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**AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive**

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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

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<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Steiner
<b>Forename:</b>	Francis
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## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV202  
**NAME:** Francis Steiner  
**DATE:** 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017  
**LOCATION:** Banbury, Oxfordshire  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Jana Buresova

### [Part One]

[0:00:00]

*Mr Francis Steiner thank you very much indeed for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the [AJR] Refugee Voices Project. May we start out by finding out a little, exploring a little about your family background, when and where you were born and your parents?*

I was born in Vienna... on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1922, as the younger son of Doktor Richard Steiner who was a High Court Judge. And... my mother Paula, who was one of the earlier women of the- earlier university women generation. But she never finished her doctorate because of my elder brother's measles. Which shows the type of priority that women gave to their children in those days compared with their careers. We lived in Vienna. My father would join the public service at the beginning of the century. Served the Republic quite loyally, but he was essentially, like myself, a central European going back to the old days of pre-1914. I regard myself, though I was born in 1922, as the last surviving citizen of- the last surviving citizen of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy which finished four years before I was born. But I'm essentially a Danubian. I'm not at home in Germany, but I am at home in northern Italy or Hungary.

*What did your mother study?*

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She did classics at grammar school... which was unusual for girls. And she studied linguistics at uni- at Vienna University and Bonn University. She finished her degree course but she never finished her doctoral dissertation.

*You went to what has been regarded as... the most prestigious grammar school in Austria - the Schottengymnasium.*

Yes, I think the second most prestigious, but I won't argue in this. It's a fairly recent creation, because it was not started until 1258, when the whole of central Europe missionised by Irish monks which is generally forgotten. The Irish monks went all over central Europe... and the main foundation was in Bavaria. The main Irish, from which missionaries went out all over central Europe as far as Eastern Hungary. And in 1158 – sorry I got the year- century wrong - the then Duke of Austria who had known these Scottish...

*They were Scottish, yes.*

**[0:04:35]**

They- they weren't Scottish at all.

*But that's what the...*

They were in fact Irish. But the 12<sup>th</sup> century Viennese got two Gaelic-speaking- two separate Gaelic-speaking groups of Celts confused. And the Irish were known as 'Scots' all over central Europe. I've actually looked at the foundation document of the abbey, and where it says in clear Latin terms, "*Scotus solus eligo*" [*Solos elegimus Scottos*]- "I select only Scots". But what he meant was- was Irish. And they spoke Irish Gaelic for the next 250 years in Vienna and didn't learn - bother to learn - German.

*But it was a Roman Catholic school, wasn't it?*

Yes. Well, it... It wasn't the school that went back to that. It's the abbey- The... The abbey was a monastery of the Order of Saint Benedict which is almost one of the oldest orders in

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western monasticism. And the abbey, founded in 1158 is still there, I may say. But... It- throughout the Middle Ages it must have done a certain amount of local teaching. But as recently as 1807, which is recent by my standards, it set up a conventional grammar school – *Gymnasium* – but because these- the- this Irish abbey had been known as ‘*Schotten*’ throughout the 800 years of its existence- if you go to central Vienna, you’ll find innumerable references: in streets and so- Schottengasse, Schottentor, Schottenfeld and so on. That all goes down to this Irish abbey, which as I think has not been Irish since 1418 when the Irish abbey- monks left in a hulk- in a sulk, because they were expected to speak the local language. And were-

*How did you fit into the school? Did you enjoy it, or, was it very strict? What are your memories of it?*

My memories are that... it... was a very sensible institution, with which of course we keep in touch. My last class reunion took place in 2010... so...

*Were you a staunch Catholic? Was your family originally Jewish?*

The family- the family was originally Jewish, though of course as is the case in central Europe, in which a way it is not in this country. Jews and gentiles mixed more freely. I mean...

*When you say that do you mean in Britain or in Austria?*

In, in Austria. I think English Jews seem to me a much more self-contained... organised- within the community. I mean... in anti-Semitic Hungary, one of my great uncles was a bishop. So, I mean...

*And his- his origins didn't prevent him from becoming a bishop?*

No - exactly. Mind you... the last cardinal archbishop of Paris, retired now, but still alive is- is a convert Jew. Cardinal Lustiger. His mother died in Auschwitz. And- but... he became Archbishop of Paris, so I mean... This...

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*When did your family convert? Do you have any idea when it converted to Catholicism?*

**[0:09:36]**

Yes, I- I can tell you exactly. My father, who was a widower when he married my mother, had become a Catholic as a very- very young man. Had already married in a Catholic church... when his wife died in childbirth. And years later, he met my mother socially in- in a Jewish family setting. And so, she became a Catholic - converted to Catholicism - in order to marry him. And to be fair, it didn't matter to her very much because... her father who was quite a distinguished journalist and had been ennobled by the Emperor and all that, was a free thinker. And didn't care that his daughter married what you might call 'married out'. That didn't bother him. What did bother him apparently, slightly, was when he saw his grandsons sent to a Catholic school.

*It brought it home to him.*

Well, that's right. It must have rankled. But I don't remember him really. He died when I was... five.

*What were your- were you accepted in the school? Did anybody infer that you were not quite Catholic?*

No.

*You were accepted as a Roman Catholic?*

Oh, very much.

*A baptised Roman Catholic.*

**[0:11:48]**

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Yes. Baptised at birth, what's more. And- and of course I wasn't the only one. There were a number of what you might call 'non-Aryan' ...boys in the school. ...And the other thing about this particular primary school was, that quite a lot of us more as a group went on to the Schotten. So that when we had our last class reunion, in 2010... some of us had been together not only since the beginning of grammar school in 1932, but since our first day at primary school in 1928.

*That's really something.*

Yes. My closest friend, going back, died two years ago. And I was chatting to his widow. And we'd been friends for eighty-six years. And the other thing about the Schotten and its relevance, is that it may have been a very good grammar school... scholastically. But it was not socially exclusive. There were always a group of boys from the countryside, from country parishes run by the abbey, which were brought in as potential recruits. And I'm- to sum it up in one sentence, Doctor Victor Adler, a Jewish physician from Prague, who founded the Austrian Socialist Party and Karl the First, the last Emperor of Austria, were both old boys of the school.

*So, it played a large part in your life?*

It's played a large part... in my life.

