

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Edith
Interviewee Sex:	Female
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Interviewee POB:	Bochum, Germany

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Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV172
NAME: Mrs Edith Fulton
DATE: 18th April, 2016
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

*Today is the 18th of April, 2016, and we are conducting an interview with Mrs Edith Fulton.
And my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.*

What is your name please?

Edith Fulton.

And, when were you born?

The 26th of August, '24.

And where were you born?

In Bochum [Germany].

*Mrs Fulton thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for Refugee Voices.
Can you please tell us about your family background?*

I remember very little except I had a very happy childhood. And... I was very spoiled by my father.

How come?

He had a shoe shop. And somebody came in to...oh, to do the display, once in a while. And in front of the- in front of the shop, was a pair of black patent leather shoes. And I began to cry. And my father said, "What are you crying for?" I said, "Oh, I would like those shoes." And my mother said, "Surely not, she has to wait until... the man comes." And my father said no. So this is how I was spoiled rotten. I remember it very clearly.

Where was that shop?

In Castrop-Rauxel. Yes.

Can you tell us a little bit about your grandparents? About the background of your parents? Is there anything you know?

No...no.

No, where did they- Your father, where did he come from? Was he...?

Well I can only tell you, he came from a large family. Was Jarocin in Poland?

Could be...

And... No... I hope it doesn't sound... Bea, I said to Ann, I've had a charmed, wonderful life. She said, "They all say that." [laughs] But it's true. And hope that I'm not showing off but it's absolutely true.

Your childhood?

No, I'm talking about my life afterwards. Yeah. Very, very fortunate in every way.

Can you, maybe- do you know at all how did your father end up in Castrop-Rauxel?

That I simply don't know.

You don't know.

And what about your mother? Do you know her background, or where she was born, or...?

No, she... Well it seemed to me she was in no hurry to get married, after all she was forty-two or forty-three. But...it - it was a happy marriage.

When did they get married?

In '16.

So during the First World War?

Yes...well I'm saying that. Don't take my word for it.

And how old were they when they got married, your parents?

My father was sixty, and my mother was forty-two, forty-three.

And you said it was his- it was a second marriage, for your father?

Yes. Yes.

[0:03:56]

What happened to his...?

His first wife died. And... Yes.

And he had a daughter?

He had a daughter who... I think now...was quite strange. But there you are.

And so did he live in Castrop-Rauxel...

Yes, yes.

...already? So he must have been there for some time?

Yes, and I also remember that he advertised for a husband for her. That I do...

For his daughter?

Yes. Advertised for a husband.

And did he find one?

Yes, he found one [laughs]...and I think there were wedding- I think there were wedding pictures. And ...that's it.

Mn-hnn. And what are your earliest memories?

[0:05:11]

Of playing with a little boy who my father disapproved of, [laughs] outside - outside the church, playing hopscotch...there. I repeat Bea, a charmed wonderful life in - in every way. There were ...well yes, in order, my late husband did three evening classes, in order to support us. And ...we lived in South Harrow. And he said, - am I boring you?

Not at all.

He said, "We can't stay here. I want Michael to marry a nice Jewish girl." And I did not want to move. He said, "We can't stay here. I want him to marry. We can't stay in this neighbourhood. We have to move into a Jewish neighbourhood. I want Michael to marry a

nice Jewish Girl.” And in the end he persuaded me. And I cannot tell you how grateful and thankful I am that I am where I am. And Michael did indeed marry the nicest Jewish girl that exists. It’s true. Yes. But this is quite interesting. He didn’t ever say about Helen, “I want Helen to marry a nice Jewish boy.” And she didn’t, but we – you know, no, we didn’t bat an eyelid. So...that’s interesting. But I think ...yes, it doesn’t mean to say that he cared more about Michael than about Helen. But it was important for him that he should meet a nice Jewish girl.

No, well maybe he thought that the mother transmits more than the father in some way.

Well he maintained that a boy would always have to support a family. And I can’t tell you how grateful I am, for where I am. There we are.

Yes, so let’s go back just a little bit more to Castrop-Rauxel. Can you remember where did you live? Where was your address, for example?

[0:07:46]

I can’t remember the address.

Was it a flat or a house, or...?

No, it was... I – I cannot remember.

Any other images, because that’s also OK. You said so you remember the shoes, the black shoes; you remember the boy. Anything else in that fragment?

Yes, strangely enough, that young boy’s name was Edmund. [laughs] Yes, I don’t know why my father disapproved. He didn’t often dis- well, he didn’t - I don’t know why he didn’t like when I played. There we are.

Yes, let’s talk about synagogue. Did you go to synagogue?

Yes, I did, because it was his greatest pleasure.

Tell us a little bit about it, please.

He laid tefillin every morning, and I remember in the synagogue that the ladies sat upstairs. And I can't remember where I sat. There was always a bit of celebration for Rosh Hashanah. And there my memory ends.

And is this the synagogue in Bochum?

No, in Castrop-Rauxel.

There was a synagogue in Castrop-Rauxel.

Yes...yes.

OK, so, how many- how many Jews lived there?

Strangely enough, I remember my father, that his greatest friend was a gentile. Somebody who had a hat shop. I don't remember anything about Jewish families.

