write anymore. Everything stopped. Now my mother was left with three children. Three children. I don't know what she lived on. I have no idea... Can't tell you. My mother's first reaction or declaration was, she went to the pharmacy to buy soap. And I thought that was very odd. Soap is important? War? You know, that was the connection. Maybe in the First World War there was a shortage. I can't tell you. And then she was frightened for us we were so near the French border. And she decided she would like to go inland more, because we were so close. Twenty-eight kilometres from Strasbourg. So she was afraid of the French bombing. So, we went to Munich. And all ...four of us, went to Munich to live in a rented Jewish- It was a Jewish family. One room. And you had facilities to cook. So, first from house to flat, from flat to one room. And I do remember that we queued a lot at some *Flüchtlingshilfe*, or whatever it was; I can't tell you. But it was in Munich. We used to sit there for an awful long time waiting for something, whatever it was. So we were there from October, 1939, which is very shortly after the war started - she didn't wait long - till March, 1940. And she realized it wasn't so bad, the - the bombing. And she wanted to return to Offenburg, leaving Esther behind. She left Esther in the Kinderheim,

Antonienheim, which was good, as it was a Jewish-run children's home. I don't know if they were orphans mainly. That I can't tell you. But she was happy, so she left Esther. And before we left, on Hanukkah before, we all got little presents. My mother had a little money, she didn't have money but she made me eine Zipfelmütze [pointed hat] out of something else. It was cold. And it was green. And I remember the embroidery. Esther got this *Tagebuch mit Schlüssel* [diary with key]. And she said, "Write all your experiences down. Be happy or not..." She was, in fact the... [Eva cries out in sadness] I'm sorry. On the inside of this book, she said, "Use this book for whatever good or for whatever bad for yourself from... what may happen." And Esther did this faithfully. She kept it until much later. When she realized that she was being deported from Munich to Milbertshofen they had to dig down a place to make a camp for themselves. And the children- the whole children's home was evacuated in... Klosstrasse in Milbertshofen and she wrote us from there. We were still in Offenburg. It's not in sequence, sorry.

**[0:26:23]**

*That's fine; you're talking about the diary.*

Esther's – Esther's diary. She wrote this and she finally sent it to our maid. But we actually returned back to Offenburg, Myriam, mother and I. And we had to go back to Freiburg to our school every, every week we went to Freiburg. And coming back to my mother who was alone now during the week in Offenburg. She was born 1904, so she was thirty-four. ...And, and this continued. Esther came home once, during this time. On holiday. To see- to see us. But that's the last time I saw Esther. And I stayed with my family, and Myriam stayed with her family during the week. And on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1940, all the Jews from Baden and the Palatinate were rounded up. Very similar to the one in 1938. Seven o'clock in the morning, got out of bed. 'Pack what you can.' 'Take 100 marks with you, only.' 'Buy food for a few days.' 'Only take what you can carry.' And I was with this family. And I certainly didn't want to be with that family. Myriam's family allowed her to travel back to Offenburg. And she found my mother in the Schiller – the Schiller-Gymnasium in the *Turnhalle* [gym] where all the Jews from Offenburg and local villages were collected. So, Myriam met my mother, and my mother had one child out of three. My family wouldn't let me go. Maybe I was too young. Maybe they could take 100 marks per head, and maybe they wanted- I can't tell you what the reason was. Anyway, I was with them. So, we were... rounded up and we

landed up in Freiburg on the...where the goods trains go, there was a- there was a waiting room along there. And all the Jews were collected from Freiburg, and the outlying villages again. In the middle of the night a train came by, came all the way through from Pforzheim, Karlsruhe, Raschtal. Anyway down, right the way down all the way to Freiburg, they picked up all the Jews on the way. It was a train with 6,500 Jews. And in the middle of the night, they called out, "Eva Cohn, *mit Zöpfen!*" [with plaits]- that was me - is called down. And I said, "Hey, that's my name!" And I said, "Do you want me?" And I found my mother on that train. So, my mother found two children out of the three. We didn't know where it was going. I didn't understand. All I know is we were three days, three nights on this train. Put us on the sidings during the night and for how long it was, until we moved on again. And... after three days we arrived.

**[0:29:42]**

My mother knew it wasn't the east because she could see the, the, the- the Alps and the Pyrenees later on. So, she knew it wasn't the east. They were always frightened of the east, because in 1937 she had a friend... who was arrested earlier, and she landed in Lublin [Poland] and that was east. So, there was this knowledge. My mother... she was pleased at least it wasn't going to the east. And after three days we arrived in a place called Oloron-Sainte-Marie. Bearing in mind, during the war you did not have the name of the station. These are things that you find out later on, where it was. And there were lorries waiting, a whole line of lorries. And we were unloaded from the train on to these lorries. And another train journey for about another hour, or so. Beautiful country. Where we landed it was desolate. It was... there were- Was one made road - one long made road. And a lot of bog, and *isles*, little islands all the way along. There were- Women were told to go one side, men on the other side. And they never saw each other again. They were separated. Each *isle* had a *gendarme*, watching over us and then we had French people, we were on French soil. It was a camp originally made for the 1937 Spanish Civil War. There were still a few Spaniards there. I didn't know why, but they were still there. They knew the ropes of the camp more, and we were totally shocked. We were given- We were told, "Here is a- Here is a - a *paliasse*;" - a sack - "fill it with straw, and that will be your bed." So, you come from quite civilized place, and now you have this space in a barrack which is the width of your mattress. That is the space that you occupy. During the day, you pushed it back, and it was your seat, and during the night you pushed it flat and it was your bed. We had a blanket and this sack. We were



treated... terribly. We had to go for miles to go to the latrines to the toilets because... to avoid sickness. We all, but we had rats, we had mice, we had - you name it. Old people died. They were taken out in the middle of the night. You had people fighting because fifty people in a barrack, they were hungry they were desolate, miserable, and it doesn't take much to have... rows. We didn't know what was worse, the scratching from our... bites, or the hunger from our stomach. It was- The situation was just appalling. We didn't have any schooling whatsoever. The water was on for about an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, and that was miles away. If you imagine it like maybe in the Army, they have such things. There were lots and lots of taps and you washed in the open. We were on the women's side – and women and children up to- If you had boys, you could keep them up to fourteen and then they moved them over to the men's side.

**[0:33:21]**

*Were you together with your mother?*

Mother and two children were together. But my mother saw how we lost weight, how we became weak. We had jaundice, we had ...what do they call it? Diarrhoea, which lasted- A very bad form of diarrhoea.

*Dysentery?*

Dysentery. And she was really worried about us. My mother was a big lady, really big, and she lost so much weight. But she could cope with it. But she didn't know where to turn and she wanted help for her children. The only thing we had in the camp was a man called Alfred Kahn. And he had- He started a choir for children. We didn't have- We were hungry to learn something. Or we were hungry... you know. I found a book from somewhere, don't ask me where. And I sat until I learned that... stuff...and German dialect. It's a chap called Hebel- [Johann Peter Hebel], and he wrote about – you won't understand it, it's a funny German. [She quotes long passage from this text, in dialect – Alemmanic – the first three stanzas of “Der Mann im Mond” – The man in the moon]

More I can't remember. But that was a book I found, and that was something I occupied myself with.

*But was this in Badisch?*

It's... Alemannisch.

*Alemannisch.*

I bought- In the meantime, I've bought the book. But I've not even tried to...

*And you found that book...*

I found that book.

*... somewhere?*

**[0:35:09]**

It was a beautifully bound book. And it reminds me on the outside of a nice Haggadah with bits of leather on it. I don't know if it was. Somebody must have loved it. And whatever you found, you got hold of it. And the other thing that we had, was this man Alfred Kahn. And he taught us all the German songs. And... we learned [*Die linden Lüfte sind verbracht [erwacht], die Blümelein sie schlafen, und... '.*] And we learned the French song about *l'arbre*, the Christmas tree. [Eva sings in French the first line of 'O Tannenbaum' *Mon beau sapin, Roi des forêts, Que j'aime ta verdure.*] But they were so important to us because we had nothing to do! It was something that, you know, to get our minds at least a little bit active.

*For the children only?*

For the children only. And... I think there was a celebration. At some stage we were on the stage. And there was a song called '*Die linden Lüfte sind verbracht [erwacht]*[the gentle airs have awakened]'. And, at some stage I fell off the stage and said, "*Die säuseln und webeln [wehen] nun muss sich alles wenden...*" [they murmur and drift and now everything shall change] And at that moment I fell off the stage! [laughs] But that was- That was- I think we had a *laissez-passer* once to get out of the- for a walk. Outside the barbed wire. But otherwise, we were in this confined area.

*And who ran- Who ran the camp?*

**[0:36:30]**

The French!

*The French.*

It was occupied... It was- it was- the Germans had occupied that part, so they could shove us there.

So, was it the *Gendarmerie*, or...?

Yep. And they- They stole, they could be bribed. All sorts of things happened. But unfortunately, I don't think the French were any better than the Germans. And we were in this camp in Rivesaltes, till my mother had the opportunity to send us to a children's home. Jewish run children's home, by the OSE – Oeuvre Secour aux Enfants - who did fantastic work. They were Russian Jews, and somehow, they had- I don't know how many homes they had. And... we landed up in this children's home, Chateau de Masgelier, which is in the- in the Creuse. And there we had better food. It wasn't kosher. I remember that you had a Spanish cook and the husband killed this pig. And I can still see the blood running out of this pig. And later on we had the skin with still a few hairs on it in the soup. I- I- That is so clear in my mind. But we had enough to eat. We were not hungry. It wasn't- We were not free either, but we were well looked after. We had- The school had three classes: *Cours Elementaire* for the smallest, *Cours Moyen*- I was the middle one and *Cours Superieur* for the older ones. Myriam was in the older group. And all these children- We were all minus parents and somehow, we all became like brothers and sisters. And the funny part is, nobody ever talked about what was happening. It was time, it was school, it was- You had to do gym in the morning, first thing in the morning, you know, to harden you. To toughen you up. But they were good to us. They were- They were very good.

*Just- Just to come back, because we were- you were first in Gurs, and then, what happened?*

From Gurs after, we- we were moved. It's supposed to have been a better camp, because we had this bog in... in Gurs. You could not walk, even to go to the toilet. It was an- it was a tremendous effort. I remember having a little coat with funny fur, you know, woolly fur stuff. And I spent my time pulling the mud out of my coat because it was sinking in. And you had to take – it sounds awful when I tell it – but let's say it was a tin which is- Imagine a large tin of fruit, two-and-a-half size. Yeah? That was our potty. So, you had to take your ...your stuff to the- to the latrines, which was miles away. But you fell over in the mud because you were sinking in! It was just the most awful thing. ...And then you had to climb up stairs, and then it fell down in this huge dustbin down below. But they were horrific things. We all- We were terrible! We were all ill. A lot of infection. So, when the chance came to go to another- We had no chance, we were moved to another camp in March 1941. Then we were in Rivesaltes. This was a much bigger camp. Much bigger- I don't know whether where we were had barbed wire there. I can't tell you; I can't remember, except that... there we slept in bridges like, you know, soldiers have. One tier here and another tier on top. And you had again the same space as before. The – the width of your mattress. But at least... it was not on the floor. It was- it was raised on wooden...

**[0:40:15]**

*Stilts, or...?*

'Bridges', I think they're called. You have in the Army. I don't know. I fell down from the top to the bottom one...

*Bunk bed?*

But it's- but not one bunk bed but the whole- the whole barrack full of...

*Yeah... And what other people did you meet when you arrived, do you remember? In Rivesaltes? Who was in that camp?*

The Spaniards were in- the Spaniards were there and they were, they were... They had already ways of cooking their stuff. Because food was, you got in the morning you got... coffee which is really black water. I don't know what it was made of, it may be malt. I can't

tell you; it was just...hot water. And you had your – your, your little... tin, which was your cup... and a metal kind of a plate. We kids got, once a month, we got a plate full of special ration. A little bit of white fat. ...A piece of... sugar, which hadn't been made sugar yet – *Traubenzucker* in a piece... a spoonful of jam. And that was a special treat; once a month children got that. But otherwise, you had a 150 grams of bread. Anyone who'd see the people when they're cutting up that loaf. It was a round loaf. They but up, how they- had to make sure that each piece was exactly even. I had to learn... not to be greedy, wanting the biggest piece. It had to unlearn... You know, now in fact I think if I have a chip on my shoulder, it's I always must make sure that if you dish out food for some reason or another, that you don't have the most. That yours is the smallest. That it's- It remains. It's a kind of a- It remained with me. But it was- the conditions in Rivesaltes were a little bit better than in - in Gurs.