*And your friendships.*

And it was the only school in Austria, and perhaps greater Germany, which when the Nazis came, did not discriminate. I mean in all other schools in Vienna, Jewish and non-Aryan boys were grouped together in separate groups and eventually concentrated in separate Jewish schools. When the Nazi authorities asked all schools, including the Schotten, what Jewish boys they had, the Schotten with a perfectly straight face, replied, "You see the question didn't arise, because they'd only got Catholic boys." ...My- everybody knew that those of us that were affected, were well-known in the sch- I mean with... the- the spirit of the locality was that nobody, even Nazis in the school, didn't give the show away. In the year above me, was the son of a Nazi Gauleiter of Austria, young Seyss-Inquart, whose father was hanged as

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a war criminal after Nuremberg. He must have known perfectly well who we were, but he too, in the spirit of the school, he kept his mouth shut. And so, we were never given away. And we had a ...great deal of reason to be grateful for the school. Because after the Nazis closed the school down...

*When did it close, the school?*

**[0:15:55]**

In July '38. It closed down all Catholic schools... on the grounds expressly that it was the business of the state to educate the young. That was actually given as the reason for closing the school down, and- and others like it.

*And where- where did you go then? What did you do?*

I didn't quite know what to do with myself, so I thought I'd better learn a-learn a trade to use my hands which I would need to do in emigration. So, I went...

*You thought that far ahead?*

Well, it was fairly obvious... Even after a few weeks of Nazi rule in Austria, it was quite obvious that we had no future there. So, I went and did a sort of so-called apprenticeship... in a workshop for electroplaters. Galvanic electroplating. And it's the first contact I had with the Viennese working class. And everything I didn't know about the life in industry, like the fact that you didn't have your main meal at lunchtime as one did in ordinary bourgeois families, was new to me.

*How did you react to this experience? What were your feelings?*

Well, everybody was very friendly. And I also did a cookery course. ...In the-

[Sound break]



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*You were mentioning that this was your first contact- close contact with the working class and that people were friendly.*

**[0:18:19]**

Yes. Now the odd thing is, which is relevant to this project, is that the Viennese - the population of Vienna - did not really behave terribly well after the Nazi takeover. I know Churchill said, "We can never forget in these islands that Austria was the first victim of Nazi aggression." That is actually true, though most English Jews deny that. It is true. Austria was the- after all we'd been under siege for five years. ...The persecution of Austria by, by its big neighbour next door throughout the 30s cannot be denied. But it is equally true that in 1938 there must have been some kind of- something snapped in the psychology of the locals. Because in early '38, we could still hope that the- the independent Austria would win the plebiscite ...against Germany. And then on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March some-something snapped. I can remember the suddenness of it. Because... it's on the evening, but not the 13<sup>th</sup>, on the Friday that the German Army marched in. There'd still been street- anti-Nazi street demonstrations that afternoon. And the same late afternoon or early evening, we saw a group of Nazis walking past a group of policemen, and shouting, "*Heil Deutsche Wache*" to which the policemen replied in chorus, "*Heil*". Well... At which one of the Nazis turned to the other and said, "You see what whores they are. Two hours ago, they beat us with rubber truncheons. And now they shout *Heil*." You can see how some- something must have snapped psychologically. Because the population of Vienna appeared to have turned nasty in one- five minutes. Of course, it wasn't the whole population of Vienna, far from it. ...And the seeds of resistance were in fact, which is generally forgotten, that very day. But that's another story. It's got nothing to... But I personally have absolutely no complaint from the whole of that unhappy year, '38. I've had no unpleasant memories of Vienna personally.

[Sound break?]

...Everybody I dealt with, was unchanged. As I say... Our non-Jewish... school friends behaved as well as I would have expected them to. Whether that is- and it had something to do as far as our school was concerned with the Schottengymnasium. But somehow Vienna may have been a large capital, but until recently, there was an element of the village

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atmosphere on the grounds... [half-laughing] There was a famous occasion when a distinguished professor of law - who of course had been to the Schottengymnasium but let that pass - was asked to give an opinion on- expert opinions with- in connection with certain governmental enquiries, and what the mechanism should be. To which he replied, "There's should be – there's no need for a mechanism, since everybody else knows everybody else anyway."

*On that basis, how did your father fare in all this? Did he convert because it would have been difficult professionally to have remained as a Jewish person?*

**[0:23:23]**

I don't think so, because there were enough practicing Jews in the public service. ... Whether it would have been difficult for him... But... I know for instance when the new authoritarian constitution of 1934 came in, and the judges were all sworn in on the new constitution, the crucifixes were not brought in, so that Jewish judges could take their... their oath undisturbed. So- so my father, even in the senior ranks of the judiciary, had some Jewish colleagues who remained practicing Jews.

*Oh, that's very interesting. Yes... And once the Nazis took over power, was he followed? Was he...?*

Oh, once...

*Was life made very difficult for him?*

No, no. I mean, once the Nazis- this is the element that- the difference between German and Austria which nobody seems to have realised: the suddenness. With the Nazi takeover of Austria, everything changed literally in twenty-four hours. It had taken five years in Germany... the gradual exclusion of the Jews from the professions. The- the fact that every- that the very few Jewish families who had private cars in Austria, because it was a poor country, had those cars confiscated in the first week. In Germany, Jews went on driving their own cars...at least until Kristallnacht, which was sort of six years after. And that affect- what

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happened was, that the Nazis took over... on the Friday evening. Saturday being a normal working day, I can't remember what happened in the court. But on Monday my father went to work, and he was- and all the non-Aryan judges were summoned by the president of the court who said... that everything they had done and authorised and signed until that moment was of course completely authenticated, but in future would they please ...abstain from signing any documents. And he would have to send them on leave. So in other words my father went on leave and remained on the books of the court, on full pay, until the summer, when he was retired on pension. And that's another thing which I feel is worth mentioning which I have not seen mentioned anywhere else. Retirement pensions and annuities were paid to Jews in the public service, but not in private industry. One of the reasons why there were so many Jewish- suicides of elderly Jews in Vienna in March '38, is that so many were destitute because the pensions and annuities had suddenly stopped to be paid – quite improperly. But the extraordinary thing is, that the Nazi authorities in the public service went on paying these pensions. So that my- we- so we continued relatively well off, compared with so many Jewish families that were... Well, I can't think of the right word- impoverished. A practical example of that was my grandmother and her sister- her sisters. My grandmother had two widow's pensions. Both from her husband's employment. And they were stopped immediately. Fortunately, she had some money of her own. Both of her unmarried sisters had been grammar school teachers, so they were federal civil servants, so they kept their pensions, which is completely illogical. Whether it was the same thing in Germany or not, I can't say. But certainly, in Austria you had this peculiarity. The Jews continued to draw their public service pensions, while private pensions and annuities - were stolen.