Do you know any, for example did your parents have Jewish friends? Did they...?

I simply don't remember it.

Because it must have been a smaller place.

A very small place, yes. Just once in a blue moon, I think... I'd like to go and have a look at it. But then I think, no, one has to go forward in life and not backwards.

Have you not been back to Castrop-Rauxel?

No. Many years ago, my husband, in order to supplement his income, took people- He became a tour-guide. And we had to get off in Cologne. And I felt so uncomfortable. I remember that distinctly. I couldn't get back on the train quickly enough.

You didn't want to...

No.

...Yeah. Ok. So... what about school, for example? Is there anything you remember of going to school?

[0:10:36]

No, except that my father wouldn't allow me to go back to school after...I was... I think- I can't even remember the teacher. I just said that I was smacked, and that was [half laughs] and that was the end of my schooling.

He didn't let you go back.

No.

And was it a Jewish school, or...?

I think... I can't...I cannot remember.

I mean, it would have been interesting if there was a Jewish school in a smaller place like that.

It was a tiny hamlet. Yes.

Because it's a...yes. And do you remember things changing, in terms of- you were born in 1924, so you were... nine years old in 1933. And do you remember...?

I remember ...wanting a cardigan, which the, which the Hitler Youth had. Needless to say, my mother – my mother said no. I remember the cardigan very well.

What did it look like? Tell us.

A black cardigan with...I think a black cardigan. But I had no idea of the seriousness. I remember my father saying, "Well, he won't last long." This was about Hitler. And...

I mean your father must have... He had a shop so he must have been prominent in Castrop-Rauxel?

I remember so little Bea.

Yeah.

But it was a happy childhood. Even in '39, I had no idea... of the seriousness of the situation. I remember on the Sunday morning, Chamberlain's broadcast; that I do remember that very clearly. Even then... it isn't- it was an adventure for me. An absolute adventure. My mother bought new clothes and... never for one minute did I realise the seriousness of it.

So between '33 and '39 you personally didn't have any...

No.

... bad experiences?

No – no.

And your parents, did they start talking about emigration, or they thought it will pass or...?

The choice, no...I don't – except there was a choice between Israel and England. And because my mother had a cousin here, she, I was sent here.

And what about your parents' families? Where did they live?

My mother had a sister who lived in- near Breslau. And... I think I used to spend holidays with them. Sorry, Bea. I remember so little.

[0:13:47]

That's absolutely fine, I'm just asking you in case something triggers your memory. If it doesn't, that's absolutely fine. For example, holidays? Do you remember going on holidays anywhere?

Always to my aunt in, near Breslau. And then, it was very near to Poland, and we went, we used to go- I forget the border town. But she was...yes, she was a good aunt. And... her son actually managed to save her. And ...yes, her life was saved. And they came- they came here, and emigrated to Australia. That was an organisation- was it called 'Jews and Christians' or something...?

Yes, so she got to England?

Yes, she got to England.

What about you mentioned that little boy? Do you remember any friends you had?

I only remember that little boy.

Anyone else?

No.

Because you were a single child, I mean your half-sister was much older.

Yes.

So then you said your mother, there was a preparation for you going to England.

Yes.

Can you tell us a little bit about that? What did they- did your mum prepare?

Well, I remember being very thrilled to have all these lovely clothes. I mean I had nice clothes before, but... it was...it was an adventure. And even when Chamberlain did this broadcast and said, "We're at war." It didn't for once second occur to me.

[0:15:54]

But by then you were already in England?

Yes – yes.

So we're still in...?

In Maidstone, but we couldn't stay in Maidstone, so we were evacuated to Dorset.

Tamara: Before you came over, you stayed with an uncle in Berlin?

Oh, I forget, Tamara. Yes.

OK. Let's go back. Let's go back to Germany. So we're still in...

I don't know why I was sent to this uncle. My mother had a brother. Why was I- I can't remember. I stayed with him.

But you said.... [coughs] you said so she prepared special clothes?

Well, no. I had- You know, it was it was exciting to have- I remember the... the lady who rang who said, "Oh, you do look nice." Actually, which was very sensible. We were given uniforms, so we all wore the same so no child could, you know. All the children in the community were given a uniform...

But that's – that's later when you arrive in England.

Yes. Yes.

Can we stop for one second?

[break in recording]

Yes, please. Walks.

Walks, yes. It was quite – quite nice, yes, we used to go. And...

What did you see, where did you walk? What was the landscape like?

Yes, it was pretty. I, I, remember, yep.

Quite rural?

Yes... yes. Now I think, Bea, the most wonderful thing is to be able to walk. And look... I mustn't be silly. Everything to be grateful and thankful for. Everything.

But you talked about before that you had special Shabbat clothes?

[0:17:45]

Yes, which could only to be worn on Shabbat.

What did they look like? What was it?

Well... I remember how it used to annoy me. But even to this day, I sort of think, I can't wear this, I must keep this just in case I'm going...yes, I would have it [inaudible].

So what was it, a special dress you had for Shabbat, or?

Yes, it was not allowed- It was only allowed to be worn on Shabbat.

And you didn't like that?

No, I didn't. [laughs] There we are.