**[0:42:14]**

*How far was Rivesaltes from Gurs?*

Not very much- Nnt very far. One was Bas Pyrenees and the one was Pyrenees Oriental. They've changed the name now, but they call it something else. But- and that's what it was. It wasn't that far apart. And my mother had *laissez passer* when she was in Rivesaltes. She could take us children, Myriam and I, with her for the day. We had to be back at six o'clock in the evening. She had- her sister, was released... Through having money, she had a room in- from Rivesaltes out in, in, in Perpignan. So, for the day we went to see her. And there we were- we went to the beach... and it was all sand. And my mother wrote in big letters in the sand, '*Hitlersau verreck!*' Translation is obvious. Swine- 'Hitlerswine, Rot in Hell.' And a big wave came and ...it's gone.

**[0:43:18]**

*You remember that.*

Very clearly. Very well, you know, the fact that you were let out of the camp. B- that we saw this aunt.

*And there was no question of not escaping or not going back or...?*

I think that we were all totally docile. Hadn't got any means. You had ...nothing. And the Polish Jews had far more *Gerissenheit*...chutzpah. They had- We were all- We just accepted our fate. I mean, you see that the Warsaw Uprising how people were able to fight. The German Jews were very obedient. They – whatever - they always want to do the right thing... and there was no question of, of escaping. I mean I heard a story from Paul Niedermann which - it's quite possible... that everybody tells the truth. Everybody has a memory, and a child can also have imagination. And some of the things that – that we were on a panel recently. There were three - three of us – and Gurs. And we were asked the same question. And each person told a slightly different story.

*Sure.*

...And so, I can't believe what he said. He said he managed to escape, and to go and to- to get some food from- when he was in Gurs or something. I can't believe it that anybody ever got there but be that as it may.

*What I was going to ask you for example in the time... from your father's arrest, and then to leaving, whether your mother must have also tried to get a visa to England or to get out.*

We have, we've – we've got proof. I've got proof on paper. England has refused transit. Belgium has refused transit. We had all sorts of things organized. And we had our papers. We were practically ready to go via Portugal... to America. But it didn't happen. Nothing happened in time. We didn't quite make it. There's some letter- There is a letter about – well you'll hear - how near she got to being freed.

*Yes, so the only person who managed to get a visa was your father.*

My father got a - a visa to get through because it was before the war. But during the war you can't travel.

*No, no. But I mean in that time...*

All the- All the, all the stuff - they did, they had. Things were in preparation but nothing materialized in time.

*And once in – in, in Rivesaltes, did people from Rivesaltes, did people– you probably were too young to know, whether people escaped from there.*

**[0:46:05]**

I don't know.

*No. It would be interesting...*

That...I just don't know. There were people who, from the children's home some older boy took his sister and they ran away, but I really don't... know.

*But anyway, so you spent a day on the beach?*

We had a- After, after lunch you know, my aunt gave us some lunch. She didn't have much herself... in that room where she was. And in the evening, we were back.

*And where did she stay? You said in Perpignan?*

In Perpignan she had a room somewhere, and we went to see her there. Occasionally sometimes she got some money from somewhere. I don't know whether it was sent... We had this aunt, this so-called aunt. She was able to write letters during the war to any country, because Switzerland was neutral. So that aunt knew what had happened to us in France. My father heard from her what had happened to us. Esther had heard... I suppose it was public knowledge what had happened. But we had no more contact with anybody. Personally, we could not write anymore. My mother could write within France. She could send a card- a letter to the children's home. And this is how I asked her for my present of poems from my mother, for my birthday. So, we had- we had contact. We were allowed to write, and she could write back.

*Just to ask you because something might be confusing. Because that- it was very south. Where was free France, when you were in Rivesaltes? Who... at that point...?*

I think what must have happened. A letter- I found a letter – this is all much more recently. But there was a decree that the German children from the homes – I was in a children’s home - had to go back to the camp... right? And then we were, the reason why we were supposed to be on the list to be deported with my mother. But people have implored my mother to leave us behind. And she... relented, and said she’d go by herself because she knew her fate was the east - and that was death. So, I mean she gave us life twice. And my most awful- of all my experience the worst experience was, we were a week together in the- I was delighted after all this time in the children’s home to see my mother again. Myriam and I saw my mother. And we went for a walk... And she taught me a last song, which was [Eva recites the song] *‘Keine Rose, keine Nelke, kann blühen so schön...als zwei verliebte Menschen auf einander zugehen. Setze Du mir einen Spiegel ins Herzlein hinein, damit Du kannst sehen, wie treu ich es mein’*. [No rose, no carnation can bloom as beautifully as two people in love standing together. Hold a mirror in my heart, so you can see how faithful I am]

**[0:49:17]**

I don’t know, it was an important song for whatever reason. And then we were already- we were all in the camp; we were all surrounded by barbed wire. And now we had to part from my mother, and within the camp they put another barbed wire, and that was the people who were going on this transport. [Eva’s voice reveals the emotion] And it- whenever I see lambs these days, I can only think of that moment how we were separated. [Eva cries] Forever. but we didn’t know what it was. So, Myriam and I were alone for three more weeks in the camp, in the children’s barrack, with other children who must have had a similar fate. And then they were trying to see how they could help us to get out, to get back to the children’s home and not to have to stay in the camp. But another thing which is very hard to bear, is that they were only interested in filling the lists. So, they- two of us didn’t go, so somebody else had to go. And that is something else that you have to say, I live and whoever the other two people were, they’ve gone. ...So, three weeks in the children’s barracks and then they tried to bring us back to, but you know, by night. I don’t know how they got us out. But by night they tried to get us out. To go back to the children’s home. My mother managed to give me her wedding ring. Funny thing to do, isn’t it? I think my sister suffered more than me, because



she understood more. My mother confided more. Myriam died very early, at the age of forty-six, because I maintain that everything that went on, she could not really cope with. It went into her. Her whole life has been terrible.

*It affected her more.*

**[0:51:15]**

It affected her. I had a more... *heitere Natur*. More...you know, she was- her nature was a heavier one, and she took it more to heart.

*Yeah...*

Anyway, so we departed and they tried to get us out of the camp, and it was dangerous. So finally, they landed us in a... convent, and we were hidden there for about three weeks until they- They were trying to find a suitable time when it was safe to bring us back to- Because all these places were, they watched. There were enemies everywhere; you don't know who were your enemies. So, when we came back to the children's home, I remember them using sheets as tablecloths, and there was a celebration that we were back, that we were safe, you know. Because they knew what it was all about, but we didn't understand. And then they asked us if we had relatives in Switzerland. What I know now is that the homes had to be dissolved... because they couldn't keep them any longer. And all the French children, that were hidden with peasants... some went into hiding altogether. But the German, the children of German origin obviously had an accent in speaking French, so they thought it's possible that they would find us. And therefore... they asked us if we had relatives, and we said, yes, we have Tante Clara. And Tante Clara was- you know kiddies call Tante Clara a friend, sometimes. And she was the sister of a friend of my mother. So, she volunteered to pass all the correspondence during the war. But that was enough; that was a big job she did. But when we said we had an aunt, they followed the story up, and they sent the rabbi to her. And... they arranged this organisation. Fifteen of us went into- they took us to Annemasse, by night, we were assembled, we were given the rules that you only had what you were wearing. So therefore, you wore two pants, two socks and that's all you had, sort of thing. And we were told to be utterly quiet, to do exactly as we were told. And if anybody shouts 'Appla!' we go flat on our stomachs and... not to hide, not to cry, not to do anything of the nature. We were

good. At that time, I must have been twelve. 1943. ...Yeah, twelve - twelve or eleven.  
Whatever. And... so we went and we had a *porteur*, he's the man who shows you the way.  
[phone rings, interruption]

**[0:54:05]**

Where were we?

*Yes...*

So, we went- this *porteur* helped fifteen of us. And I've just found out - how many years later? Seventy-five years later? - who my companions were, because for me, I was older now. It wasn't interesting anymore. This fifteen of us we went across and we had to climb what seemed a very high barbed wire. Could be a twelve-year-old child it's different from what it was in reality. We were told when we get to the other side they will shout, "*Halte là!*", and you stop dead in your tracks, or they shoot. So, we climbed up, and we go to the other side, and exactly that happened. "*Halte là!*", and we stopped. And then they took us...

*What did they shout?*

"Halte là!" – 'Stop here!' You don't speak French?

*Yes, I do.*

OK, well- So we got to the other side. And they took us by lorry... to a suburb of Geneva... and we were interrogated. And it went like this:

'Un jour je passait en Suisselle,  
Il a gendarme m'ont arêtes,  
J'avais la bouges jus'qu au....  
Et les pantalons dechirees  
On m'ammenait aux bureau  
Comme tout le monde...  
Ma fouille.de part en haute...  
Comme tout le monde.

.....m'en foutu dans une...

.....

Je ne coucherais quelle mais elle  
se couchait cinq minutes apres elle  
comme tout le monde.

Quelle

Et les interrogatoirent, par un monsieur et par ecrit,

C'etait un vrai purgatoire,

Et quand cela etait finis.

La visite medicale

comme tout le monde.

Il fallait se mettre...

Devant tout le monde.

On cherchait le petit medicine sur tout le monde

I can't remember the rest. Anyway, that was the arrival in Switzerland. We were three weeks in quarantine, in a camp.

*Who wrote that song? When was that?*

Oh, don't ask me.

*How did you get to that...?*

Don't ask me. I- I can't tell you. Lots of things I can't tell you, I'm sorry. I, I, I don't know.

*But you remember that song...*

**[0:56:56]**

A lot of things that are just - they are there. Anyway, then we were in the camps and they were – they were frightened that we were bringing in disease and what-have-you. After three weeks... we were free. And they found a place for us into another children's home because Tante Clara couldn't take us. She said, "I'm so glad the children are here, that they are safe,

but I can't take them." So, there was no choice but to take us to this – to this children's home. And another thing which was great pain to me, was, on the way to Geneva to the train, we were on a tram... and somebody opened my hand and put two francs in my hand. And that feeling, the feeling that I look as if I needed it, that killed me. I mean I was twelve years old but it was it was - it was not a nice feeling. And a long, long journey into beautiful Tessin. It was really beautiful, and we were in quarantine as you see, because we shouldn't bring in any children. But once I arrived in, in the Tessin, the woman who normally had twenty-seven children, she now had seventy. And she needed to hire- to rent another ...house or room for us. So, she rented an old hotel. From a man called [Eduard] Von der Heydt. And we had this place, and I then had scabies. You know what scabies is? It was, oh, between here and - every joint. And I was- we were all in quarantine, because couldn't mix with - with the other children. So, all the new arrivals were in that house, because of me. And we were scrubbed with carbolic soap. That's all we had; we didn't have anything much. And after three weeks, the second – the second quarantine we could mix with the other children. You had children there from Poland. You had one girl from Benghazi; how on earth she got there, I don't know. Belgian children, Austrian children.

*Lybia?*

A lot of French...Yes, ok. French children. Moroccan children. We all got on well. But we were all totally different people. The woman was Christian. She had nothing against our religion. She wouldn't stop us from... you know, if there was anybody to help us on the Jewish side, she'd give us a bit of... not an education but, it was, it was sort of run on her lines. She said, "I'm not Miss Volkhardt, I am Lily." She wanted us to *tutoyer* in other words, so she wanted to be our friend.

*And the language was French?*

Oh, no. French we had to learn in France, I didn't tell you that. First, we were in France, and we were in the in the Masgelier. So, everybody spoke French there. I arrived, I had lice in my hair and everybody knew that I had lice because I had a big towel around my head with paraffin on it. So, you felt different again. So, they cut my plaits. That was in France. I had to learn French. Then we came into Switzerland, and it was the Italian part of Switzerland. And the language there is Italian. But Lily comes from Zurich, so she spoke Swiss-German. So,

we could make ourselves understood between Swiss-German and German. ...She wanted us to work our way through. She hadn't got much help. She couldn't pay much help, so we were encouraged to- everybody had to do something. I was '*chef du couture*'. I could darn ...socks of twenty-five boys who made holes in their socks like this. They wore them for one week, and they were wool. And those- ... horrific. You had to see that everything was, was done. Some people had to sweep up the staircase. Others had to wash up. Others had to do laundry. But behind where she lived, I don't know what a *patriziat* is in English. It is a kind of- it's like the mountains behind her house. And it's wild. And you could go out there. You couldn't go in the village, but you were allowed to go in there. And you know, I remember going, and having my dreams. My walk- walk around and then I'd come back and tell the other children that I met such a lovely family, and they asked me in and I had tea there. And I sat round this table with four people. Oh, it was wonderful! Do you know it was imagination. Wanting to do, wanting something which I yearned for, basically.