*When did your parents decide to send you away from Austria on the Kindertransport and how did that come about?*

**[0:29:26]**

Well... They didn't decide ...to send us on the Kindertransport, because that didn't exist. What happened was, that my elder brother had been to England before visiting English friends. And... somebody thought... that given my father's judicial background and the fact that my brother was already studying law, he should try and pursue a career in England in the law. Which, looking back, was a complete nonsense. But it has worked out very well. So, in

the summer of '38 my brother went off to London to be a Bar student at Gray's Inn. Because in those days, there were relatively few judges in England compared with the continent. And the Bar counsel in his wisdom, thought a continental high court judge was something rather grander than he was, in fact. I mean, compared to an English high court judge, the comparison was negligible- anyway. Grey's inn accepted my brother as a Bar student. And... He got a student visa... on the basis of the admission to Grey's Inn. And some relatives- I think it must have been relatives from America- who had originally, I may say come from Hungary. [laughs]

*Definitely part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then!*

**[0:31:27]**

Oh, definitely. Remember I'm a quarter Hungarian- I'm a quarter Hungarian like any typical Viennese, born in the centre of the town as the child of two parents who were both born in the very centre of Vienna. But if you go into the higher- earlier generation we come from all over the place. Some are typically Danubian. ...So, it was the- I think it was the American relatives who guaranteed his maintenance or something. But the money was somehow found. So, my brother went to England in September '38 and it left me at rather a loose end... For learning to electroplate and doing my cookery course, but really not having much idea of my future, whatever it might be. Except that it was obviously urgent for me to get out. We didn't know the dangers, because of course Kristallnacht hadn't happened. The idea- the Nazi doctrine had been to get the Jews out- it had not been to kill off the Jews. That was a new one. It hadn't happened in my day. So, I was sort of idling about, until after Kristallnacht. A friend of the family, Paul Gutfreund, whose son has had the most distinguished career one can have in England, came round one day and said, I can still use- hear the phrase, using the word in German, "*Ich habe einen Job für Dich.*" So, I said, "How come?" And he said, "The Quaker office in Singerstraße, which is easy walking distance, is organising something... to bring unaccompanied children to England. See if you can get accepted by them." So, I trooped off to the Quaker office and discovered about the Kindertransport... which of course all the English religious communities were represented. The non-Jewish things - activities - were centralised by the Quakers who had an office in Vienna. And there, the first person I met was a beautiful young woman called Barbara Ward, later Lady Jackson of Glossop

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[Lodsworth], editor of the Economist... eventually. But she was there representing some Catholic refugee organisation. ...And I had no idea who she was, but I mean except here was an English Catholic representing something to do with refugee aid. And I was interviewed, and after that inevitably my memory goes blank. But I mean... this was... early November or mid-November 1938. And the first Kindertransport train left less than a month later. It is quite incredible, how quickly and efficiently the thing was organised. It may have had something to do with the fact that the home secretary of the day, Sir Samuel Hoare, was a Quaker. I think that might- because otherwise, I mean- Kristallnacht was on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, the first Kindertransport train left Berlin I believe on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December. So, squaring the British government, squaring the British Parliament, making the arrangements with the Nazi authorities – all that inside one month. It is barely believable, but it did happen.

*So, did you present this as a fait accompli to your parents? Or did they encourage you to do this?*

**[0:36:44]**

Oh... Oh, I think they were heavily involved. I think- it's perfectly possible that one of my parents came with me to the first interview. I... I- good as my memory is, unfortunately there it- there are complete blanks.

*Is that because it was a painful time... and you want to blank it out?*

I don't know. It may be, but anyway there we were. And ...so

*How- what were your parents' comments? How was the atmosphere at home during this period before actually leaving? Was it strained because of the forthcoming journey?*

Well, the atmosphere was tense enough, given the atmosphere in Vienna at the time. ...The atmosphere was inevitably tense. There was the extra twist of the Munich crisis when we thought the war might break out, in which case the family would be separated. We would be trapped in Vienna and my brother was already in London. And I remember there was much telephoning. But-

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*Did you parents see you off at the station?*

**[0:38:33]**

Yes... And what I cannot remember- and Peter Heatherly who's researched this, will probably know the answer, whether the train left eventually from the Westbahnhof which is the main western station, or from Hütteldorf, which is a suburban station on the same line. My parents obviously came to see- see me off. Took me by taxi to- to the station. But they were not allowed onto the platform. And I seem to remember... but the memory may play one tricks ...that the children strained themselves to see out of the windows. I remember- I remember shouting out through the open window, "I'll be back!" ...little knowing how long it would take. But... I do seem to think that the accompanying parents were not allowed onto the platform.

*That was the- that became the norm, because the Nazis found it very hard to control the crowds and the mothers especially. So that that would be...*

Yes. It so happened that a week or so before we left, we'd been summoned to either the station or a police office - I can't remember which - to have our baggage checked. And there... my father was addressed by name by a lady, who said, "You don't remember me?" They'd apparently met at a dance twenty-five years before. And they recognised... And they ...discovered who they were. And they both- this woman, Mrs Toch had two boys on the Kindertransport... and my parents had me. And so, the two Toch brothers and I joined together for the journey in the same compartment. And we knew each other for the rest of our lives. Now, the elder Toch boy, who emigrated to America and had three children there I'd lost contact with him after- and I was telephoned - oh, this was about ten or twelve years ago - by a lady who introduced herself as Susan Toch, Otto's daughter.

*What an amazing coincidence.*

**[0:42:05]**

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And so, I said- and she'd- her father had died, but she'd found some reference to me or I'd been... mentioned by somebody else. I was still fairly mobile so she... rang forward- she was going to to travel in England so I said, "Well do come and stay." And so, I met her in the days when I still had a car at... Oxford airport. And she and I have been in contact for the last fifteen years. And I... [laughing] take considerable pride in the fact that she doesn't know- she grew up partly in America, partly in Israel. Speaks good Hebrew, speaks English, obviously. Has no German but has somehow managed to regain her Austrian passport on the grounds of- and so I interpreted between her and the Austrian Consul in Los Angeles. I deal with her German correspondence and the thing I make- I take great pride in, is that I have made her vote the right way in all the recent Austrian elections. So, if the unspeakable Mr Hofer has been defeated... by the- in the last presidential election, by a very tight margin at that, I take some credit for the fact that Susan Toch's vote and my vote may have helped Professor Van der Bellen defeat the unspeakable Hofer.