Yeah. So do you remember your parents telling you first that you had to go to England?

Do you know I simply don't remember it. I vaguely remember... being, I vaguely remember the train station in Berlin. Vaguely. And also ...my mother had very good friends here who actually came... to meet me at Liverpool Street. But, I went straight to Maidstone.

Did you know anyone on the train when you...?

No, my mother said, "Look, you must not speak to any gentleman. You must not speak to any man on the train."

And did you board the train? Where did you board the train?

I think, well, in Berlin, obviously. Yes.

So they went there? They drove to Berlin or...? They took you to Berlin, your parents?

I think I was living there with my uncle. I simply can't remember why.

Aha.

Yes.

And so from- you went from your uncle to...? You can't remember. That's...

An adventure.

Yeah. So you wanted to go...?

Well... I can't remember whether I wanted to go. It seemed all fabulous. [laughs]

And do you remember more of the trip? The journey? Do you remember the boat?

Yes, going to the- coming to the Hook of Holland, and... I think it was my first glimpse of the sea... which I've loved ever since.

And so did you not talk to anyone, during the trip?

I can't, you know. Sorry Bea, I cannot remember it.

Fine, but- what about arriving in Liverpool...?

[0:20:16]

Yes, arriving at Liverpool Street and these very nice friends came to meet me for a short time, but they remained very, very nice friends. I remember the husband...

What were they called, do you remember?

Doctor and...She was a doctor, and he was in business. And he bought material for me to have- Now this was rationing, and everything was rationed. And I was not prepared to spend my coupons on a wedding dress, for something which could only be worn for one day. So I had- he very kindly provided material for me, and I had a suit made for my wedding. The suit- he provided the material because he worked in Bradford. And... See everybody wanted a white wedding; I didn't.

That's a bit - bit later. But so let's just go back to your arrival. Do you remember, what were your first impressions of England?

I simply don't remember it.

But you were sent, you said you went straight to Maidstone?

Yes.

Yes. So what did you find...?

I loved it! Absolutely loved it; it was a beautiful house in a park. It was called The Mote. And... they made, I mean for Christmas, they did a wonderful Christmas because obviously they were. But also, a Jewish rabbi came once a week to give- to give us lessons, or whatever. And... I think from Chatham- I think Chatham even in those days had a Jewish Community. Yes.

And what sort of community was it where you were in Maidstone?

Well, Bea, this- these were Quakers. And... they had a chapel, but you - you were in no way, if you wanted to go to the chapel you could go, and if you didn't want to go, you didn't go. And for some reason I – I didn't go.

And what was it like for you? You came from quite a religious household. For example, you said...you kept- did you keep kosher?

Well, yes, because a man came with a basket with kosher stuff. I remember that, yes. Yes.

How did you manage that when you arrived? Did you just sort of say to yourself "I can now eat whatever I want" or...?

[0:23:01]

No, it didn't...it wasn't important.

But you said the Quakers, so they let you...

They were wonderful.

... choose or, if you wanted?

Actually, I was not the only Jewish child. There were other Jewish children and I can't... I think; sorry I can't remember.

But it was happy time?

Very.

And did they school you? Was there school?

Well, no. Because there was no ...money to pay for my schooling, so I had to clean. But it didn't do me any harm.

Where did you clean, in the house?

I think... cutlery had to be cleaned, whatever it was... But after a year, I remember very little. But they were wonderfully kind.

What happened after a year?

After a year, I came back to London. I lived with my aunt, and got a job in a nursery.

What was our aunt's name?

Olga. They had emigrated quite early. And... they lived in a large house in Eton Avenue. And they were also... very kind. Their kindness was rewarded by me leaving them. [laughs] But it all... You know, it all worked out.

[0:24:43]

How old were you by then, when you lived with them?

Must have been about sixteen, seventeen years.

And again, so you worked in a nursery?

In a nursery.

What did you do in the nursery?

Well, you looked after the children, which I loved. And... I had a nice letter from them, because I – I was getting married. And they said that they were sorry to lose me. I tell you who lived next to that nursery. Aldous Huxley. Yes.

But you said before that you were evacuated from Maidstone?

Yes, to Dorset. Whereabouts in Dorset, I – I cannot remember.

So the whole centre- all the children were evacuated?

Yes. Yes. And... we were told that we must not speak. Then American troops came - came to settle in this part. And we were told under no circumstances must we talk to them.

And did you then go back to Maidstone, or did you go from Dorset to London?

No. From Dorset, no I didn't go back to Maidstone. What... I went back ...to London to stay with my aunt. Yes.

And did you have any contact with the Refugee Committee or with Bloomsbury House? Did you get any help?

Yes, I was taken to Marks & Spencer's in Marble Arch. And I was given a pair of shoes. And ever since then I have been a loyal customer of Marks & Spencer's. [laughs]

And what about contact with your parents? Did you have any letters?

There were of course letters... I remember so little. I'm sorry Bea.

And did you at that point know what happened to them? Did they stay in Castrop-Rauxel?

[0:27:02]

...No, I simply. I don't- I simply don't know.

But you said there was a letter which said that your father went to sleep...?

Yes, but by then I think they were already in Theresienstadt. I think Tamara's got the letter and I find it difficult to read the writing.