**[1:01:36]**

*But you were free. You had...*

But- In the Kinderheim we were free, but we had...

*But you couldn't go to the town?*

Village. No, we were not allowed to go. Only when- if accompanied for special reasons.

*Because you were as foreigners?*

We were foreigners, we were Jews, and they didn't like us. There's no question about it. The boys, later on could go to the Collegio *Papio [Ancona]*, so they had a lovely education. The girls were not so lucky. We were, we just had to- We had to do a lot of work. We had a little bit of Deutsch-Schweizer-Schule which was rubbish. One teacher is just about still living now. And I'm still in contact with her, but she really is on her last legs. She's ninety-five now.

*She came to the place?*

She was... That was her first place as a teacher. And she was telling me how difficult life was for her. And then she got married and she left, and we had somebody else. But she was the only one who could show us ...kind of warmth. Kind of- It was a hard life. It was a... loveless existence. Which made me harder, and which made me whatever I am.

*But were you with your sister the whole time?*

I- all the time with my sister. My sister did... I did better in France, in the children's home, and she was not, I was more popular. And in Switzerland... the roles were turned. She did better. And there was a Doctress there, she was a woman. What she was doing at Lily's I still don't know, because she was Christian, she was a doctor. And she was seeking refuge from somewhere. So, whether she was a Nazi, I can't tell you. She was German; that was a fact. But she wanted to adopt Myriam. So, Myriam had advantages there which I didn't have. And me, I had to show my anger... in... being on the bad side. If we- Lily would have chocolate from the Red Cross and she'd put it in the place called *eisernen Bestand* in case, you know, last resort if there was no food. But we didn't get it, and I felt that was an injustice, and so I joined the crowd who said, "We're going to- When she's out one day, we're going to get hold of the key." And Myriam was sitting on the key. She was the girl who was - my sister - was the trusted one. And I [inaudible], you know, standing, making, telling them when somebody's coming. And the boys went to get- I got the key from Myriam and gave it to the boys. So, I was- I was culpable. And... We got the chocolate, and we got it into the mountains. But of course, we were always found out, because everybody around us, the- The people there, they'd tell on us, and Lily would know very quickly what was going on. And of course, we were punished. But life was still a bit better than it was in the camps.

**[1:04:27]**

*Were you close to your sister or was it...?*

Myriam and I had fights. We were once in the dormitory. I regret it to this day. I really- If I could undo it, I would undo it. I don't know what the row was about. And she was sort of standing there like- Boys and girls sleep together in a big dormitory. And she was holding and lording it over us and saying whatever it was. And I wanted her to shut up and I couldn't,

so I put her pyjama trousers there and then everything stopped. So there was always something pretty evil [laughing] inside me. But mind you, Myriam and I became the greatest of friends once we were both married in England here. She had a tough time. But I'm not there yet.

*No... If you allow me, please to just go back a little bit. When you were in Rivesaltes, I- I need to understand a little bit better what happened, and who – which organisation - took you out to this children's home.*

The children's home, they already got us out in Gurs when we were there... No, no, no don't lie Eva, because it was all- It was only in Rivesaltes. This organisation Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants and the Quakers were responsible for getting us out. How, or why, I do not know.

*And that the authorities allowed this which- It seems extraordinary, that...*

Well until it became- Because what they were doing is they were smuggling all these kids – the dangerous kids – out into Switzerland. But we were- They were found out. Have you heard of Marianne Kohn? She was one of the women. She actually also comes from my neck of the woods. And she was caught. And she went to Auschwitz. I mean that thing- there's a lot of them.

*And the home...so where was that?*

The home, that was- that was in Masgelier, the - the children's home in France.

**[1:06:19]**

*And Masgelier, how far was that from Rivesaltes?*

That's near Limoges.

*So quite a way...*

The other one is right - right in the Midi.

*Yeah.*

And sort of...sort of- that map ...will show you where it is.

*Yes, yes so, it's quite far.*

I don't know how it was organised. I don't know. But all I – I definitely found a piece of paper where it said at this certain time, we all had to go back to the camps.

*So, your mother must have given permission that you could leave the camp?*

She – she did, because it was better for us. We had a- we had a better life. We - we would have gone under. So many people died.

*Yeah. And then, at some point you had to return?*

I had to- I had to return to the camp once they had- No, it was a holding camp. Once they had built the gas chambers and in Feb- In '42... they were, they were ready. And so, the old ones who came there, they went back again. They went back to- to Poland. First to Drancy, and via Drancy, three days I think in Drancy, and then on to ...to Auschwitz. My mother got a number. So, she, they wanted her to do work or something. Whereas my sister did not get a number, so she went immediately to the gas chamber.

*So...?*

**[1:07:41]**

But all this stuff, we were- and we went back. In 1995 we went to Auschwitz. And... it was horrible insofar as that my husband didn't want to come. He didn't want to see any pain. My children insisted if he wants to go to Breslau and see his old house, we're going on to... Auschwitz. And I was glad... because I didn't have a grave. I don't- how can somebody at thirty-eight been taken away, from in front of your eyes? Never to return. And you hear this



and you hear that. But... what is true? I had nightmares thinking I wanted to get up - here in England - and I wanted to find her! In Belgium somewhere, for some reason, unknown to me. It was unfinished business. A grave gives you somewhere to - to grieve, to understand. I had nothing. So, it took a long time. And then finally in 1995... He wanted to go; it was very important for him to go to Breslau to see his house. And the kids said, "We must all go." So, we just- three children, husband and I went to Auschwitz in 1995. And I was able to put a candle on that... broken down barrack which is left there. My son didn't want to be with us because he was 27 at the time, that's the youngest. [Eva coughs] Sorry. And he said, "I'm sorry I'm not going with this young...young thing. What does she know?" I said "I'm going only once there. So, I want to see every little bit that there is to be seen." So, I took one of these guides... sorry could I have a drink of water? [coughs]

*Yes...*

He said, "What does she know? She's a young kid, she's Christian! What the hell does she want to tell about my grandmother? I'll find out by myself just as well!" And I was very upset. I wanted to be with my children. My husband he didn't say a word because he was kind of shell-shocked. He was very- Everything went inside him. ...He said he was OK. There were other problems there but not then. And I was, I was glad that I got there. But anyway, take me back to where I was.

*Yeah. But anyway, just to finish your story. So you found out...*

I went afterwards- I went into the archive, and I looked at everything and I've got a letter in Polish which I had to get translated into German.

*And what did you find out about your mother's fate?*

**[1:10:22]**

My mother was there not quite three weeks. And she ...It's 'sudden heart stopped' at 1.45 signed by this Kramer bloke. A lot of these things were fake. A lot of the things that you don't know that they were- that it was genuine. ...And the conditions must have been absolutely – absolutely unbelievable. You know, first they take your husband, then they take

your home. Then they put you in – incarcerate you. And finally, you get a number. You're not there anymore. You- you become absolutely nothing. I mean, what a most awful fate! And she did this... so that we could live? I've got three kids. I can't promise you that I would have... let them... free. I don't know. But I think it's the biggest thing she could have done.

*Yeah....yeah. ...But as you said, you managed to, you saw her again when you came back to Rivesaltes.*

I had this last week, maybe it was a fortnight altogether but not more than that.

*Yeah, and you said she gave you something... Was it then?*

No, on my birthday. On my twelfth birthday I said... I'd like... some of her poetry. I knew she wrote poetry. I've always had a leaning towards this. You know, I can't- I don't know why. And later on comes this little exercise book, with little squares. Green cover. Tied together by a bit of wool. And she says, "This is a little collection... what my memory... put down. And you'll also find some new ones. This is for you alone and not for...for, for other people. This is just for you." And I was- I was bowled over. It was- I didn't quite- I didn't understand as much as I understand now, as a grownup. But her love for her country, for her mountains, for everything. And what she has lost, and to think that this person at thirty-eight was just murdered for nothing! Just because she was a Jew!

**[1:12:49]**

*And you managed to keep that, from her?*

This is my biggest treasure. That's what I came to England with. I came to England with two things. Outside you'll see some photographs of- We as children were given for Hanukkah six...pictures and a French... French, German and Italian to tell us what the festival was about, with pictures by Oppenheim. And... that was important to me. And this little booklet of my mother's. Then I had nothing, nothing until later on after the war, when I went back to Germany to our maid, and she... picked up all the poetry, letters from my grandmother to my- to my mother. Written in pencil. She just picked it up, and she saved it until she saw me. And

my sister Esther sent her diary to this nanny. And... And I broke it open, because it was a...  
*ein...ein...*

*It was locked?*

It was *ein*- Yeah. *Ein*, what did she call it? *Ein Tagebuch mit Schlüssel sollst Du haben mein Kind*. And she said you know, to put all your things. So that's what I got- I mean, this Minna, this woman. If she- she could be, in a, you know, one of the... righteous men in Jerusalem.

*Yeah.*

I've met many good people... and I've met many very bad people.

*And did you stay in touch with the nanny? With Minna?*

Do you know what? She never married. She was allowed to live in that house until she dies but the house belonged to her brother. Because he came back from Russia, from the war. And that house was left to him, and he married again. And Minna had a very sad life, because when she retired and she was at home she had cancer, and her sister-in-law was so disgusted she wouldn't wash her feet, and she wouldn't wash her hair. So, I sent her dry shampoo so that she could... do her hair. And I – I washed her feet while I was there. And she said, "Am I so disgusting that she couldn't wash...?" I mean, it was so- she was sad. [sighs] Anyway, she had made an arrangement "If anything happens to you," 'cause she had nobody else. She had the brother and the sister-in-law and they didn't get on very well. She had the upstairs of the house. So, she said, "If something happens, if I'm ill, would you come?" I said, "I promise." And I kept my promise. I got a call. And I got as far as Cologne, because you still had to go by boat. ...Didn't fly in those days. That was not... She was... I don't know, it was 1980-something. And when I got there- And I always brought presents for them. And I arrived by taxi from Baden-Baden to- It was out in a village. And the sister-in-law opened the door and says, "She's in hospital; she's not here." So, she took the presents, and I took- told the taxi to still take me to hospital. And they took me to the mortuary and she was dead. [with emotion] So I didn't make it. ... But anyway...

**[1:16:37]**

*...Yeah...*

So, we were in Switzerland for all these years, till 1945. ...The war... ended. I was understanding under a fig tree... and bells were pealing and I thought “What on earth does that mean to me?” We’d had contact with my father by now. Can I blow my nose?

*Of course.*

...We had contact with my father. He’d sent us a photo that he was a soldier in the British Army. It was in the Pioneer Corps – the lowest of the lowest - but it was British Army. And... we came to ...We met him in October ’45. We went from Dieppe to New Haven and then by train to Victoria. We were accompanied by somebody called Nina Oyens. And my father stood at the station in Victoria. My sister says, “So you’re my father?” I was glad to see him. I put my arms around his neck, and kissed him. It was very difficult; the man had been alone for six years. He had all sort of experiences. No doubt guilt complex that he lives and his wife and his daughter died. He had no choice. He tried. ...But life was very difficult. He rented a room in Bayswater for Myriam and me, and he had a room in the same house. He hoped that we would keep house for him, look after him. We were two birds out of a cage. End of the war. You know, and do all that. We had one ring to cook on. Put a shilling in and when the money ran out then you couldn’t... He couldn’t cook anymore, and stopped cooking. He came home at six o’clock and he left half past six in the morning. When he came home at six at night and he expected a meal, but...

*What did he do?*

He was a ...manager in a feather factory. British Feather Company. He had a Jewish boss, and this Jewish boss later on found him a wife once we knew that my mother had... cause my father couldn’t marry. He didn’t know... but then you could find out from the Red Cross... her fate. And...But it was very hard. It was hard for him, and it was hard for us. First, we had German housekeepers. ‘Would you take your Frieda in your home?’ Blah, blah. They didn’t like it. We lived in Clapham- First we lived in Battersea, which was very poor. We had a ...a little house for, little workers’ house, I would say. The toilet was out in the yard. No

bathroom in there. And then you'd go to the public bath and you shout "More hot water in number four please!"

[1:20:17]

*This is your father and the two of you?*

Yeah, just us. And we gradually saw that it doesn't work. We - we were not prepared to do what he wanted. But he did find out, and there was a Jewish Club in south London. So, we went to Bolingbroke Synagogue and he found Habonim meets there. And there we met Habonim. And I said, "Myriam, go and find out what it's like." She went for six weeks and she said, "It's not for me." And then I went, and I loved it. I met my husband from- in this group, the Habonim. We went JNF collecting door to door, and people asked us if we were related, blah, blah and somehow things happened.