*You could not have imagined that all these events would take place when you said that you would be back. You did not imagine either that you would not have seen your parents again, for example.*

No... I couldn't- one couldn't foresee that. And here is the particular tragedy of the thing. In the end... my parents got Irish visas... and I think even British transit visas because in those days you couldn't really travel between the continent and Ireland. And the war broke out. The English Quakers in Vienna had to shut down the place, but the American Quakers stayed because America was neutral for another eighteen months or two years. And that is where things went wrong, because the American Quakers said to my parents, "Oh do go abroad if you can. In any neutral- in any neutral embassy- in any neutral country, you can collect your British and Irish visas at the local British embassy." And in those days before 1940 of course, you could still travel on the continent. And much of] Poles and Free French arrived in this country going around easily. The American Quakers suggested my parents should do that. So my parents duly prepared to emigrate. And went to Budapest on a fortnight's transit visa... where to their horror they discovered that the British Consulate didn't want to see them and said, "No you can't pick up your visa. Nobody's who's on German territory- nobody who's on German territory after the outbreak of war can be admitted." So ...high tragedy. Christmas holidays- I was in London staying with my brother for the Christmas holidays, from Belmont

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Abbey School, when we got a telegram from relatives in Budapest: “Parents arriving next week on fortnight’s transit visa. Please cable British Entry visa within the fortnight.” Well, my brother and I actually... shook with fury because we realised that this was completely impracticable. However, Holy Mother Church went into operation. And thanks to the intervention of the Abbot of Belmont and of Cardinal Serédi, the Prince Primate of Hungary, that fortnight’s transit visa was transferred swiftly and briskly into an unlimited pe-period of residence. So, my parents sat out most of the war in Hungary. Not all that easily, because my father was ill and he was relatively old and then he had glaucoma and things. But... by a stroke of bad luck, there was an interim period - I don’t think- I’m sure the AJR would know that - between the occupation of Hungary by the Nazis in March ‘44, and the summer of ‘44 when the Regent of Hungary, Admiral Horthy, stopped the deportations. But there was an- there was an evil interval during which my parents were arrested in May ’44... kept in tolerable conditions till the summer... when they were deported to Auschwitz in July. [pause] And...

*July 1944?*

**[0:49:04]**

Yeah.

*Yes.*

If it had been a few weeks later, they wouldn’t have been deported because Admiral Horthy stopped the- quarrelled with the German envoy in- in Hungary and stopped the deportation. Anyway, what happened to my father, I can’t say. I can only hope that sick old man as he was... the given the conditions of the transport – four days without food and water and things – with any luck he would have died on the transport. My mother survived and was eventually- I eventually discovered that she died in what appeared to have been a hospital barracks in Auschwitz in October 1944. In other words, she was not gassed... for which I’m duly grateful. Whether she was put onto a forced labour or not when she- I don’t know. I can only hope that my father died on the journey, which is quite likely. At least that’s what I pretend to myself.



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*Does that trouble you a lot... thinking about that? The not- the not knowing?*

That does not trouble me, because... ..this sounds very harsh and unfeeling... but for so many years I knew even less about it. I mean... [pause]

*No, it's not harsh.*

It sounds very unfeeling but... I'm almost in- inclined to smile and say, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it."

*And you say you hope that he died on the transport.*

**[0:51:23]**

Yes, it's quite likely, because he was a heavy insulin user, and... I suspect that the period of incarceration in Budapest, those conditions were tolerable, but not ideal - for a diabetic. But what conditions on the transport must have been like, I cannot think. The one thing that troubles me... and troubles me greatly, is that if my father had survived the transport, and... my parents would have been separated on arrival in Auschwitz, he would have been marched off to the gas chambers as being old, and unfit and useless. And that- the thought of that separation is the one thing that really worries me. What it must have been like for the two of them. And of course, much the same may have happened to other families. There must have been some dreadful scenes on that arrival ramp in- in Auschwitz where families were separated to be selected or deselected. That is the one thing that really- it doesn't keep me awake, because I'm a bad enough sleeper as it is. And ...But that's the one thing that does- seriously worries me, that- the scene between my parents if they were forcibly separated on arrival in Auschwitz. Assuming my father had survived, and assuming my much younger mother was kept alive for forced labour. It can't have been a health spa anyway.

*No. When did you actually know what- discover what happened to them?*

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Very quickly because, in the summer of '46, my brother and I happened to be in Zurich. And we met with a family called Breisach, an old maid and her parents, who had been interned together with my parents in Budapest but somehow had been snatched from deportations at the last minute, when they were taken to Switzerland. I don't know in what context. But we met them there. And they told us all about how our parents had been and where they'd seen them.

**[sound break]**

**[0:55:00]**

*And these ladies told you and your brother about their experiences in Hungary and then going to Auschwitz. And they told you about your parents.*

Yes.

*What were your reactions at that point?*

I can't remember. It's perhaps a self-defensive mechanism.

*Mnn. ...But it must have been a terrible shock for you.*

**[0:55:42]**

No but we- we- we knew what was coming... because we'd... we'd heard this in- my brother visiting friends - a family inevitably a connection of the Schottengymnasium, in London, in Kew Gardens - heard them mention this Breisach family in Zurich, and said that they had, they'd got to Switzerland from Hungary. And my brother picked this up and said, "Well, the dates fit. I wonder if they met my parents." So, Frau Doktor Fleischmann said, "Well, here's the address. Write to them and find out." So, my brother wrote to Mrs. Breisach and told her that- anyway, it then emerged that we would be overlapping in Zurich in the- that summer. The reason why we were in Zurich in '46, is that we had two surviving great-uncles who'd spent the war in Switzerland. And we went to see them.

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*What were their names please?*

Doctor Julian Halberstam... and Leo Halberstam. They were the two brothers of my- my Polish grandmother, and in the family- they were always known in the Polish form of – Uncle Julian was ‘Julek’ and Leo was ‘Leon’. ...They were... They were my grandmother’s two younger brothers.