Yeah. So you could assume that they were deported...

Yes.

... and sent to Theresienstadt, and ...didn't survive. And your father must have been in his seventies by then.

Yes, oh, yes.

It must have been quite, very difficult.

Well, yes, but obviously he died in his sleep, he- you know, there was no...yes.

Mnn.

Some- occasionally I think well I should have- I should have done more to see what happened. But... I just... I don't know how to describe it. I think, I was then so involved with having a child, and ...yes.

So we're still in the forties, and during the war time. So you were working in the nursery. So how did you then meet your future husband?

Well, there was a club in Eton Avenue. And there was- and I became friendly with a...with a boy, I can't even remember his name. And one day he came and he said, "I can't see you today because I'm going to see my uncle to pick up my birthday present." So I said, "Well, this is the first time I've heard you mention your uncle." He said, "I can see you don't believe me. Come with me." So we went to see the uncle who lived in one room in Belsize Square.

And I thought, “Well, what a lovely man.” And in that instant the boyfriend died. And I kept on asking him afterwards about his uncle. And then my- there was rationing and my aunt was a diabetic. But she got more meat than anybody else. And she had a... cousin living in Greencroft Gardens. And she sent me with some meat. And I rode a bicycle up Eton Avenue, and I fell off the bicycle. And who should pick me up? My husband-to-be.

[0:30:00]

The uncle?

Yes, he- he helped me to pick... And all the meat- it was a tragedy, Bea, because meat was like gold dust and there it was on the floor. And I having fallen. And I think we... we must have exchanged addresses or whatever. And yes, I thought that he was absolutely lovely, which he was. This is how I met him. Yes.

And what was the name of that club? Was it a...?

I think it-

Could be...

It was in Eton Avenue. I think a Jewish club.

Could be Free German Youth or something like that...?

I remember very little... about it. But... I can't remember how, how we...

It was for other refugees, the club?

There were only Jewish people. Yes.

Jewish refugees.

Yes. Yes. Well there we are; that was the love of my life, Bea.

So that's how you met. And then, from falling from that bicycle to...to your engagement, what happened?

Well I can't remember an engagement, but... I remember my aunt saying that she would have been very happy to let her daughter- she was very- she also thought he was lovely. And the wedding was... The wedding was, there was a chuppa. The wedding was somewhere in the West End. It was in 1943, and my then husband had a job in Liverpool, so we... lived in Liverpool.

[0:32:07]

And what was his job?

He was working for a Polish shipping firm in - in Liverpool. And... we lived there for a while, and I think I had a job in a nursery in Liverpool. And then... We were married in July '43 I think, and Michael was born in August '44. And the tragedy of my life was that you couldn't – it was very difficult to buy new prams. And I didn't want him to have a second-hand pram. So there was a 'shop'[inaudible] in... Swiss Cottage, and my aunt very kindly paid for the pram which was ten- which was a lot of money in those days. And I took this new pram on the train to Liverpool. And my daughter wasn't quite so lucky; the pram was reconditioned for her. So...[laughs] Yes.

It must have been difficult; it was still the war-time.

Yes, you couldn't, I mean... Well, everything was rationed, Bea. Yes. And then, I think my husband was in the Army there because I remember him coming home on weekend leaves, and... I had to clean the buttons on the uniform. Yes.

Was he British? Was he British by then? He was British?

We became British in 1947.

Aha. So what – what was he when you married him?

I think he must have been British. Yes?

Tamara: Not Polish?

Not Polish? If he...?

We became naturalised in '47. Yes. And he...

[0:34:03]

When did he come to England? When did he...?

I think he came in '37 or maybe '38, yes.

Right. And where did he come from?

I think before he came he'd lived in Belgium...I can't- I cannot remember.

Tamara: He was from Prague?

From Prague?

No, not- Not from Prague.

From Poland?

I don't know why he went to - to Belgium. He worked as a waiter for a time.

And what was his name, please?

Fruchthändler.

Fruchthändler?

And we had a lovely friend who said, “You can’t let your children go through life with a name like Fruchthändler.” So he changed it to Fulton.

When did he change it?

I can remember when, Bea. But...

When you married, were you already Fulton, or?

No, I think I was still... I can’t remember.

Tamara: It was when Dad started nursery.

What darling?

Tamara: I think it was in '45, '46, '47...

When your son started nursery?

Michael. Yes, I did take him to a nursery. I tell you Bea, a charmed, wonderful life.

But he changed the name just for...

[0:35:36]

Well, yes... I think it was a good move, because...[laughs] So...

Difficult to pronounce.

Difficult to pronounce. And people...you know, no inquisition. I mean ‘Fulton’ is very straightforward.

How good was your English, speaking of names, and changes? How good was your English when you arrived?

I had English lessons in Germany. My husband's English was perfect. Erm....

But you managed. You didn't continue. You didn't have any schooling in England?

No.

No. So... you went to Liverpool and...

I think Michael was born in Liverpool. And then after Liverpool, we moved to Reading. I can't. And I cannot think, I cannot remember why, but we did move to Reading. And... my husband started to train as a teacher. And he taught for many years until he was to become a lecturer.