*Just to go back to Switzerland. You said your sister didn't want to come to England?*

No, she was allowed to go to *Gymnasio*, the Gymnasium, first. So, she had a few months longer in Locarno than I did because I got there much later. And she - she wanted to do her matriculation there, and stay there. But there was no such offer. So, she said, "I'll come to England if you want me to. I'll come as a shoe-shine boy. I'll do- I'll come but I don't- if you need me for that."

*How old was she by then?*

Well, if I was fourteen - she was sixteen.

*So, she legally couldn't stay there, so...*

No. So anyway we went... We went to this Habonim and it gave us... The first time we started living a little.

*And did you know by then what had happened to your sister?*

Esther? ...No. We didn't know. We just- She just- The last thing I had is a birthday card in 19..., in March 1944 for my thirteenth birthday. And we didn't have any private property, so you had nowhere to put this precious card. So, I left it with Lily on her desk. Lily had a desk, it was like huge, you know, absolutely just... everything was there. When Lily died, nobody cared about all that precious stuff. There was so much - so much - knowledge in there. But some like a... somebody who collects stamps, picked up this card... put it on the internet, got hold of Ruch, who got hold of me, and offered me this card for 108 euros. That card that I had read. And that's the last sign of Esther's living was in 1944, from that birthday card was the last thing. And it was offered to me. He paid for it. I sent him the money; he wouldn't take it. He said, "That's your 80th birthday present." So that's how much later that card was found. Cause Lily died and somebody just cleared...

*It had survived! The card survived.*

**[1:23:18]**

The card survived. ...And that's the card that you see on there.

*And where was it sent from?*

It was sent from Theresienstadt. 'Protektorat Theresienstadt'.

*So, she was in Theresienstadt?*

She was in Theresienstadt. And this was a strange story. I've been told by somebody who survived, but who was half-Jewish, so he didn't die. And he said Esther volunteered to go to Auschwitz. I can't believe that anybody volunteers whether you knew it or not what Auschwitz was. But I went- Recently there was a film. Somebody was talking- Two people were talking after the film, and this lady said yes it was possible you could volunteer from Theresienstadt to go. So, whether it is, I don't know. But anyway, that is the last. So, I didn't- Finding- finally finding it was much later. Then I went to Munich. There was a book. There was- Esther was in Munich and the book was written about her and the whole thing. I went to Munich and by that time, [Martin] Ruch, doing the research for the books, pulled a lot of knowledge... from the archives.

*When did that start? When did he start ...doing all this research?*

The book came out in '94 – 1992. So the... poems existed, the diary existed. And people wanted always... the diary. I said, "I don't give one away without the other. If you're going to do that, you'll take my mother's poems." And sometimes you had to find out that people- You know they were out to make something out of it which I didn't want. But finally, Ruch is a decent man; he's a fantastic man.

*And you managed to get this published. When was it published?*

In 1994. ...But I started in 1981, when the children- When the children are off hand, you'll find in a couple of years' time, you will be all of a sudden you find more interested than you already are. And you want to know. You have done- 'cause you're wrapped up. I was busy with forty-odd years with my children, because I had a late-comer. But once I was free from that. And I kept everything. Every shred of paper. But I had a cardboard box which, every time I was asked to – to go somewhere, I had to go through this. And that- Nobody understands what they're asking of me. Because it's pain; you're making me think of something, yeah? So, when these people came to make the film and they offered to put this that it was tidied and you could just pull something out, they did me a great favour. Although they broke the contract, but they- That was a great favour, because that was so painful that you cannot understand. You know, each little bit you had to look through. And I'm not organised. I'm – I'm a practical person but I'm terribly untidy. And so that was...

**[1:26:32]**

*Mnn. But let's just go back to your arrival in Britain. What- do you remember your first impressions when you arrived?*

My father took me to C & A and got rid of my socks, because... I was wearing knee socks with *Bommeln* [pompoms]. And he said, "That's German. You can't have that." So, he brought me to... C & A and then he went to Freeman, Hardy & Willis, bought me two pairs of shoes. Shoes, and, and that's my first impression. It was Marble Arch because we lived in Bayswater. But he didn't take us to school or anything. And then the landlady, after six

weeks of being there, said, “The kids have got to go to school. They’ve missed a lot.” That’s when she took us to Paddington Maida Vale high school. The story there was that we should really go to a class below our age, which we didn’t want to do.

*Yeah.*

And she listened to me, and that was not good for me, because as a result, I – I left school without any – any certificate. But I decided- I stayed on to sixth form and then I did shorthand and typing. I then I... I thought about it and thought, ‘I must do something with languages. I’ve studied hard and I want to do hotel business.’ But I couldn’t get into hotel management straight away ‘cause I didn’t have the certificate. So, I did a chef course; they let me do that for one year. I quite liked cooking. That was OK. But I did so well once I got to that college, my past was gone. Finally, I was not foreigner anymore. I was accepted. At college you had... all sorts of people. But not, you know- It was just- It was far more acceptable, and I got on well. And then I could go after one-year chef’s course, I did two years hotel management. And I got my diploma there and then did fine. But then I didn’t like working in the hotel world, well because my boyfriend was... working when I was free, et cetera. We hardly ever met, so I decided, ‘I will try and go in an office and work nine to five-thirty.’ I said, “I can do bookkeeping. I’ve got French. Who knows what I will find?” I went as a bookkeeper. And that was OK. It was much better than working in reception, was very tempting. But you know as a woman in the hotel world, you can be General Assistant, they don’t give you responsibility. Maybe nowadays it’s better but it was horrible at the time. Men for these jobs. And the Irish ladies at the desk, and they don’t want to take your reception job away. That’s all they... But from college you were sent one term a year to a hotel to get, as a - you know you could get your training for free. You worked for free basically.

*Yeah. But did you want to- You wanted to fit in?*

**[1:29:20]**

I was- It was very important what I wanted. I wanted to fit in, and I wanted to have a small family, and I wanted to have a table for four people. I didn’t want to sit seventy people in a long- you know, the way we were eating. It - it was all so rough. It was... And my father wanted us to run a house, and we hadn’t seen a house! We’d seen camps and children’s



homes! How do you run a house? You know. From eight years on, what the heck do you remember? What do you know?

*You'd been in institutions. You were in institutions for many years.*

We were institutionalised and I wanted to get away from it. And it was- It was very hard. It was hard. And this is what my children accuse me today. That this hardness, when they were ill...I- If they couldn't move- I had to work all my married life. It was important that I worked. So, I worked. So, my children couldn't understand it if they had a bit of a tummy ache that they couldn't stay at home. It's fine, but if I could see that you couldn't move then you were ill. I had my sis- daughter sitting in the kitchen. I had a Rayburn coal burner. That was the only room that was warm. So, she couldn't move anymore, and she was obviously poorly, then she could stay at home. Otherwise, I couldn't go to work. And maybe these are the things that she's... You know, when she's telling me now that I'm a bad mother, that I haven't been good to her. It's not that I've been bad - that was her on the phone just now. So, there is contact again, but it was very hurtful to think... I was doing well... My kids are all fine. I'm fine. And then, sixty years later...no, you didn't do it. You were rotten.

*Is it that she thinks you were tough? Tough?*

She couldn't- it's very difficult to put all the things on it. She said- I'll give you an instance. I knitted all their garments, you know, their cardigans and whatever. And I had- I had to. And then if she had a new tunic until she was eleven, I cut all the trousers down and I used the leg part, and you know, not all the top part, and made it into a tunic. So, she comes to school and she said Miss Bradshaw her teacher says, "Susie, you've got a nice tunic." She said, "That was my grandfather's wedding suit." So, another time she comes and she says, "And whose suit was that?" She had a different one. So maybe that singled her out. I don't know. But I'm - that's what I'm imagining. She can't actually... She didn't want to tell me whatever was going on, but she didn't want to hurt me. She's quite sensitive, but I think she's been to many shrinks and they've also twisted her head. So, they've given her, and whenever they don't know what to say, they tell you, "Oh, well, it's due to your mother-" or, "It's due to the war." You know? We will never find out the truth, but the thought that my children and my grandchildren are all... stained by what Hitler did, that is horrible. Because I'm so proud, I was proud that I survived, and that he hasn't won. They've got a big party of twenty-two

people who are close family again. By the way, I'm very close to my sister's daughter, who lives in America, and – and her son. So, her life was very hard.

**[1:32:38]**

*Tell us a little bit about what happened to your sister.*

Because my father was a Prussian...German-Prussian Jew. Anybody who comes home after 11.59 is a bad person. There's nothing you can do in London, at that time, after midnight. Myriam didn't like Habonim. She went to the Linguist Club in Hyde Park where she met nicer people: accountants, surgeons, dentists. And she got into that crowd, and sooner or later, there were real clashes between Myriam and my father. One New Years' Eve it was time to go to a dance. And I had just one nice dress and I was ironing it so that it was lovely, this blue taffeta dress. And we were eating in the morning room, and there was an argument between those two. And the pease pudding was being thrown, and it went on my dress and I couldn't go...because of whatever it was that was wrong between those two. He called her a whore. And she said to him, "You can talk." And then there were big...it was unpleasant. And... so Myriam left. She was old enough by now, and had a room in Bayswater. And finally, my father's sayings came true. She was pregnant. And then he didn't want her, to see her in his house, with a big stomach. So, she went into a home in Clapham Common for unmarried mothers. Now the man who - who was responsible for the child couldn't marry; he was married. And the boyfriend she had before... came from America to marry her. Because she didn't want him, but now he's going to accept the baby as his. So, he came before the baby was born. He came— They got married in England in December '55. So, by the time the baby was born he was born in wedlock, and he- He's born in wedlock, but it's not his child, basically. So, she arrived in July. She went over to America... with this baby. And she was married to him, but he's over there. When she arrives, he lives with some other woman. Demanded she marry. He was a doctor. He left England in order to go to America so he doesn't have to pay all the taxes. He was writing a book on LSD and he was trying out LSD before he could write about it. So, he would buy a- rent a television, and never pay for it. He would do all sorts of funny things. He would lie on the couch... He tried out the stuff presumably, and then he just got up to make an egg and something and he went back on the couch. And Myriam couldn't stand the situation. In the meantime, she had one child by him. So, they had Julian who was...alright. They had the two children. She said, "Whatever it is, I

can't live with this man." She divorced him. She worked. She had a good job. She worked as- She did shorthand typing. Because when she left college and she had no qualifications, she was only a – what do you call it – she was taking travel agent...being a courier from one – taking the tickets and all that sort of stuff. So, she realised she needed her shorthand typing. She went to Pitman's; paid for it herself. Got herself through. And in America she had nice jobs. And then she came on holidays once a year. By that time, she was good with my father. Because she was in America, she was the good one and I was around the corner, I was the bad one. And... It was hard. My father married... twice. And it was bad. My father was married for nineteen years to this last woman. And he died in '76. And she lived another thirty-two years. I was responsible to look after her, and she was supposed to look after me. I kept my bargain, she didn't. Doesn't matter.

**[1:36:48]**

*So, when you- did you still live with your father when he married again, when he remarried?*

I lived at his house upstairs. I had two rooms in a big house in Clapton. And I stayed there until my mother-in-law took pity on us and gave us a deposit for this house. And I didn't want to leave this house, because my husband was my rock, and this was, this was... equally my rock. I didn't have to move. And now I'm moving out of my own free will. And I hope I'm making the right decision.

*Yeah. But for your sister, going to America must have been also getting away from the family- from your father?*

Oh well, she didn't have a good- she didn't have a good life, but we were ok from that moment onwards. We were, you know, we couldn't- every holiday we could afford we went to each other. She came here.

*Where did she live in America?*

She lived in New York. Then later on she lived in Teaneck, a suburb. But she married for the second time, and then she had about five years' good time. It was a Jewish chap she married. And... And, he was so proud because she was a pretty woman. And he was so proud to have

this lovely Myriam. But Myriam became ill. She had leukaemia. And she had been here. In June or July, she was here on holidays. And I went to Innsbruck on holidays with my family. And I had an email saying, "Please come and see me." I said, "What do you mean? You were just here!" She said, "It's important." So, I had to go to my father and borrow the money; I didn't have the money. And he didn't understand. First of all, I had to ask to make phone calls from his house. Because, you know, I couldn't afford to make these- I had a line, but I couldn't afford to make the calls. And I said, "Dad, these telephone calls are counted." I was trying to explain it to him. ...Myriam died. She was, had six weeks from then onwards. And then I went out to the States, and I stayed for two weeks. And Madeline was in- the daughter was fifteen-sixteen. She was earning money. She wanted to go to Smith - a nice university. She needed money for, you know, spending money. She saved a thousand dollars in the six weeks holiday. She lived on baked beans and spaghetti. And so when she died she wanted me to be there. So, I ... She came back from Canada, and found her mother dying. So I was there. And then... Madeline and I became very tied together. So, she's like, really like my fourth child. Not so much the son. The son, if you see him, and if you go there, he's lovely to you, but there's no - no connection.