*How did they get to Zurich from- where did they go- from Poland or Vienna?*

**[0:58:23]**

They [laughing] they went from Poland in something like 1887 to Vienna. I can go into some detail which may not, may or may not be relevant to my story, but what happened was that my great-grandfather... was what was then called a private banker - I think he would now be something probably something more to do with stocks and shares or securities - in Warsaw, where they had a good conventional Polish middle-class upbringing. My grandmother was at school together with, I think, Madame Curie – Marie Sklodowska, as was. We have the same stories that you find in that biographies of Madame Curie by her daughter Eve Curie, we have from my grandmother. There were five children: three daughters and two sons. And once upon a time, my great-grandfather who obviously was was offered a position - a very senior position - in the Imperial Russian State Bank in St Petersburg on condition that he converted to the Russian Orthodox Church. And he declined. Eighty- seventy years later he was wondering whether he’d made the right decision. But-and said no, he wouldn’t desert his Jewish faith. And after that, he never felt safe in Imperial Russia. And since the family [laughing] fortunately for some reason had Austrian passports, they moved to Vienna. But until 1914... the three older children – certainly not the- spoke Polish at home. ...Which of course fitted quite well into cosmopolitan Vienna. The three daughters had- the eldest was my grandmother who married a very successful wealth-journalist. The two younger daughters, both highly intellectual, and their unspeakable mother, my great- grandmother - may she rest in peace - stopped them both from getting married... being a sort of typical Victorian. And so they both went to university which in the 1880s or ‘90s was perhaps not all that usual for woman. The younger one, Sophie, who was not only very clever but also very

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beautiful, so that was- went to Oxford at a time when women were not yet members of the university. And they set up - those two maiden ladies set up - a girls' school. Experimental school, which got a very good reputation and in the end was taken over by the Ministry of Education, which was just as well because it- it gave them economic security. And so, this is how they came to be federal civil servants, which is how they came to have their- their pensions.

*What a family!*

**[1:02:54]**

The younger one, as I say, was headmistress of the Mariahilfer Mädchen Realgymnasium – Reform Realgymnasium, was the first Jewish woman to be appointed a *Hofrat*.

*What does that signify?*

Well-

*In addition, that she was the first Jewish woman. But what is- could you please explain the Hof...?*

*Hofrat* literally means court councillor. It is ...and was, a senior civil service rank, but it's also used as an honorary title, like the equivalent of a Knighthood. ...And the word conveys something comfortable going back to the Empire. I think- I've forgotten which politician it was... who after the very peaceful revolution of '19?] was described as a "*Eine Hofrätereublik*". And the extraordinary thing is, that the Austrian Republic which goes to great lengths to ban titles - which nobody take seriously, of course - still awards- awards the title of *Hofrat* as a- as an ho-honorific.

*That's really ironic, isn't it? Yes. May we come back to your arrival in Britain?*

The 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1938. Overnight boat from Hook of Holland to Harwich. No, we were not taken to Dovercourt, like most. Our transport was... first to Pakefield Hall Camp near

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Lowestoft... which was a summer holiday camp. And in that very icy winter of '38-'39, unheatable summer bungalows for a holiday camp were not particularly suitable. So, we slept in our clothes and the ...water froze in our tooth mugs. So, it was decided to break the plan to disperse us. As many children as had guarantors as families were dispatched.

*Who guarantor-ed for you? Was it your brother or your relatives?*

**[1:06:26]**

I never discovered that. I suspect it must have been the Catholic Refugee Children's Movement. Because I finished up, not in a family, not having been guaranteed. But that happened a few weeks later. I was eventually placed in a Catholic boarding school in Herefordshire... whose headmaster had approached the Refugee Children's Movement with offering places for two boarders. And... luckily enough... ...Belmont was, and is, a Benedictine monastery. So, it was something not too unfamiliar. You can imagine that boarding school in England after day school in a family setting in central Europe is a bit of a culture shock. But the culture shock was mitigated by the fact that I knew what an abbey was and I knew how an abbey was organised. And I knew... The real culture shock was to discover with English schools still practiced corporal punishment, which had been outlawed on the continent twenty years or thirty years before.

*So, did you suffer the consequences?*

Not personally.

*But did that horrify you?*

It did surprise me.

*And how readily were you accepted by the boys in the school or not? Did they feel that you were quite alien and...?*

Well, they must have felt...

*...Did you speak any English?*

Yes. I did have this advantage that I spoke faulty but fairly fluent English. And the other thing is, there was another Austrian boy who went to Belmont together with me at the same time. But he was four years younger, and so he was integrated much more quickly.

*Because you would have been...*

I would have been six-

*... nearly seventeen when you went to the school, wouldn't you?*

**[1:09:37]**

Exactly. So, the idea of... the priorities of a boarding school seemed to me pretty- at the time when I knew war was going to break out, when the one thing that interested me was the news on the radio, I couldn't really get up any great interest in house matches, which were- which- and I didn't much care for rugby anyway. But...

*No, because the British system is very much on team games, team spirit, team sports...*

Well, I don't know...

Well, I- I always regarded this with a kind of slight superior relaxed... And of course, the thing is, one does say it with some difficulty, the central European system of secondary education was so much superior to what went on in any but the very best schools in this country...that my wife used to complain about this, because she had the same experience. She'd been archetypally English. But a girl in her school from Prague who was inevitably always top of her form. And I'm sure I did not make myself popular at Belmont by becoming top of the form at the end of the first term. But then the quality of the education at the Schotten compared with Belmont Abbey School, despite the common Benedictine inheritance. So...

*But you followed the news closely?*

Yes. We had a radio in the sixth form common room.

*How long did you stay at the school?*

Five terms, because I was... taken to Belmont in the ...spring term of 1939 and left... after taking London Matric... in the summer of 1940.

**[1:12:24]**

*And has that had... That school had any lasting- left any lasting impressions on you?*

Yes. A few. And sadly, like so many private schools, it hasn't survived. But again, I'm probably the oldest living member of the old boys' association but I do pay my annual subscription. And... I've friends going back to- to, to Belmont.

*Did some of the boys invite you to their homes during the vacations or... how did you spend the vacations? Especially as your brother was studying.*

Well... the Easter vacation of '39, I went to stay with English childhood friends of my mother's... with whom she'd maintained contact even throughout the First World War. So... I spent part of the Easter hols in London in my brother's digs and partly in Leighton Buzzard with that family.

*Otherwise, it would be a very lonely time without family.*

It would. It would be but... And as for the summer holidays of 1940... some other English friends had arranged for my brother and myself to stay with farming relatives of theirs in the country. Which is where we were when the war broke out.

*And come the end of your school days, what did you then go on to do?*

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[Laughing] For want of something better to do, I went to the Isle of Man.

*You were interned?*

Yes.

*Because you would be over sixteen – considered an adult.*

**[1:15:04]**

Yes, in fact I fell between two stools because there were thirteen categories of so-called ‘Friendly Enemy Aliens’ who were entitled to release. One was boys at boarding schools and the other was undergraduates. However, I’d fallen- my brother who was interned together with me, was released after a few months as a student. I stayed behind in the Isle of Man, becoming the greatest living expert, I think, on Manx history.

*When were you released?*

Don’t ask. Fifteen months later. It was very, very boring.

*Whereabouts in the Isle of Man? Which camp were you in?*

I started in Central Camp on the Central Parade. I went on to Onchan, and eventually to Hutchinson.