And where was he a lecturer?

In Tooting. And I wanted to move to Tooting to save him the journey. But he said no, because he had a lot more sense than I – than I had. Yes. Lovely, really, yes.

And where did you live when he was commuting to Tooting?

I think we were already in Hendon.

So what brought you then to Hendon?

[0:37:26]

Well because he want- he wanted to- he felt that where we lived in South Harrow, Michael wouldn't meet anybody. And Michael went – this is interesting – Michael went as a volunteer to Israel in '67. And we didn't want him to go, but... he insisted on going. And [coughs] excuse me. He never in his life looked so well as he did there. They had a volunteer's

dance... and he met Anne. And he came to tell me he met a fabulous girl and I thought to myself, "I attach no importance whatever." [coughs]

Shall we- do you want a glass of water?

I'm fine, darling. And...he met a fabulous girl. He picked grapefruit in Israel. And he looked very well. And... yes, they, they did get engaged. They got married. It's a fairy-tale, absolute fairy-tale. And it's no use having, well yes, there was a lot of pain, because the marriage fell apart. But ...one of the most important things in my life is that they have remained good friends. They were both very civilised, and did whatever was in the best interest for the children. Now...nobody divorces without pain. And... But the children love both parents, and the children are lovely. And the icing on the cake is, I now have two great-grandchildren. Yes. And fabulous. Fabulous grandchildren. And I repeat, the idol of my life is Anne. A very, very exceptional person – very - in every way.

You remain close to her?

I love her. She behaved... impeccably. She always did- both, the children love both parents. And I'm very, very happy that there is somebody who makes her happy. And I'm grateful to him. It means a lot to me that she- I can't praise her highly enough. I mean that.

So to come back to you a bit earlier after the war, post-war. Was there a moment when you realised that your parents didn't survive?

[0:40:41]

I think I did. Yes. And I thought then... I never... I never, ever... I never ever wanted to go to Auschwitz. And...my husband had a brother who fled to Brazil. And... years later, and a very nice sister who escaped to Sweden, also went to Brazil. And this is how my daughter... met her husband in Brazil. And I have to say he had such a rotten time here that I was surprised he didn't take the first boat back, but he didn't. [laughs] And to this day he calls me Mrs Fulton, but I don't mind.

And do you think that by the time you realised your parents weren't alive you had already – you had already a child?

Yes.

Did it help? Did that help or did that...?

I think it- I think it did because it was a new life. And... yes, it – it certainly did.

But you felt that then you didn't want to back to Germany or to...the camps?

No, no, no, no.

And until today, you have not been?

I wouldn't dream of it. You, of course you read the AJR Journal. And it seems to me, that people can't divorce themselves from their past. And I feel one has to- you have to.

And do you think you divorced yourself from your past?

Yes, I... Yes, you know I didn't... I didn't ever burden the children. And yes, look horrific as it was, we were, and remained powerless. And life is very, very precious. So we have to...Does that sound cruel Bea?

No. That's one of the coping mechanisms. You know, that's how one copes with very difficult circumstances.

Did you talk to your children at all about your...? Your experiences? Your pre-war life?

No, not... My daughter accuses me of not having given her a Jewish upbringing. But I say to her "Well, it's not too late. You can, you can do whatever..." And she says, "That's your fault."

[0:44:05]

Of not having given or having given her...?

Not having given her a Jewish upbringing. So...

What upbringing did you give? What identity did you want to give to your children?

I was very bad, Bea. I didn't... Oh, yes. Michael had a Bar Mitzvah, that he did have. Oh, yes, he did have a Bar Mitzvah. And... there we are.

But did you join a synagogue with your husband or did you...?

Do you know, we did in Liverpool? But here... Here we did not. But his wish was fulfilled. He married the nicest Jewish girl.

So for you there was a break in terms let's say of religious practice?

Yes – yes.

And do you think that's related to what happened to your parents? I mean, was there a feeling in you that this shouldn't have happened?

Well, yes, because the idea of God became very alien to me, and has remained alien. I like Richard Dawkins. [laughs] But ...I repeat, I'm unable to participate, but I love to see it. Because Golders Green is very Orthodox. And, in fact ultra- In fact, what I see in Golders Green, I never saw in Germany with the *payes* and everything.

And how does that make you feel?

I love- I just love to see it. ...No... And I actually became... very friendly with an ultra-Orthodox family. And one day... it was on Shabbat, I- Oh, yes, my husband said, "Look, you can't..." He said, "You can't go shopping here; you'll offend the neighbours..." And... a delightful family. And there was I walking around with shopping on Shabbat. And guess

what they said? “Come home with us and have lunch.” I could have – I could have died a thousand deaths. This is how tolerant and humane they were. Yes.

So your husband also was not religious?

No...no. Bea, I never know what it means to be religious. Does it mean...? But you see, people enjoy it.

Maybe it's also the wrong word. You can be religious without keeping anything. I mean, maybe the word 'religious' is too narrowly defined?

[0:47:20]

Well... Obviously I haven't joined it. But I think first and foremost you have to be human.

Yes. But you joined the AJR.

Wonderful.

Tamara: I remember you saying, "If you have to have a religion..."