*Yeah.*

He's married. He hasn't got any children. She's got two children. ...Seventeen and a nineteen-year-old.

*Mn-hnn. So, let's get back to you and meeting your husband perhaps. When did you- you said you met in Habonim?*

**[1:39:46]**

Yes, we met in Habonim. One year we went to pictures in town to see 'La Symphonie Pastorale'. It was a New Year's. My father said, "You come home and have a drink for New Year." I said, "Yes, yes, yes." But you know, on the way home, we were dancing in Piccadilly, a horror, and then we went on to Trafalgar Square. And by the time we wanted to go home, no more tube. So, when we finally got as far as Clapham Common, we had to walk from Clapham Common to Battersea, and I got home at half-past one. My father wouldn't let us in. He'd locked the door and... he took me in and he hit me and Wally was left outside. He

made me cry and my nose was bleeding. And I thought, “My god, he won’t- He won’t stay with me after this experience.” You know? But finally, my father let him sleep on the floor because he couldn’t get home at half-past one, two o’clock. Myriam was upstairs sleeping. She was still at home at that time, but she didn’t have the courage to come down and help me out. And... Then later on we went out more and more. We went out as a threesome and finally one dropped off and that left two of us. I was very green. I was very- I was a late developer. And then we got married in 1954... in my father’s house. Kate, he was living there with his... third wife. They were downstairs. The second wife walked out when she heard that Myriam and I were pregnant. She didn’t want to babysit, and she had a boyfriend anyway. It was a weird story. That was my- The boss had recommended that wife to him. So then he advertised in the ‘*Dalton’s Weekly*’ and I chose this woman that he married, this third wife. He said, “You choose. I had forty answers. You find out who I want.” And I picked this woman who was ten years younger than him. And that was really very bad for me. It was very good for him. He had nineteen good years with her, but I had her thirty-two years afterwards. She only died five years ago. So, she made my life hell. For some reason we didn’t like each other. Yet I did everything I could. In the end, I put her in a home here in this road so that I could still, you know, keep an eye on her.

**[1:42:06]**

*You didn’t get on?*

She didn’t like me! She didn’t- at first, I thought she was being in between my father and me. So, I thought things can be better once... you know, he died. Because there’s no more competition. But if my father gave me something, she had to be considered as a third child always. It was a weird thing. She was a late marriage. She married him when she was forty-eight. And she lived to one hundred and two, and my father died at seventy-six. And if I tell you, I – I, I survived and I thought I made a go of life, except my last blip with my daughter which I hope will sort itself out before I go. But for about twenty-two months we had... no contact. Cause I was so hurt that I – I couldn’t cope with it. But time is fantastic.

*Yeah... And you said so, when you married first you lived in that house and then you settled...?*

My mother-in-law- I was pregnant for the second time. Very quickly- I told you I didn't know where children came from. The first time I had a child, I went to my doctor and he said, "You're not unusual." I said, "What does that mean?" "You're pregnant." "Oh, so we've been doing it right!" I said to him. It was as green as that. And twenty-two months later I had another one. And then they taught me about family planning. We had two rooms, two large rooms in the attic. So, one was a living room and a kitchen separated by sort of a bar. And another big room which was the bedroom. But we had to move the... cot. When we went to our bedroom, we had to move that cot into the living-kitchen room. And when we had the second one on its way, she said, "You can't live like this." "We have no choice; what are we going to do?" So, she lent us £1,000 which was a good deposit, because my husband earned little.

*What was his profession? What did he want to do?*

My husband, he wanted to become an artist, but he couldn't afford to be an artist. So, he had to work for his uncle, who promised him his business. And after thirty-eight years his uncle- he's also the man who brought him over, by the way. Wally's mother had a sister who married an Englishman in the First World- between the First World War '14 and '18, and... that sister lived in England, and so they helped them to come over on the last transport before the war broke out.

*From where? Where did they...?*

**[1:44:32]**

From Breslau. They came via Harwich to England.

*Did he come on the Kindertransport?*

He came on the Kindertransport, but he had this uncle and aunt as a bit of a backup. But first there were the B'nai Brith or someone that helped him out. I don't know. So, we- he- I, I felt I needed somebody who I could look up to, and somebody who would understand me. Because it was no good marrying an English person who thinks 'The woman's crazy' if I cry in the middle of the night or something. It wouldn't be good for him. And I- It was, it was- It

seemed absolutely perfect. But he was an idealist and he didn't need money. And all he loved was books. And all I loved is my family, which helps. [half-laughs] So life was tough in many ways.

*So, what did he work...? What did he?*

He worked in his uncle's business. And he wanted him to do everything, so he sent him- He worked in an office for a while and he sent him as a traveller and... he hated – he hated driving and he - he just wasn't cut out to sell anything.

*What was the business?*

This business was a - Pilot Stationers. Wholesale stationery. But he promised this business to several people who'd done him favours, and so Wally never got the business. The business was sold after thirty-eight years working there. And he was- He was out of work. And I was already working, but I couldn't do much more so I opened a second business. I worked as a bookkeeper by day, and I started- I advertised in Wolverhampton in the area where they were poor, and said I'd got a knitting business. I wanted some knitters. And for months I... I- it was really hard work, because you don't make much money. People kept the wool, some people knitted badly. But we got by. And finally, I got him a job. I saw an advertised job in the Royal Institute of International Affairs. And so, he had lovely- The last eight years were really good for him. It was with a nice type of people, what he needed. Not that... stupid business of his uncle.

*And 'artist' meaning- what was he interested in? Was he painting or...?*

The history of art. He became- he was- in 1960 he got interested. It was an advert in The Times- a –you know- story about brass rubbing. And he loved the medieval arts and all that. So, he was completely wrapped up in this. So, every Saturday he'd go out, and he would get- did brass rubbing. And through brass rubbing he got the history of each thing. And finally, he became- He was the Secretary and then he became Vice President of this Society. And finally, he became - it was very important to him – a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. And you know, it was some recog- recognition for what he's been doing. But he left- When he died were – were debts. And all I had was... a house full of books that I didn't want, didn't

understand, the sculpture and the history or medieval... [makes sound of despair] ...Didn't want. So my children helped me to try and sell some of these books. Which did raise twenty-six thousand, so finally I had some- something to carry on with.

[1:47:55]

*So, it wasn't easy... It wasn't easy for you.*

I worked- I worked after each child. The longest I've been at home was when Johnny was... two, and we needed more money. Then I started dressmaking and alterations. I had no idea of dressmaking and alterations! [laughs] But I just did. People came to the house and you heard their stories - more of their life-stories than their alterations.

*And did you have any help at all with the children, or...?*

I had no help. My mother came for... After the baby was born, Wally had time till ...one o'clock, and my mother-in-law had time for one hour or so. They all worked in that same business. They were in the packing business. I mean they were well-to-do in Germany. They never bought another home. They were just doing furnished. They didn't want to have a home of their own anymore. And... So, mother came with a tin of chicken. Cooked chicken. I've never seen a tinned chicken since. And three pairs of frankfurters. No, two pairs of frankfurters. But I was already looking after my father, cause his wife had walked away. It was- I can't- Can't tell you. There hasn't been... Maybe the sad thing is, I've been alone for sixteen years. I've found my feet. Before, I was relying entirely on my husband. I was his other half. ...It's hard being alone. I had a partner, after – when he died – after three years. I found a man... through the Kindertransport – what's her name, the woman who went to Israel?

*Bertha. Leverton?*

Bertha Leverton. She did me no favours. [both Eva and Bea laugh] For ten years it went- it was OK. And now I'm getting away from it completely because – he needed, he needed a mother looking after and I'm not capable of looking after another man anymore. I don't want to. Why am I telling you this?



*I don't know, we started talking about what the- about the conditions and that you said you had to work...*

And he's also a poor chap. But by God I - I can't have this responsibility anymore.

*Did you ever get any restitution or any help from...?*

**[1:50:18]**

I - I was too young. I was too young. I get money because I haven't got enough from the...from the... I got £500 for lack of studies. And I got... money, about £50 every three months or something ridiculous, because I paid £500 to become German in 1994. I get... I get money from the [inaudible] compensation if you had under 9,000 or 9,000, and I didn't; I got that. I got money every month from that. But real – real restitution I never got because I was too young, and then Hermann Hirschberger managed to get me £150, you know, when he said they'd got to count three more years. But I've been living on a shoestring sort of...ever since. There wasn't much there. And that's why I'm telling you. To live here, to do what it needs doing...

*Yeah.*

I haven't got it. But if I move, finally I'll have a brand-new place, a new place, and it's perfect provided I can make a life for myself. Which I hope to do! I've still got enough in me to.

*So, you're moving to...*

To Ross on- Ross on Wye in the hope that I'll be able to help something to the Jewish community there, which is very tiny. And me, because I'm near my son. And see, because I'm seeing I'm going downhill, and I'm not ready to go to an old-age home. But there, I've got everything that I need on one level. Although it's on the first floor, but it's all on one level. And it's done. I don't need to worry about it, you know, things falling into disrepair and can't afford to do it.

*Yes. And when you were raising your children, what sort of identity did you want to give them? Or what...?*

As I'm a Jew of Europe, I'm, I'm, I'm nothing. I go to Israel, and I have a- I have a split personality when I go there. When I was younger, I would have liked to go to Israel, but I didn't like the idea that somebody else brings up my children. But having had three children I think it's a fantastic thing, only they don't do it like that anymore! [laughs]

*In a kibbutz, you mean?*

**[1:52:45]**

Ja. I would- Kibbutz life would have appealed to me then. I think, I don't know what my children- I think- David said to me to live in England, and not to be very religious you don't... it's wrong. A religious Jew can live in England because they keep themselves to themselves. But I'm not a religious Jew. And through Habonim- He worked afterwards for a year, and gave Habonim you know, work time for a year. And then he went- He studied politics and history and then he went to Manchester and then he went on to - to Israel. First Mahon, and he's very well liked in Israel in what he's doing. So, he knew he could, he didn't want to live here in England. ...Johnny: I did him harm. When Johnny went out with a... Christian girl... and I sent him to Israel. I said, "Try and find a new Jewish girl." Becky is the nicest girl. She's my... They got married. She's my daughter-in-law. I feel very close to her. She's a very good girl. And I apologised about a few years ago at Pesach. I said, "I have an apology to make, because when I spoke into that tape in 1994, I said, 'What Hitler started, my son is finishing off.' And... I take it back." [with emotion] I still feel sorry, I say, but... it was hard. And truly I don't know what to make of her. She obviously feels Jewish, and she returned everything belonging to Judaism to me except for the candlesticks. So that's number one. David found his way over there. [Inaudible] And he's got two little boys. They're still fourteen and... twelve.

*And how do you think that your experience impacted your life, from your perspective?*

I wouldn't be what I am now. I would be somebody totally different. I would have had backup from my mother, who - who I possibly miss. Imagine having a child, never seen a baby before. And I had to bring it up. I didn't know what to do. My husband stayed till one o'clock as I told you. My mother-in-law for an hour, and she was not very domesticated, but she was a lovely woman.

*Did he have family, your husband?*

He...he, his family. Yeah. His father lived until he was eighty, and she lived until eighty-four. She was in the Leo Baeck House in the end – Baeck Home in the end.

*So, was that a bit of family support for you, or not?*

**[1:55:44]**

I had more of my mother-in-law than my husband. Every Sunday she came around. She loved coming around when she was alone. And... he'd go up in his upstairs where my sewing room is now was his... *Kabuff* [cubbyhole] where he had all his - his books around him. There wasn't room- There was just room for a chair and a table. But I talked- We talked to each other. And she died in 1980. And life... It can be full if you make it, but you've got to plan it in such a way that it is full. But the people say that they can't believe that this happened. Hopefully that is a thing that... we provided.

*Yeah.*

Because that he could do something that goes on for generations. Because I do believe... I do believe that something must have... left its mark on the children, although it hurts. But I don't- I can't see exactly where.

*Yeah... And what made you then interested to go back and collect these things? And also, maybe you can tell us a little bit about your textile work?*

I felt I wanted to make my nice – my life more beautiful, and... I called it 'play'. I didn't have a childhood. I still call it 'play'. You might find me outside in the garden, doing a batik,

playing outside and just enjoying it. Never mind what comes out of it. People have told me, “That was nice. It’s...Do something with it.” Ah! I carried on. It made me- It made me happy. I lost the track. What did you...?