*Why did they keep moving you?*

[Laughing] Well, for a start, because they could concentrate. Since most friendly aliens had been released by then, there were very few of us. And that is what actually made it rather unpleasant. By the time I was released, most of the internees were genuine enemy aliens. So, it was a rather comfortable atmosphere of a central European café- cum-evening college. The



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number of classes we had in the Isle of Man... and ...and literary activities and musical activities.

*Did you take part in those?*

**[1:17:18]**

Well yes, I took some language classes and I also worked for the camp welfare officer. That was... again, a farce. My brother worked for- in- for a man called Mr. Anglis, who was a Chartered Surveyor who came from the Prison Commission to look after me. And he worked at the central office for all the- the total camp headquarters. Not only the individual camp. And my brother worked for him. And I worked for the camp welfare officer. So, the two communicated by saying, "Will you tell your brother at lunch...?" [Jana laughs] The man I worked for – again I go off at a tangent – was an extraordinary man. He was a retired Colonel who'd been a Brigadier- acting Brigadier General in the First World War, but who had re-joined in 1939 as a Lieutenant. And... I worked in his office, and we became sufficiently good friends that I was asked to stay with him and his family after my release.

*So, did you accept the invitation?*

Oh yes, I went and stayed with Mrs. Smead and their boys.

*In the camp... Most of the men's camps were in former hotels...*

Yes. Boarding houses, really.

*...and boarding houses.*

Well, not most of the camps. Central Camp in the centre of Douglas, certainly was one of the- our house, 22 The Central Parade was obviously an ex-boarding house... with what had- may have been the garden running down to the- to the sea. So, between us and the shore there was a... a barbed wire fence. And I remember seeing an elderly Orthodox Jew, standing by

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the fence, looking out over the beach and the sea, and saying “Well, I could never have afforded this, could I?” “*Wo hätt’ ich mir das leisten können?*”

*But you weren’t allowed to go into the sea, were you? Or only under guard?*

I don’t think we ever went into the sea. We were taken for walks regularly... under guard.

*And what about in Onchan, what were the conditions like?*

Onchan we were in individual private houses. Where some of us went in for energetic gardening because that was more residential houses. And... And why they moved us to Hutchinson I can only think it’s- as most people were released it was a question of concentrating us into a... more compact accommodation.

*Were you anxious, like some other people of the Jewish faith or of Jewish origin, that Hitler would invade Britain and people in the Isle of Man or on it would...?*

Would be Sitting Ducks?

*Were you conscious of that at the time?*

**[1:21:39]**

No, because I wasn’t responsible enough. I’m naturally not- not a worrier. I was convinced – for no particular reason- logical reason – I was convinced that things would go right.

*On your way to the Isle of Man did you go up through Liverpool and then walk down to the docks?*

Yes.

*Did people spit on you?*

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No.

*Or punch you?*

No.

*As some people experienced?*

I didn't experience- I suppose we were marched in convoy. But it's surely- that it's possible that if we were taken to Liverpool by coach that we were delivered to the port direct. That's possible; I can't remember. One minor detail was that when we were arrested, my brother and I, they'd come for me rather than for him, because I'd recently moved from school. And so... he more or less said, "Well, how about me?" They said, "Well, we have no instructions to arrest you. But no doubt within a few weeks or so..." Actually, he might not have been interned if he'd stayed behind because of course, it all stopped. However- so he did a deal with them, which was not honoured I may say. He said, "Look, if you guarantee that we two stay together, I'll come now." Which of course the local policemen in Hampstead had absolutely no authority to guarantee. And the- the promise was not kept except that on the boat from Liverpool to...to Douglas... my brother picked up his bag and moved himself to the part of the ship where I was. So that in fact we marched off the ship together.

*Were you expecting the arrest or did it come as a terrible shock?*

**[1:24:04]**

No, we were expecting it.

*Because some of the arrests were also made at earlier- very early morning, and often didn't have enough time to even take some basic belongings.*

No, no. We were woken up at about six o'clock and warned that we would be collected at about eight.

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*Did you deeply resent this, feeling... that you were not an enemy alien and that this seemed very unjust? What was your response?*

My response was- was that this was really rather silly. But given the circumstances, the British government- well, they could be forgiven anything. That was my approach at the time... and it hasn't really varied. I mean... Churchill had enough on his plate, so his reaction: "Collar the lot." ...It's perhaps forgivable.

*That's very magnanimous of you. How did you come to be released?*

By cheating. Category 13... was... you could be released if you'd volunteered for the British Forces. And a lot of refugees and ex-refugees went...

*The Pioneers.*

**[1:25:52]**

Yeah. Well, I got very bored with being there for fifteen months with nothing- nothing much to look forward to. So, on the other hand I resented being bullied. I said, "I'd be quite happy to volunteer for the British Forces, but I'm not going to be blackmailed into it." So, I decided to cheat. I volunteered for the Pioneers. And on the evening before the medical examination, I drugged myself heavily on black coffee. That was how it was, on the basis of cardiac insufficiency, I was rejected on medical grounds. And so, I was released under false pretences. But of course, eventually I volunteered under my own steam... but not under pressure.

*It's a different approach, isn't it? A different feeling.*

Yeah.

*When did you volunteer at the later date?*

Fairly late. After my degree.

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*Where was your degree?*

University of London external BSc Econ, taken in part-time study... during the Blitz, while working in London on so-called 'war work'.

*And this was a BSc in Economics?*

It's a BSc in Economics... with transport as a- as a special subject. And... ..when I got my external degree, which was not a particularly good one, I volunteered back for the Army and ...

*Could I just check the date... when you graduated?*

June 1944.

*Thank you. Yes, sorry and you then...*

I volunteered for- for the transport section of the Royal Engineers.

*And did they take you?*

No.

**[1:29:07]**

*Aha...*

I was selected for a 'Wozzbee' [WOSB]... [laughs] How these things disappear... WOSB stands for War Office Selection Board. ...For a commission in the Royal Engineers... But I was notionally eaten by crocodiles, because I fell into a notional river... during the fairly intensive physical. Actually, I - I amazed myself with what I could do. I mean I got out. I mean these tests were quite severe. But I got out by climbing up a vertical wall out of a

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dungeon or something. Not a thing which I could ever do. But the crocodiles came into the fact that one had to cross a notional river, by going across horizontally from one horizontal branch to another without falling into the river. Well, I fell into the notional river and the- the medical officer who said, “Well, Look, you’d better fly a desk.”