Oh, yes, of course. If you have to have a religion, I'm very happy to be Jewish. For many reasons.

Such as?

I actually, because we didn't belong to a synagogue I had a lot of trouble when my husband passed away. But again, I had very good... distant relatives who helped me to find a place for him in the Liberal Cemetery in Willesden. Yes.

And that feels the right place?

Oh, yes, yes, definitely. Definitely.

So you didn't want to be not buried in a Jewish cemetery? I mean...?

Well, I wanted him to... Yes, I wanted him to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. And I have a plot next to him. Yes, this is a...Oh, yes. So a bit has stuck. Maybe not much, but...

Yeah. And where would you consider your home? Where do you feel at home?

In Shirehall Park.

How many years have you lived there?

Bea, I daren't tell you! Since 1962.

So more than fifty years. ...And how would you describe your identity today? How would you describe yourself?

You see, we never had a car. So... it's very convenient. We're near to a bus stop. And... Now I had reached the stage I couldn't do the stairs anymore. I had a stair lift. And this is thanks to Tamara, because the stair-lift sat- I was petrified, but Tamara helped me. And now it's second nature. Yes. And... the AJR helped me financially, which is wonderful.

[0:50:15]

And you also go to the Michael Sobell?

I do, Bea. I do. Because these are the people, we know each other from Cleve Road and – and Belsize Park. And... you know my, we were told- Look, I think it was brilliant of them to find Michael Sobell.

And was it important for you to be in touch with other refugees throughout your life or - or is it important now?

Well you know it, yes, it is, it's nice to see them. And... it's excellent. I mean, whoever found Michael Sobell... There are lots of English Jews there. And we were- we were told to integrate. But people don't. They, you know, they sit in cliques.

And speaking of English Jews, what experience...did you have any bad experiences?

No, none, none. None. It's a lifeline; it's absolutely a lifeline. And of course you know they have lots of flats. But no, it's...

But what's important for you to go there? What...?

I like...

What do you like?

Bea, first of all, you can eat there, very reasonably. And you can take food home. It's – it's very useful.

Yeah.

[0:52:07]

And they do... Yes, it is a lifeline.

Yeah. And do you... You married- I don't know whether your husband spoke any German?

Yes, he did.

Do you keep up? Do you still speak any German?

No. No, I've forgotten so much. I have now reached the stage where I've forgotten a lot of English. Where I have to ask how it's spelt.

Yeah. But the German is also not something you were looking for?

No.

No. So what do you think is the most important part of your – of that part of your heritage, the German Jewish identity, or?

No.

Anything?

No, I'm just very grateful that I've been so very fortunate, in – in every way. I couldn't...
...You know Tamara does so much for me. It's like a mother. Wonderful. And Jane, they're lovely, all of them. Absolutely lovely.

And what impact do you think did this - that traumatic experience undoubtedly you know that separation from your parents - what do you think did it have on your life?

I don't... That life is very precious. It becomes more precious as you get older. Much more precious. When you're young you never for one moment think that you're going to get old, and you become dependent. And... you know, somebody said to me many years ago, "I'm not the person I was." Well you can't- you can't be! You have to make the best of it.

*And do you sometimes think about how different your life would have been without Hitler?
Without-*

No, never.

Had you stayed in Germany?

[0:54:22]

Never, never for one moment. Occasionally, I don't know why, there is a picture of him, and I have to turn it over very quickly.

A picture of...?

Of Hitler.

In your mind?

No, occasionally it appears somewhere. Bea, it's a horror story. It's a horror story which is... in some way, ISIS is not a repeat performance, but another kind of horror.

Yes. And do you sometimes think about your parents?

I do...I do. I do yes. I loved them. I hope that doesn't sound selfish.

No, not at all.

But, it's been wonderful in every, every way. ...But when I say- Yes, I mean... It was lovely when we were able to buy our first house. And... I repeat, I'm very grateful that I am, where I am.

And what do you feel towards Germany today?

I've no feelings whatever. ...Just dead. Completely dead. The AJR has students who come over. And... that's - yes, that's quite good. They, I mean, when I say Michael Sobell is a lifeline, certainly the AJR is - is very good. Bea I mean, you cannot praise them highly enough. And I came across them absolutely, I didn't know their existence.

How did you come across them?

I went to... One of my favourite haunts was Golders Hill Park. And there I met a lady; her husband was a doctor. And she told me, she said, "You must come to Cleve Road." And I did go to Cleve Road. It – it was an eye-opener.

And did you go to any of the Kindertransport reunions or anything...?

Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. And Prince Charles came to one. And he spoke. I have to say, he spoke beautifully. I think I went to Kingsbury. In fact, my grandson took me. Yes...yes. I don't think, I couldn't understand Bea. They arranged a trip to Prague and I could never understand why people would want to go back to somewhere where they were thrown out. But maybe that's me. The trip has been cancelled obviously because of security risks.

Yeah, from your point of view it's somewhere you don't want to go back to.

I can't understand why people wanted to go. Why go somewhere where you were thrown out? If it is me, I know I'm abnormal. I'm well aware of it. [half laughs]

You had no desire to go back?