*I asked you about the textile work... when did you start?*

The textile work... Well, my husband went out every Saturday doing his brass, business with his meetings and all the rest of it. And... I was alone! They children were doing their own thing. They were going to Habonim or wherever they went; they also went to Habonim. What do you do with your time? My friend across, broke down the barrier between my house and the house at the other end. She was German, and she was frightened to get in touch with me, because was- She came over, you know, she was German and Christian. She thought I wouldn’t want anything to do with her. It turned out she’s my best friend, she really is, and has been the last forty years. And then I saw an advert that... in Regent’s Park there is a college, the American College in London. They do different courses once a month, on different textile things. So I thought, well I always liked knitting and... let’s have a go at that. So, every month I went to Regent’s College and I saw different things. One day you did hat making, one day you did...some crazy weaving and another day some dyeing. All different things. And I got more and more excited about this, so I went every - once a month. Even when my husband was alive, still I went to this college. And I could just about pay for it. It was twenty-five pounds a day. And I went by car and it took five pounds to park and another five pounds to eat. Well, thirty-five pounds, I know it’s a month but it was a lot of money. Anyway, I did it and I enjoyed it and I got pleasure from it. And then you had exhibitions and you saw exhibitions and got more and more into it. And... it grew and it grew. And then I decided when I was eighty-five, years ago, that I would like to take my whole family to Germany to show where I come from. I have a daughter-in-law from Montevideo, that’s Uruguay. I have a daughter-in-law from Wales. I have, had a son-in-law who came originally from Lithuania. I came from Germany. My husband came also from Germany. My, my, my niece is in America. And one’s married to an American. I mean, it’s such a mixture of people. I want to bring these people together, then they can try and understand - if they think I’m crazy, why it is that I’m crazy. And everybody thought, “You’re mad, what you’re doing.” I thought it’s worth doing. So, when I’m eighty I planned for a whole year this thing. I wanted to have- celebrate in Germany. Show them that I have collected German - new kinds of Germans – who are my best friends. They are fantastic people. And that there were some

bad people there and some good people. And I did it. That was in March 1980. When the town heard that I wanted to do this they said, "How about... we celebrate you? We ...there was a big- There was a big – a big opening of my exhibition, and it was also six weeks. The - the Mayor opened it, and this and that - a whole big thing. And my, nobody had ever seen a party like mine. The reason why I had the money, because Kate left me the amount of money that was my father's, which I had to share between me and my sister. But whatever money she made, went to somebody. You know. She - my father had a fantastic, whatever you call it, restitution money. And that all went to somebody else. But I had enough money; I made this party. Everybody came. I stayed in the suburb somewhere. It was beautiful country behind the hotel where we had the vineyards. It was an amazing place. We stayed there just for the weekend, and the family stayed for a week. People came from everywhere. And at this party, they hadn't started even...we had a what do you call it? Music, which was a real klezmer band. We started dancing and tables were laid and people were going mad. It was just a lovely atmosphere. Jew, Gentile, old Jews, young Jews. It just- Everything went well. Somebody volunteered to show them around the town and explain all the places where we lived, and... You know, all the various places where there are... What do you call them? Stolpersteine?

**[2:02:29]**

*Stolperstein.*

Which I hate. And everybody's shocked at my thing, but I hate them. First you kill them, then you walk over them. You should *stolper* [*stumble*]over them? What is this? If you would have put it on the wall... no respect.

*So, you didn't do the Stolpersteins?*

They did, they did, they did three in front of the house. One for my aunt Martha, and one for my mother and one for Esther. No, but I didn't- They wanted me to contribute to it. I mean, that was an irony. Anyway, and somebody else showed us the old synagogue what's left of it. They put all people who were still living there... on the side of it. Not to disturb their hall, but- It's there. Somebody gave, they gave a speech. They were amazing. So for the whole week we were... feted, and wined and dined. And the rest, I did. It was- It was great. And

then somebody wrote about me. And she explained to me why I was doing what I was doing. The need to express myself. The need to talk about my religion. And my new-found life. And so that - that was it. Was that what you wanted to know?

*Yes. Do you feel it's sort of a circle? You need...?*

It's, it's- It has. I've, I've rounded it off. I was quite happy if I- If I died after that, I was fine.

*Was that the first time you went back?*

No!

*When was the first time?*

I was invited back in 1986 for the first time. I mean I've been back privately as long as Minna lived. But it's just about right. She - She died, and then this thing started. The town invited us. And they wanted, they wanted to show goodwill. And for a week, they took us around, showed us Heidelberg and all the wonderful - Worms - and all the wonderful things that lived, and even that there were people here way before 1865 when my grandmother was born. But then they lived in villages. They were allowed to work in town but not to - to live there. So, a - a lot. And then I thought all the time I felt, I really and truthfully would like to live, make my- the name of my mother and my sister, then it's only he who's forgotten, keep it alive. And then people wanted to have Esther's diary, and I wouldn't give it to them! I only give it to them if you do it on condition that you publish some of our mother's poems. And in that book eventually they put ...some of the poems. And then when my mother would have been 100, they did that - this one - my mother's poems. And then Esther's diary. And now he's doing one... Then there was one, 'Offenburg Women'. And my mother is in it and I'm in it. And now they're doing one where my sister Myriam is mentioned. And this is all this guy...and I don't think he makes a great living out of it. In fact...

*What is his name? For the record?*

**[2:05:29]**

The... Ruch. Martin Ruch. Dr Martin Ruch. And I have asked that he should be honoured in town and by Leo Baeck College. Leo Baeck College hasn't given me – in America, hasn't given me an answer. But I have known that he is going to be honoured together with me in January, so... I think...

*By the town?*

By the town.

*Are there any Jews today in Offenburg?*

A few, a few Russian Jews. But what they are, I don't know. They have to go to Emmendingen if they want to pray.

*But there's no functioning synagogue?*

Nothing. Nothing. The nearest is Emmendingen, and I've been going to Freiburg. But they're all Russian Jews and do you know, what, they now pray half in Russian. I mean, they've got a beautiful re-built synagogue. Bear in mind this is where I was taken from. There's a big plaque there. They called- my name is there, Myriam's name is on there. Myriam... Myriam is 'Marion' somebody, and I am... also completely different. They didn't know; they picked up things and they don't know.

*In Emmendingen?*

In Freiburg. There's - there's a plaque of all the Jews who, who were taken to Gurs. Som I was in touch with them for a long time, but gradually I, I feel 'you know what?'

*Yeah.*

I went to a place now – it's called 'Gescher', it's called 'The Bridge'. And they're mainly for people who are intermarrying. But there are also Germans who are interested in it.

*Yes.*

And I think they're lovely. There are only about twelve of them. And... I'd- I'd carry on you know, if I was...

*Where is that, the Gescher?*

Gescher is in Freiburg.

*Freiburg.*

If you look them up on the internet, you'll find them.

*Yeah. So, what's interesting you said you did a lot of this in Germany, but in England, you haven't actually...?*

No. Because it happened there, it was important to do it there. And here, I feel there's quite a few people who - let them do it. I mean I don't... I've never pushed myself. I've not- I don't have the need.

**[2:07:29]**

*So, for you it's not so important. It was more important to do it there.*

It's important to do it there where it happened. The people of Germany should know what they've done and understand. I had, for example there's a girl... from Beirut. And she wasn't supposed to come to the talk, her mother said she can't come. I mean they do it- The children have to go to school, and there they were asked to go. And she says, "Mum I've got to go. I want to listen." And then in the end she said, "Please can I have a photo with you?" I said, "With pleasure." She said, "I have to show my mother how nice some Jews are. You are lovely. I didn't know..." You know there are things- And what the children, look there's a whole world of things that the children write how, what they understand. It's- it's worthwhile. And that's why I put my energies into that. But not...if it doesn't matter. This matters to me very much and there's not much more I can do. And I keep saying I'm getting



old, I'm getting weak. And therefore, I don't know how much longer I can do it. But I will do that. But I've— I've called a halt about Gurs, because it's such a farce.

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

A mish-mush. I told you. A world Jew. A European Jew of some sort. I don't know where I belong. If I'm in England I criticize what Germany does. When I'm in Germany I criticize what English people do. There's a lot I like. I like the food, I like their thoroughness. Even if I'm untidy, I like things done a certain way. I like- I respect them more. I find them... more intellectual most people that you mix with are... ordinary. I'm ordinary. But I veer to those people more. But what I would have been, I don't know.

*Do you sometimes think what would have happened?*

I often, I ask them, I ask them, I ask them to tell me, "What do you reckon would have become of me?" And nobody has answered it yet.

*What do you think?*

I haven't a clue. I haven't a clue. I might have become a shy little mousy thing for all I know. I don't know. But I had to fight, fight my way around.

*Yeah. And become quite independent. And where would you consider your home?*

I wouldn't live in Germany. But this has been my home. This has been wonderful. This has been very good to me. But I'm surrounded... [half laughing] by lots of Orthodox people...

**[2:10:04]**

*Yes, it's a very Orthodox area.*

And I am- I adopt the outside. This one's got four children. She's going to have more. This one over there has got five children. The one over there they said they were modern Jewish and invited me over. And they wanted to hear my story, that was all.

*We didn't talk about your sense of Jewishness... and whether you joined a synagogue.*

I'm very, very- I'm not – not religious, but I've become very, very much so. And I think old age has got something to do with it. I don't go particularly to their social functions. But it's still my home. And I shall miss them. And I think it's got something to do with being old and knowing that you're going to die soon and my affiliation...

*What is your- What was your affiliation... in terms of synagogues, or...?*

Reform.

*Reform.*

Reform. I find them honest and I find them...they're OK. The lovely man where I spoke on Wednesday said to me, "I want to pay you a compliment." I said, "What's that?" He said, "You could be my mother." That's a man from Stamford Hill [half laughing].

*So, this was the first time that you actually, you gave a talk for Yom HaShoah at Pinner Synagogue?*

Yeah, I should have been at my synagogue. I would have had more fun. [laughs] It was also interesting.

**[2:11:31]**

*How was it? What was that like for you? Was that the first sort of public thing you did in Britain?*

In England I've only spoken to people who have private schools, and who want it in their private school. Or, if they're my own children or my children's children, and they ask me. This I find very strange. I would never wanted- my mother or my grandmother to come and speak, and - and talk about it. And charming! Really lovely, well-received. I didn't know. I can't tell you. You have to make up your mind. I don't know what I am.

*Yeah. And are there certain, you said there are certain elements you like of Germany. Are there certain things that you miss? Difficult to say.*

I watch more German television than English television. I like their programmes. They are more... They've got... they discuss things that we don't talk about. There are... I just prefer it. I feel more at home. But that's something that's come in the last... sixteen years.

*More, now? More...through your work? Through...being in Germany?*

I – I suppose so.

*I mean, what amazes me is that you left...*

As a little child.

*You were deported as a young child. That you managed- the language that you kept.*

But that's re-acquired in a certain extent. I still, there are words in English that crop up when I speak. But that's natural, but my friend she understands me. We understand one another.

*But when you go to Offenburg, do you speak German? If you have to speak there?*

Ja, ja, ja, ja.

*You speak in German?*

Yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

*And that's another thing I didn't ask you. What was it like to come to England? Did you have any English?*

**[2:13:09]**

Nothing, well, yes, I did. I had- I had a man who taught me English. He became a... a composer. Opera composer. And we were reading... 'Of Mice and Men' in school. And he was walking up and down, and he was saying, "Il n'existe plus que la faillites et la honte!" And I thought, 'That man is mad...' But he was composing his operas. He wasn't really interested. He was making a bit of money, or getting nothing. Or maybe he did charity work. There were always people, you know. We did not- We didn't have geography as geography. We learnt the capitals of the various countries. It's just very... A lot's missing.

*But you managed to pick up English, while you were here?*

Absolutely, ja. But I came into a class and I didn't know what they were talking about. They were children of my own age, they were already making up at fourteen...weird. ...It was, it was – it was difficult. The first week you were important because you were a newcomer, and then you've got to make your way. And there is- was no way. You know, you... It wasn't easy.

*And did you experience hostility as a sort of foreigner, or German?*

Never, no. The only, the only thing that happened to me, one hotel as a receptionist, he asked me whether I would change my name. I said, "Why?" "Could you have to be Cohn?" I said, "What do you mean?" "Could you change it to Priestley?" I said, "It was good enough for my father, it's good enough for me. But if you don't like that, please phone my father and explain to him." It was important the if he was going to let me go, that he should know why I'm going. And he did. That was the only- That's the only time. And at U3A I had a bit of a debate recently with somebody who asked me to have lunch with him in the canteen and I walked out. Because we were talking about Israel and what-have-you. And... that was- that was it. It was just too bad. But otherwise, never.