*So where did you finally end up? [both laugh] Not eaten by the crocodiles?*

No, not eaten by the crocodiles. Not unnaturally, as I- as I’d been talking about transport- I was drafted into the civil service with a view to be put into the Ministry of War Transport. And of course, bureaucracy got it wrong and I ended up in the Board of Trade. [both laugh]

*What did you do there... with an Economics degree?*

**[1:31:30]**

I worked for most of the time in the- what came to- what had previously been called ‘Control of Factory and Storage’ premises but came to be known as ‘Distribution of Industry and Regional’. And there I fell, accidentally, into a family project. Because the DR department looked after the trading estates which had been set up in the development areas in- I have to go back a bit. In the 30s, when there was a lot of unemployment in the old- areas of old heavy industry like steel and shipping and things, the government created what’s called ‘The Development Areas’. They were called ‘Distress Areas’ in those days, but they’re now called ‘Development Areas’. And there... modern industries were subsidised by the government. And one source of refugee recruitment was... foreign entrepreneurs who were encouraged to set up new industries, provided they provided employment. And one of those companies was founded by the two men, one of them being one of my father’s cousins. And they set up... a company which was originally called- in West Cumberland, which was originally called ‘West Cumberland Childwear] Limited’, and eventually became ‘West Cumberland Fashions’. And this is where the circle closes... because ...You will have heard of this- of yet another bit of refugee projects about clothe- the clothing industry.

*People working in the mills?*

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...Oh, well not only in the mills. Also- I mean this is not an AJR thing. But in, no, it's UCL or Imperial College- it's Imperial College that is organising a research project on the history of the clothing industry.

*Amelie Berg?*

Yes.

*She's writing a book about it.*

Yes.

*Yes. But it's for the- it's... partly her own book and partly for- in connection with the Exile Study Centre at London University.*

**[1:35:01]**

Well, that- exactly. Well- and one of the things she's researched into... is the history of the particular company and which is how she's been collecting photographs from my niece Maggie. The circle closes.

*Yes.*

But anyway, that particular company... became the object of- of, of work of the particular department of the Board of Trade for which I was working. And Jack Adams the Regional Comptroller of the Board of Trade for West Cumberland, who ended up as Lord Adams of Ennerdale, who was in fact a local- a very humble local man, came into the office and we- I was introduced to him. And he said, "Oh, I say. I've known your mum- I know your mum and dad in Whitehaven." "Well, sadly, no. It's a- but it's a cousin you know." But anyway... I stayed on the Board of Trade for the next two years and at the same time... tried to do a... a part-time MSc in Economics, but it didn't work.

*Did that disappoint you a lot?*

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Not particularly. I'm- I'm not an emotional person. But the nuisance of that was, that I had a fairly in-inferior degree. I couldn't sit for the competitive exam to transfer from the Temporary Civil Service to the Permanent Civil Service. So, I never became an established Civil Servant, so...

*Did that frustrate you a lot?*

It did, because having a sort of public service background from home, it would have suited me quite well to become a bureaucrat. But... it was not to be.

*But also, in the circumstances, to study part-time and the Blitz, one would think that certain allowances would have been made. You know. Not everybody was going to get a perfect- a First in those conditions.*

**[1:37:38]**

Well in fact, my supervisor for the... when I was working for the MSc part-time, actually wrote an opinion of this and said, "This man achieved a BSc Econ after two years' part time study. If he'd been allowed three years, let alone three years full time study, he would have got at least a Second."

*Of course. And it's an enormous difference.*

So, I never got a Second. So, I never became an established civil servant. But I retained friends in that milieu which was really quite congenial. And to go on from there in the- on that track. Since the end of the Board of Trade at that time... Secretary of State Marshall... He was General Marshall, the American Secretary of State, created a thing called 'ERP': The European Recovery Program, still known as The Marshall Plan. And that was run by an international secretariat. And to start it off, since it had no organisation, it recruited- seconded civil servants from the member nations. And so, because I had fluent French and German, the Board of Trade seconded me... ..to the International Secretariat of the OEC, where I stayed for the next eighteen months... working in Paris - which was quite an experience.



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**[1:40:01]**

*And which year was this that you were seconded?*

July '48.

*So, your languages became very useful.*

Yeah.

*Did you enjoy the work? Did you find it challenging?*

Unfortunately, it wasn't challenging. But... one was very, very busy. I mean, it's sort of, if you didn't go back to the office after dinner, you wouldn't know what to do with the evening. And the... In the early days of the OEC it worked on a 24/7 basis. I mean, there were messengers on three shifts and things like that. However, ...

*How long did you stay in Paris?*

Fifteen- roughly fifteen months. By that time... I'd been naturalised. And so, I arrived in Paris... with a British passport, brandnew.

*Were you very proud of it?*

Oh, I was very pleased to have it. But of course- by that time the Austrian Republic had been re-established. The first Austrian Minister to London happened to be a family friend. And so [laughing] when I went to see him at the- at his new improvised office in South Kensington, I had not yet been naturalised I may say. He opened up- this was grossly improper; I mean it was all- no ordinary consular relationship. He opened the desk drawer, pulled out a blank Austrian passport form, and filled it in my hand, which created the historically unique document which says, "Profession: Civil Servant (His Britannic Majesty's Service)." I must have been the only international- or national civil servant who had a- had a passport like that.

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Gabi Matzner, the Austrian Ambassador in London forty years later, when I told her the story denied that it could have happened. I said, "I assure you, it had."

*Did you keep the passport as a memento of that?*

**[1:43:09]**

No, I think I did eventually- at that time it was illegal to have two passports. That of course has changed now. And a lot of people have two nationalities. Maggie's husband, John Guy who is English born but has an Irish mother, has just acquired an Irish passport.

*Yes. That's quite something. When you came back to Britain, what did you do then?*

I was unemployed... so I got a job through what they called 'the Austrian Jewish Mafia' in a Manchester oil refinery.

*And what were you doing there?*

Allegedly market research. But I was a sort of *Omnium Gatherum* of... on the- call it market research. The Manchester Oil Refinery Group, may its memory rest in peace, was the first independent refinery in the- in the oil industry traditionally, crude oil- oil was refined where it was dug out. So, you had these large refineries in Arabia and- and the products were shipped to England. What these two Viennese had done to set up Manchester Oil Refinery, was to set up a refinery for specialised products like lubricating oil, and so on. And that group, Manchester Oil Refinery, Petrocarbons, Petrochemicals all based on the Manchester area, was a kind of central European home-from-home. Unfortunately, the oil crisis of 1957, which generally people have forgotten, put paid to it. M.O.R. was taken over by Burma Oil. Petrochemicals was taken over by Shell, and it's all gone.

*So where did that leave you?*

Unemployed, as usual.