[0:58:20]

No... No. Once in a blue moon, I think I'd like to have a look at Castrop-Rauxel and then I think well, what is the point.

Were you ever invited to go to Castrop-Rauxel or?

I don't think anybody knew of its existence! But people do go back. People do go back... to look. Every human being is different. I hope I haven't been too much of a nuisance to you.

Absolutely not. Is there anything we haven't discussed which you'd like to add, or maybe Tamara, is there anything you think we haven't...?

Bea. Please don't think I'm showing off, but I've been so fortunate in every way. In every way.

Is there any message for anyone, based on your experiences, for anyone who might watch this interview?

Life is precious and you must make the most of it. And you have to take the rough with the smooth. Yes, when we talk about traumatic. It was not...the Holo- which for me, I hope it

doesn't sound cruel. Traumatic was the divorce, for the single reason that the children were small. And... I remember my husband holding his hands to his head and he said, "Those poor children." But I can only tell you, this was... I mean...these – these were admirable, wonderful parents.

[1:00:19]

You mean the divorce of your son?

Yes. Not- Look, our concern was not for Michael or for Anne. The concern was for the children. But as it happens, the chil- because both parents ...just admirable. Both parents did whatever was in the best interest. Look, I cannot look into the hearts of the children, but they are lovely, lovely.

So is there any message? Life is precious?

Very precious. Very precious. Very precious.

Tamara: You haven't mentioned... [inaud]

What darling?

Tamara: [inaud]

My daughter has got a daughter who is a so-called 'single mother'. With a child- the child is no longer a child. But the child is... nearly seventeen. And as you can imagine, quite a lot of problems. She now works as a receptionist in a doctor's surgery, and I have to say, my daughter is very good to her. Her son lives with me. This is his choice, not mine. And... I'm now very used to him. And very grateful. He does a bit of shopping... I'm just very grateful to have him.

So how many grandchildren do you have?

Four... four.

That's lovely. And you said there was a German saying. What did you say before?

“Es ist nicht alles Gold, was glänzt“ [All that glitters is not gold]. Well, it's true. I mean, you know. But you have to take- You have to take it- look, she went to Canterbury University. Inexplicably she left. And as you can imagine, to be. But again, not everything is bad. The father... The father is not a bad person. He is a tattooist [laughs]. And... the child goes to him. So this is- this is good, yes. And my grandson is ...nearly thirty-five. I repeat, he came to live with me many years ago. And I'm now, I'm now very used to him.

[1:03:13]

That's lovely.

And... Tamara do you know what? I forgot about them. Thank you darling.

Is there anything else which we didn't talk about which you think needs to be mentioned here?

Bea, please don't think I'm showing off but I have very...very exceptional grandchildren. And... the jewel in the crown in Anne. She cooks for me.

Ok, is there anything else...?

No, I've been more than fortunate. More than fortunate. In, in every way. I think now... I often think of it but my husband said, 'No, but we can't stay here. I want Michael to marry a nice Jewish girl.'

That was important?

It was important to him. It did- at the time, I couldn't understand but I see now that of course he was right.

Yeah.

Tamara, I'd forgot about them. I completely forgot about them. Sometimes Bea, I'm very, very rude and I say "I've got two high fliers and two low fliers." Which is very- but they've both got...well, this is it.

Yeah. And ...

I know it sounds horrible. But... the low fliers have been, well, when I say that, maybe they, maybe they lack ambition, I don't know what. But their hearts are in the right place. This is what matters.

Yeah. And a standard you think, for yourself, that you didn't want to dwell on the past?

[1:05:44]

Never, no, never.

So hence, you didn't. I understand you were not so keen to be interviewed. Or it was not something you...?

Well, when Anne- Look, I've enjoyed it Bea. I've enjoyed it very much.

What changed your mind? What did you...?

I didn't ... I didn't... I thought it was wonderful when Tamara offered me to have it in her flat.

You didn't want to be interviewed in your house?

No, because I'm quite conscious it needs a lot doing to it and I now can't do it.

Yes, you were worried about it, that it wouldn't look so good, or have visitors there?

That's right.

Tamara: You had a letter from the Holocaust Foundation. The government are doing interviews.

Yes, did you have a letter from the Holocaust Foundation?

Tamara: Yeah. And so I said to you, if you don't want to do that, why don't you do this?

I don't remember the letter, what did they- What did it say?

It was to ask you to be interviewed.

Tamara: Do you remember?

And did I say no?

Tamara: You said, no. And I said, "What about doing this one?" You said, "Yeah, I'll do this one."

So you won the day, Bea.

Oh, excellent. Excellent. Maybe just a last thing I was going to ask you because Tamara told me. You said there was a burglary and you lost some of your things...? What happened?

[1:05:44]

Yes, now, the thing which really. I don't like that expression, but the thing which meant a lot to me were photographs. I mean, I have no silver. They took a bit of money, so... But the box of photographs. Yes, lots of photographs. Worse things happen to people.

What sort of photographs did they take?

Well there were wedding photos and all kinds of photos.

And how did you...? Where did you get those photos? Did you bring them yourself or...?

No, I kept them. I kept them. And this was a box of photos which would have been no use to anybody. But again... I was in bed and I didn't hear them. It was during the day. Yes.