*Speaking of names, you said at the beginning you wanted to tell us something about Sarah.*

I– I was ill in 1990, and for some reason I needed a birth certificate. And I said... Phoned up, "Can I have a...?" "Of course. Free of charge." "Thanks very much." It comes very promptly: 'Eva Judith Sarah Cohn'. I blew my top! And I said, "What? That is not the name I was given." Apparently, the Nazi's job was that they had to cross out Israel on the men, and Sarah

on the women. They sent me another one. Also free of charge. And then I- I voiced my opinion in Germany and they said, "Sarah is the most popular name nowadays." You know that's what they had a 'J' on - on your passport. And it was- well look on there and you'll see 'Harry Israel'. And the degradation, how you can, how you can... you know, make people who are ordinary people into nothing. And how low... they can go. How low. And people are capable of evil. You wouldn't think it if you are hungry, if you are tired, if you are ill. You'll do anything.

**[2:16:50]**

*And now, coming to the end of the interview, what do you think helped you to go through your experiences... as a- as a child?*

Possibly- possibly my talking. I don't know... I... I never. I, I don't look at myself nowadays as dispossessed in any way. I managed through. I'm here. I have shown you all my children. That's it, sort of thing. I - I haven't missed out. I could have had an easier life, but other people who've got worse.

*Do you see yourself as a survivor?*

Yeah! I'm a survivor but I don't – I don't want to go to the Holocaust Centre. I, I pay my dues there, but I've got nothing to do with it. But if we go and see – I don't know - Prince Charles, then I'm one of them, because [inaudible]. But that's basically it.

*But obviously your experience is quite different from the Kindertransportees.*

Well, that's not- They've got- Of course it is. It's an easier one. But... there's a competition as to who suffered more, and it goes with the age, and I have no time for that. But maybe I was always sufficiently occupied and I didn't need to go there.

*And now you're moving away from London. Does it worry you not to be in touch with other...?*

The fact that I've asked you to find me AJR, I'm trying to re-create. I want some of those people but... they might be all right. I mean, it's just- It's...it's not a safety net, but it's something like that. Somebody who can understand you if nobody else understands if you're surrounded by... well, they're different. It's not London, is it?

No.

**[2:18:56]**

*So, is there anything I haven't asked you which you'd like to add? That we haven't touched on...?*

I think I've told you more or less off the cuff whatever there is.

*Is there any message you have for anyone who might watch this interview?*

Don't be a follower. Make up your own mind what's good and what's bad [pause].  
'*Mitläufer*' is my word. Don't know if you can translate it in English?

*You could say 'collaborator' but it's not that, it's... 'bystanders'.*

Well, he looks at it, and the other one runs with it. Yes.

*Yeah, it's more than- Yeah, that's right, it's difficult to translate. Just before we finish, I actually wanted to ask you whether you actually know the people who helped you to cross the border. Was it Partisans? Do you actually know who they were?*

No! It was the OSE!

*It was still the OSE?*

I've got the thing next door waiting to be settled, so I send them some money. It was the OSE who saved me. I owe my life to them!

*So even not just the orphanage, but the...?*

Well, the orphanage is the OSE. These are the people- it's a group of people I think in 1924 in Russia they started it. And they're helping nowadays children who've not got parents. People who've got difficulties at home, they'll still sort of take the children into their homes. They've still got homes.

**[2:20:40]**

*So, they were also responsible for smuggling you over the border. So, they found the person to take you to the border?*

One man is still alive and he's Monsieur [Georges] Loinger. He's 103 now. And he had a lot to do with it. He came into the camps and he was, as a guide, as a, you know, not a girl guide. What are the boys?

*Scouts.*

Scouts. And he put the- He hid some children under his cape to take them out. They, they, they were- There were fantastic things happening.

*And were they recognised ever by Yad Vashem, do you know? Was that particular organisation?*

Well, he is a Jew himself actually; he's an Alsatian Jew...

*But they were responsible?*

They're definitely- There's a lot about, about this stuff. You can research. There's an awful lot. You put 'Masgelier' you'll find something, and you put 'OSE' you'll find something.

*Yeah. And do you feel that in France there has been interest in this – in this topic at all? Have you ever been contacted by- I mean, as we said before in Rivesaltes there is now a monument, but there was nothing I think, for many years.*

I've never been contacted. I've been contacted from Gurs. I've been there... three times? Every four years or something. And I said this time, last October, that I just don't want to go there anymore. The whole thing is like a farce. You go there and you see... People go there for a walk! You know, and it was such a horrible place. They planted all these trees since then. There was nothing there.

*You don't have any interest to go to Rivesaltes, for example?*

I would go if I... I would go to Rivesaltes just to have a look to. I never actually went again to the camp, to the camp site.

*Maybe somebody should invite you. Maybe they should organise something there. Yeah.*

**[2:22:51]**

I don't know. At least I mean, I have great pity for today's refugees. I feel very... akin. I know what they feel. Never mind what the fears are about them, but I - I really feel ...because there is a reason that they ran. We didn't run.

*And do you think the British Government should...?*

I think you should help helpless children for sure. I mean if it's a good influence we don't know. I mean, maybe the good children might become... But if we educate them early enough, definitely. I mean they didn't want to take- They took 10,000 children in England only because it had somebody behind them who gave £50 per person for each child that they took in. And now they come in and they give them things. So there is- There is a difference. But, yes, certainly, if anybody in need. It's only by luck that you're... OK.

*Mrs Mendelsson thank you very much for your interview and sharing your story with us.*

*Thank you.*

You're welcome. No, you're not welcome. I don't want anymore! [laughs]



*I'm sorry that you had to tell your story again and be upset...it's painful.*

It's far worse when it's at home for some reason. Do you know that? It's far... It- I seem to be more affected... I don't quite know what it is. Or maybe it's just that I'm old. [laughs]

*Maybe it's easier in a public setting? Is that what you're saying?*

It is rare that I break down in a public- Usually I'm- I'm in a bad way when I'm- when I describe the separation between my mother and us and I say when she was deported. But... not – not otherwise because I've done it so often. But it's... I don't know.

*I apologise for that, but I think it's a very important that I...*

Oh, no, if it's a valuable job you do it, and you're doing something for posterity.

*Because hopefully this will be for posterity, and it will be as part of a big archive of refugees and survivors.*

My children don't particularly want to part with my - my lot, but it would be the Wiener Library or to go to Yad Vashem when I, when I, when I go. I don't know.

*That's excellent. Thank you again.*

**[End of interview]**

**[2:25:38]**

**[2:26:00]**

**[Photographs and documents]**

*Mrs Mendelsson, can you tell us what you're holding in your hand, please?*

This is the last book I've got from my mother which she made for me, for my birthday in 1942, when I was eleven.

*And what's in it?*

Poems that she's written down from her memory, and some which she has added in the camps, Gurs and Rivesaltes.

*Would you like please to read us...a few?*

Yes, I would.

*Please do so.*

**[2:26:29]**

[Mrs Mendelsson reads her mother's words to her]

*Eine kleine von gestern und heute, eine kleine Auswahl von Gedichten meiner geliebten Kinder von ihrer Mutter Camp Rivesaltes, 15.3.1942*

*27.11.1942 Evaleins Geburtstag*

*Meinen Kindern,*

*Ihr wollt Gedichte vom Mütterlein, ich will Euren Wunsch erfüllen,  
doch sei dies Heft für Euch allein, nicht fremde Neugier zu stillen.*

*Ihr wisst, dass alles, was ich schrieb, zurück ich musste lassen,  
die Lieder all von Freud' und Leid, vom Leiden und vom Hassen.*

*Was in diesem Heft ich euch gab, schrieb die Erinnerung nieder  
und weckte aus ihrem Grab manch alte Mutilieder.*

*Auch ein paar neue sind dabei, ihr werdet sie schon finden.*

*Von Eurer Mutti lieb und treu, mög' Euch dies Heft verkünden.*

*Und wenn die Sonne golden scheint, an Evchens Wiegenfeste,  
geht in den Garten, treu vereint und lest, es ist das Beste.*

*Wisst, dass die Mutter lieb Euch hat und schickt euch ihren Segen.*

*Und wenn Ihr wendet Blatt um Blatt [she is crying], wird sich die Heimat regen.*

*Vergisst sie nicht, vergisst sie nicht, lasst's Euch von Mutti sagen,*

*es war Freude und viel Leid in unseren alten Tagen.*

Translation: A small selection of my poems for my beloved children from their mother

27.11.1942, little Eva's birthday

To my children,

you want poems from your little mother, I will grant your wish,  
but this booklet is for you alone, not to satisfy a stranger's curiosity,

you know, that everything I wrote, I had to leave behind,  
all the songs of happiness and suffering, suffering and hatred,

What I give you with this booklet, is written by memory,

Which resurrected from its grave some of mother's old songs,

But there are also new ones, you will find them

Written by your mummy, dear and faithful, may this booklet tell you about.

And when the golden sun is shining on little Eva's birthday,

Step into the garden, truly united and read it, it is my best work.

Please know, that your mother loves you and sends her blessing.

And when you turn page by page, you will feel your homeland call.

Don't forget it, don't forget it, let your mother tell you, there was much happiness and much suffering in these olden days...

[2:28:28]

*Thank you.*

*Thank you.*

[Mrs Mendelsson reads another poem by her mother]

*Rivesaltes, 11 März, 1942*

*Sei stark mein Herz und hab' Geduld, ist auch Dein Sehnen ungestillt, noch stehen wir mitten auf der Leiter, noch geht das Klettern mühsam weiter und noch ist nichts erfüllt.*

*Sei stark mein Herz und hab ' Geduld, nur Triebkraft sei das Hoffnungslicht, du musst noch lange, lange warten und tragen all die vielen harten, Fußtritte des Schicksals, verzweifeln wir nicht. Sei stark mein Herz und hab ' Geduld, Du musst ja durch den [she leaves the word out] zum Ziel, ein Rosenschein am Firmament gibt Warnung, dass es doch zum End' des Leidens kommen will.*

Be strong my heart and patient, even if your longing is unsatisfied, we are half way up the ladder, we have to continue the laborious climbing and nothing is fulfilled. Be strong my heart and patient, the light of hope may be the driving force. You'll have to wait much longer and bear fate's many hard blows. Let's not despair! Be strong my heart, and patient. You'll have to get through [...] to reach the goal. A rose-coloured light in the sky is warning that suffering will come to an end.

[bell rings]

**[2:29:29]**

*Yes Mrs Mendelsson, what is this book, please?*

*Inzwischen sind wir nun "besternt" worden... [in the meantime we have received a star]It's a diary of Esther Cohn, 1926, murdered in 1944. And the children of the Antonienheim. It's a note that was in her diary on 22 of October, 1940, when 6,500 Jews were deported from Baden and Pfalz, into the ...I don't know if it's free unbesetzte, unbesetzte [un-occupied] Frankreich.*

*Yes – not occupied.*

Unoccupied.

Mendelsson reads her sister's words]

*Auch die Mutter und die beiden Schwestern, Eva und Myriam sind unterwegs,*

*3.11.1940*

*Oh, Furchtbares ist in der Zwischenzeit geschehen. Alle Juden aus Baden sind fortgekommen und zwar am 22. Oktober. Es ist ganz schrecklich, einfach unglaublich. Es ist jetzt schon fast vierzehn Tage und ich habe immer noch keine Adresse. Ich kann das Leben jetzt bald nimmer*

*aushalten. Viele Leute schrieben mir, aber was hilft das denn? Wann werde ich meine süße Muttsch, meine Geschwister wiedersehen? Werde ich es überhaupt nochmals? Oh, lieber Gott, bitte gib, dass wir wieder bald zusammenkommen. Oder falls es nicht sein soll, dann mach doch meinem armen Leben ein Ende. Was habe ich denn dafür, wenn ich niemanden mehr habe? Oh, dass ich nie geboren wäre! Solches Elend zu erleben... Mein armer, süßer Vati, ist auch nicht da. Hoffentlich bekomme ich bald ein Lebenszeichen von ihm und meinen Lieben, die jetzt wohl in Südfrankreich weilen müssen. Lieber Gott, behüte und beschütze meine einzigen Menschen, die ich liebe! Gib‘ ihnen satt zu essen, ein Bett zu schlafen. Bei jedem Bissen, den ich nehme, denke ich „hat denn die Mutterle auch sowas zu essen?“ Oh, wie grausig ist doch das Schicksal! Lieber Gott, führe mich recht bald wieder mit ihnen zusammen. So allein kann und werde ich nicht leben. Oh, Mutti, warum haben wir uns in den Ferien nicht besser verstanden! Jetzt, wo ich Dich so nötig habe...*

Also, my mother and the two sisters are on the go. 3.11.1940

Oh, in the meantime something horrible has happened. All Jews from the Baden area have been removed, precisely on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October. It is utterly horrible, just unbelievable. It has been almost fourteen days and I still don't have an address. I won't be able to live like this for much longer. Many people are writing to me, but what does that help? When will I see my sweet mumm and my sisters? Will I ever? Oh please, God, please make, that we will soon be united. Or if it is not meant to be, then please end my miserable life! What do I have if I don't have anyone left? Oh, I wish I had never been borne! To experience such misery... My poor, sweet Daddy isn't here either. I hope I will soon receive a sign of their wellbeing soon from him and my dear ones, who are most likely in the South of France. Dear god, protect and look after the only people I love! Please give them enough to eat, a bed to sleep in. Every bit I make, I think "does my mother have something to eat?" Oh, how cruel is fate! Please, god, unite me soon with them. I can't and won't live lonely like this. Oh, mother, why didn't we get on better during the holidays! Now, that I need you so much...

**[2:32:42]**

*Thank you.*

*Yes, please.*

My- my grandfather, Eduard Oberbrunner, and his wife, Emma Oberbrunner and my mother as a sixteen-year-old girl, about 1920. Sylvia Cohn is at the back.

My mother and father getting married in May 1925. My grandfather Eduard Oberbrunner with older sister, Martha, on the left, her sister Irma – Irma [Wetzler], with an uncle.

*And where?*

It was taken in the Wilhelmstraße 15 in the garden, I believe.

Erster Flug. The first time they went on a plane. I think it was 1927. My father Eduard Cohn and Sylvia Cohn, geborene Oberbrunner.

Alle drei grüßen...ein .....Geburtstagsgruß. Ich weiß nicht mehr wer...[all three say hello...it is a birthday with. I can't remember for whom...]

Sorry, I should be talking in English! [laughs]

Go on...?

*Alle hatten den gleichen Matrosenanzug und gratulieren jemand zum Geburtstag. [All three are wearing the same sailor suit and congratulate someone on his/her birthday]*  
*[Eva reads the birthday message]*

*Where was it taken?*

AugustasträÙe, da waren wir schon umgezogen... [AugustasträÙe, we had already moved]  
We moved from a house to a flat, and this is the veranda in AugustasträÙe, in Offenburg, in Germany.

*And roughly which year?*

Well, how old do I look? I don't know. About five years old, so 1936, roughly.

**[2:34:55]**

It is Carnival in Offenburg. Myriam and I are a Dutch girl and a Dutch boy, taken outside Friedenstraße 46 in Offenburg. Oooh, I would think it's about eight - we were eight and ten years old, or seven, no, must be seven and nine? So would be 1930... Even earlier. Could be 1937 I would think, at the latest.

This reel has Esther in the background, Myriam to the left and I'm to the right. 1934, playing in the garden. All wearing dirndl dresses, or the older two are. That's the photo my mother gave my father when he left in June '39 and it says, "Immer vor Euch steht ...: "So that you can always see in front of you your wife and three children, Esther, Eva, Myriam"

I can't see a thing...

This is Rivesaltes. It's much larger than Gurs. And the problem there were, there were pebbles everywhere, and when there was wind, they all went on your legs and it was horrible. We had more space there, for sure. But it was still terrible.

The last picture of my mother taken in Rivesaltes. I have no idea who had a camera, who was able to take it but she sent it to us together with that little book of poems.

*So, is that the one you got through your nanny?*

No.

*No.*

No. In the camp...someone took a photograph, and she sent me that little green book which I've been reading from. And at the same time, I would have received that photo. What does it say there? 1942?

*Yes, please.*

It's Masgelier, the children's home in France run by the OSE. And somebody got married. Gertrud married the doctor and we're celebrating, having a little celebration. I'm there in the

middle in white with a scarf dangling down. I'm still in touch with one of those people, who lives in Florida and we all Skype together. And we're all like sisters - brothers and sisters 'cause we didn't have any relatives so they – they took the place of.

*And when was it taken?*

This was taken in 1941-2, 1942. Between I'm not quite sure when.

**[2:38:34]**

That's taken in the garden of the Casa Cedro - it was an old hotel. And when seventy children came that's how we ate outside in the summer, outside. Always these big tables, with rough - rough food. It was good for playing football anyway.

We're eating in the Casa Cedro in the Tessin, in Ascona. And so many people always together. It was so rough. I'm on it somewhere, it's on the right, but I'm not quite- I can't see from here, where.

There's Lily, who was *Directrice* of this home in Switzerland whom everybody called her by her first name. And we gathered sort of once a year, when we were grown up, to be with her.

That's a picture taken in Switzerland before I left to come to England, and it was used on my identity piece of paper that I came to England with.

That's the photo that was taken... he... shortly after we arrived. That's how he found his children again, who were eight and ten when he left us, and now we found him at fourteen and sixteen. Very difficult for him and for us. That's my father – sorry.

That's our wedding picture. Walter on the left and I'm naturally on the other side. Outside the new synagogue in Egerton Road, N15, or I don't know - N16. 1954, March the 28<sup>th</sup>.

That's in the garden of Highcroft Gardens, Golders Green where my in-laws lived, two roads behind us. On the left is Steve, Wally's brother, older, and his father, my father-in-law and



my husband next to him. In front is Oma Greta with Susie on her lap, my daughter. And I've got David on my lap. We paraded every Sunday morning... at eleven o'clock.

On a visit to Israel in 1974. And at the back Susie, in the middle Johnny and in the front David, who lives in Israel.

*Your children?*

My children.

For Pesach I rented the house in Oxfordshire countryside. And we had a week together. The whole family is there. From... Children and partners... and son-in-laws, and daughter-in-laws or daughters-in-law. And we had a nice time together. Everybody had their own room and own toilet and bathroom. So, we could all do what we liked, but we had a joint kitchen. We all helped to make a quite a nice Pesach on plastic plates.

And when was this?

A couple of years ago. Two-three years ago. 2014.

**[2:42:47]**

Yom HaShoah 2016, my grandson came with me on that talk...at Pinner Synagogue.

[Eva reads from her speech at Pinner Synagogue]

Yom HaShoah. I'm here to share with you this story in order to create a better future. My outward appearance is quite normal, but within me there are many wounds. I believe that the children of the perpetrators have their own problems. The fact that I'm not sure where I belong, whether it is the land where I was born, land of my captivity or the land of my refuge seven years ago - seventy years ago, sorry. It took me many years before I could talk to my children about the past. I'm coming to the end of my work; I'm old and I'm very tired. My hope is that you will pass on the story which you have heard from the horse's mouth, and that you will have the courage to see that this will never happen again. Eva Mendelsson, nee Cohn.

This is not the one that I read there, actually.

[Eva describes textile montage she has made]

I call it the CV. It's basically my life since all the horror has happened. Starting on the left, in the top you see my father, who had to leave Germany in 1939. He came to England. And you see... his passport, which had a 'J'. It's a bit faded, but a red 'J' was on his passport. After the Dachau he left, and he sent his wife a postcard, saying 'You can reply with 25 words'. That's down at the bottom here, and you see his name, where he was in Dachau. Then you see...you see...what you see... you see, he's got his children. They're all- They're all in front of him. That's a picture my mother gave him before he left Germany. In the meantime, we were deported from Germany to Gurs, which is the middle picture. It was mud and goodness knows what. It was horrible. People died of starvation and - and sickness. From there, we children were freed. My mother stayed in- She went to Rivesaltes. And we children landed in a children's home, in the middle of France, run by the OSE - on the right-hand side here. Then we were called back to the camp. And this time we were meant to be deported with my mother, but my mother left us behind. Here at the bottom, you can see how, how, how little we were when my father left and now that my father found us again in England in 1945. There is a poem translated into English about the train. More or less, what happened the three or four days that we were on the train from Baden into Gurs. And then you see the death certificate of Auschwitz of my mother. And somewhere there is one for Esther. ...I can't see it. ...I can't anyway, here it shows you where we were. Where the camps- Where the camp actually was, down in the south. First *Bas Pyrenees* and then *Pyrenees Orientales*. And at the end there in the picture you see the smoke, how when they died and they went up in smoke. My sister, and- My mother and my one sister and my mother. My- My mother died two years before my sister Esther and one didn't know about the other. What else? And that's the story. And that's the piece of paper I came to England with in 1945, having escaped into Switzerland, via Annemasse into Geneva. And these are the pictures how they were stamps used in Gurs for internal correspondence. And these things are just to show you '*Liberté, Egalité, et Fraternité*' where it got you. And this is '*Juden*' Esther had to wear in 1943...1942.

[2:47:30]

*This shows your...your work as a textile artist.*

Yes, I do— I do a lot of that, and it keeps me happy and also releases some of the misery that's been behind me. But I do pretty things as well.

*And have you exhibited it?*

This is- This is actually in Germany, in a museum. I didn't want to sell it, but they did want to buy it, so I let them. And that's another one that I made afterwards.

*Where is it in Germany?*

It's in Offenburg, in Baden, 28 km from Strasbourg, and 68 km from Freiburg im Breisgau.

I didn't tell you what this was. This is basically one's saluting and having a hammer on it and she's in front. And she's cowering. That's it. And there again, you've got the children. That is actually all the children from Offen- Freiburg who were in the Freiburg school, here.

*These are the two...*

Look, at the back- At the back here, it tells you where it comes from. Sterbebuch, 23<sup>rd</sup> 93. And we reckon that that's the number that must have been my mother's.

[some discussion about filming a photo that's behind glass]

You can if you want to, it's up to you. What's the problem, you want to get it out?

**[2:49:20]**

*No, it's...*

The glass. Well, you know if you want to get, you can get non-reflective glass but that costs an absolute fortune.

[long pause]

Are you finishing with this picture, or what? Sorry... [pause] I've only just got this.

**[2:50:25]**

2009... I decided to dedicate this scroll to my mother and my sister, who both died in Auschwitz. On the back of this I've got- This is basically pomegranate on the front, and it's happy. On the back of it, I will show it... where my mother ended up and where my sister Esther ended up. One in - Both in Auschwitz, and Esther first in Theresienstadt.

*And where is this scroll now? For which synagogue is it?*

North Western Reform Synagogue, Ayliff Gardens, NW11. And after that I thought I'll do one more, and that'll be my last one. And that will be for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But that isn't dedicated to anybody. 'Just did it.

I went to Auschwitz in 1995. I did ask beforehand that I would like to have a certificate of how my mother died. And here it says, "Sudden heart stop. On the clock 1:45 in the morning. Signed by Kremer, on behalf of Kremer." I got it from the archives, but it's horrible. I think I had to have it translated; it was in Russian – Polish, sorry. It had to be translated for me. It also showed that she was given a number.

[pause]

I enquired recently if someone can tell me when I came to England, and how I came to England. And so I was told to go to World Jewish Relief. And by return of post they sent me this piece of paper. It shows that my father knew about us and ...in March '44, which was about a year after we, we landed in Switzerland. And he was our guarantor.

*Mrs Mendelsson thank you very much for sharing your life story and your photographs and documents with us.*

Well, it's very good for posterity.

*Thank you.*

*Yes please. One more photo.*

In 1992 I was approached by a teacher who taught in a *Gymnasium* in Offenburg. And she took her children to the cemetery. Each one should take one grave and write about it. Children have taken my grandparents' grave, and underneath it says, 'Oberbrunner, Emma und... Eduard Oberbrunner. And underneath it says, Sylvia Cohn, *verschollen*, and the other one it said Esther Cohn... it didn't say '*ermordet*' but something like that. And then I had sent all this to me. And I was asked if I'd like to comment. And it was so- I was touched. They asked me 'Why are there no flowers on the grave in Offenburg?' It's very well kept. They're- They're keeping it clean. But there's nobody to go back and to look after it. And so she- I became friends with this teacher, and she showed my letter to the class. And then she showed that letter to her headmaster. Then the headmaster got involved and then he recommended that I should tell the children about it, and I was invited. And so it went on from one teacher to the next teacher to the next headmaster. And a huge family of... new Germans who I think are absolutely wonderful. They do want to know about the past, and they're prepared to show what happened in their town by having given them those pictures you've just seen, as a reminder. And I think it's worthwhile talking to them, and to try and bring them all round to thinking that there's nothing to be gained by having enemies particularly with people who haven't harmed you in any shape or form. Just because they were born Jews.

*Thank you very much.*

You are welcome.

**[End of photographs and documents]**

**[2:55:51]**