Do you have any other possessions? When you came on the Kindertransport, what actually- I didn't ask you, what could you bring yourself, apart from the clothes?

I'm trying to think what I... I think I brought a necklace from my mother which my daughter has. And... my husband's brother dealt in jewellery, in, in Brazil. And... I have no interest in jewellery, in rings. It doesn't ...It doesn't appeal. I can live without diamonds. [laughs]

So do you have anything from what you brought?

No. No. Except this necklace which Helen has got.

Tamara: I think Lucy has a couple of hankies.

Handkerchiefs? Some handkerchiefs?

Tamara: I think Lucy has them.

Handkerchiefs?

Maybe. You won the day Bea, I enjoyed it very much.

I know it's difficult, and it's difficult to... talk about the past.

Well, the past is past. You know, I'm now very conscious of being very old. But everything to be grateful and thankful for. Everything.

Tamara: You brought a few photos.

What darling?

Tamara: You brought the photos with you.

You brought a few photos. Yeah.

[1:09:49]

Tamara, I didn't know you'd got them.

So a few photos you managed to keep, despite the burglary.

Because my other granddaughter had them. Yes. Enjoy your life, enjoy your children, above all enjoy your husband.

OK. Is there anything else?

No I think it was kind of you to do it, and I enjoyed it.

Tamara: Do you want to say anything about Israel, because you feel passionately about it?

Yes, Israel is something we haven't discussed.

I feel a bit guilty that Tamara had to remind me about it.

That's fine. Israel, is there something you would like to say about Israel?

Well of course, I owe my happiness to Israel, for the simple reason that Michael went as a volunteer, it's true. Quite by chance, I listened to Miriam Margolyes, who said that she, well of course she is very pro-Palestinian. ...And that Maureen Lipman had broken off her friendship with her...

Did you go to Israel a lot? Did you...?

We did go to Israel once, yes. Yes.

And was there- after the war did you think of emigrating somewhere else or was it always...?

[1:11:36]

No...no.

And you said you were naturalised in 19...?

In 1947.

And do you remember that? Was that important to become British?

I don't- I don't remember it. I'm just happy that we changed the name, [laughs] because that would have been a mouthful.

Yes, yes, you didn't feel it was important to keep that name?

No...no.

What about your maiden name?

Even worse!

What was your maiden name?

Kleczewski Even worse. Even worse.

Are there any relatives, surviving relatives with the name Kleczewski?

Not that – not, not that I know. No.

OK, Mrs Fulton, I'd like to thank you.

Oh, please call me Edith!

OK Edith...

I can't bear it!

I would like to thank you very, very much for...

I thank you.

...allowing us to interview you and sharing your story. And we are going to look now at a few documents and photographs.

I thank you for taking the time and trouble, in the week of Pesach that is beyond me how you do it. Today has to be your last working day.

Not sure...[laughs]

Pesach is a lovely festival. Festival of hope. I thank you. I thank you both.

Thank you.

[1:13:21]

[End of interview]

[Photographs]

[1:13:26]

Edith, can you please tell me about this picture?

It's my late husband and his mother.

And what was the name of the mother? Do you remember?

Helen or Helena Fruchthändler.

I would say this gentleman was right. In the 30s.

And where?

I'm unable to tell you. It must have been Poland, I'm sure.

Can you please tell me about this photo?

I know nothing about it. Well if you say '26 it must have been '26. My mother and I.

Gertrud...Holländer.

And how old are you on this picture?

Well, two.

And probably it was taken in Castrop-Rauxel.

Yes.

[Next picture:]

My husband. My son-in-law, my daughter, myself and my son.

And what is the occasion please?

Her wedding outside Hampstead Town Hall. It was a registry office wedding. ...I think 19...I can't remember, 1975? I can't swear to you; I can't remember the date. Sorry, I simply cannot remember the date.

It doesn't matter.

Yes, please?

Darling, I can't tell you anything. I don't recognise myself.

But it is yourself?

Yes!

And where is it?

Near my house in Shirehall Park, in Hendon.

[1:15:32]

And when was it taken?

In the 70s?

I would imagine.

Edith who is on the picture please?

From left to right...Bea, darling I can't see without my glasses. ...Let Tamara come.

Tamara: Your son in law Jesse, great granddaughter Ellie, granddaughter Alicia, granddaughter-in-law Anna. About ten years ago.

Yes, please?

Tamara: Your son, Michael, granddaughter Tamara, then great-grandson Samuel - Sam, great-granddaughter Amy, granddaughter-in-law Anna, and grandson James.

And when was it taken?

This was in Hong Kong wasn't it?

Tamara: About three years ago - in Hong Kong.

OK. Excellent. Thank you. What do we see here?

I can't see a thing.

Ok. So I'll tell you what we see. This is identification papers, which show you, I think when you came in 1939. But your name was changed to Fruchthandler. And the nationality was changed from German to Polish.

Who is on that photograph?

My late husband and myself but I don't remember the year. 70s. '71 - I simply cannot remember. I think in the garden...

In Hendon?

Yep.

Edith, thank you very much again for agreeing to be interviewed for Refugee Voices.

Thank you...thank you.

[1:17:59]

[End of photographs]