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*Were they times of real hardship?*

**[1:46:03]**

Looking backwards, it must have been. But one was young and not conscious of it.

*Did you ever experience in your work, particularly in Britain rather than in Paris, any resentment against you, anti-Semitism or accusations: "You're from Austria" and "part of the enemy", or...? Any such accusations? I'm not saying that they should but am asking.*

I don't think so. Where I- my brother and I possibly were different from other Jewish or non-Aryan refugees, is we kept our pre-war connections. So ...I have nothing but contempt for the behaviour of part of the Viennese population in March '38. But I'm- I don't bear grudges over seventy years. And so, when for the first time, in 19 - I think - '48, I went back to Vienna after the war, I needed a haircut. Of course, I went to the barber who had done me all my childhood.

*He was still there?*

Yeah.

*How did- how did you feel going back? Did it feel as though Vienna was full of ghosts... or did it relieve something within you – or complete something within you - that you, you wanted to get back?*

Well, I'd never wanted to emigrate.

*No.*

**[1:48:04]**

Little did I ex- expect to spend my life as a counterfeit Anglo-Saxon, married into the most English of English family settings possible. ...Almost the second Senior member of the

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Reform Club in Pall Mall, then which nothing more establishment. Little did I expect to end up with a Papal Knighthood.

*When was that conferred?*

About 2005. Everything that has happened to me in life has been completely unexpected and unforeseeable. Little did I expect that as a civil servant and when I was still believe it or not an, an Austrian citizen, I found myself on Sunday duty in the Minister's private office, taking my turn as any Junior Assistant Principal would, going through the Minister's red boxes. Which I had no business to see, but I happened to be duty officer. That was not a thing I would have expected in my life. Nor, would I ever expected thirty or forty years later, sitting in a committee room in the House of Lords chairing a meeting where on my right side was the Duke of Norfolk as a member of my committee. Hence the Papal Knighthood. That's another story.

*But... Did you feel out of place or did you feel that you had come home when you returned to Vienna?*

Both.

*Mixed, yeah.*

Certainly, more at home than an average practicing Jew would have felt. And not as full of resentment as some of the returnees... who- who may have gone back but carried a grudge. That's not my style.

*But you also felt perhaps slightly estranged and removed from it?*

Surprisingly little.

*How long did you stay there during that visit? How long were you there during that visit to Vienna?*

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[1:51:31]

Oh, about a fortnight. I mean I've been to- I've spent an awful lot of time in Vienna since then. ...Helped by the fact that I built up quite a lot of Austrian business from my City job. Again, taking advantage I've been going back- I mean I remember calling... in 1960- was it '61 or '63? I can't remember. I had to call on business at a small private bank. And I was introduced to one of the Partners, had the name Imhof. And when I entered, he said, "I heard you were coming. A London broker called Mr. Steiner, and that reminded me." And he pulled out a photo of- out of his desk drawer that was a school photo, not for the Schotten, for the primary school. In fact, it was the class photo taken on the lawn outside the cathedral on the occasion of our First Communion. And we were all sort of wearing white sailor suits. When this chap Viktor Imhof heard of somebody from London called Frank Steiner, he thought it might be me, so he got the photo out of his desk. So... it was slightly less- slightly differing experience from most AJR members... who really... feel much more alienated.

*When you were in Britain... between 1942 and 1945, you joined the AIA the Austrian Youth Association.*

I'd forgotten that!

*Where was that?*

In Lowndes Square...

*Where, sorry?*

Lowndes Square... Belgravia.

*And was it a political organisation, or was it purely cultural - or mixed perhaps?*

[1:54:15]

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Well, political in the sense that it was not the Socialist Youth. It was in fact- it was not that. It was meant to be a social organisation. Of course, it had an immense influence on my future, because the secretary... who happened to be a college friend of my brother's, who remained a family friend until she died sadly of- at the age of- in her fifties from cancer, married a very successful Scottish stockbroker. And that connection got me my job in the City.

*What sort of activities did this organisation hold and what were the facilities there?*

The facilities were basically club facilities.

*In what way?*

Well to- provide club accommodation, which was not ideal, because of course most refugees didn't live in Knightsbridge, but...

*No. And did they arrange talks? Was it outings, or...?*

Certainly talks.

*And did they have a library as well?*

No. They had originally had a rather good restaurant. But that didn't last.

*And did they arrange dances as a lot of these clubs did?*

I don't think so. You know, you've got me, there.

*Was there a- I mean not precise numbers of course but was the membership quite large? Was it a bustling place or...?*

Not really.

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*No... And who- who organised it? Who ran it?*

You may well ask.

*Some of them had, like the Austrian Centre had a... sub-element if you like, of Communism.*

This was definitely not it. Both the Chairman and the Secretary had minor titles.

*So, it sounds like more of a small private organisation...*

All I can remember is that the annual subscription was, I think, two guineas.

*That would have been a fair sum, wouldn't it, at the time?*

No... A guinea is a pound and a shilling.

*Yes, but... in value- in terms of purchasing power at that time.*

It was certainly- a certain amount of money, but I think it could be paid monthly.

*And did you meet friends there or even family members there by chance?*

**[1:58:19]**

[sound interruption]

*To return to the Austrian Youth Association. It was very much Austrian. Did it give you a sense of reassurance in a foreign country, a sense of compatriots sharing your experience? Or was it a little hub within a hub?*

Difficult to say, because I remember so little about it. But of course, ...it was a slightly out of its time thing, because not unnaturally the overwhelming number of members were non-Aryan or Jewish refugees who really didn't know what they felt. Nor did I, at the time. And... I mean, a couple of members of the Habsburg family were members, but weren't- it was, the

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whole thing was slightly off-key, being based on a part of London where very few of us lived... which made it more and more difficult. And... it didn't seem to be all that effective. If it had any tint of colouring, it was old-fashioned monarchist traditionalist, which sums me up.

*Tremendous. Could we turn now please to when and where and how you met your wife?*

Certainly. Sadly, too late. I mean she entered my life too late and left it too early. For many years, my social life in London was based largely on a thing called the Newman Association called after Cardinal Newman. It was the Graduate section of the University Federation of- of the University Catholic Federation of Great Britain. Which had a very nice social club... and was a very busy, active marriage market. And organised ramblings groups... and that sort of thing. And in the summer...

[sound break]

In the spring of 1963... the Newman Association... organised a regional conference...on I've forgotten what. But it was the first regional conference I went to. And it was in Coventry. And... during the tea interval on the Saturday afternoon, I stumbled over what seemed to be a pair of unusually fashionable shoes. Because as you can imagine, Catholic academics is not the most fashionable and clothes-conscious. So, I looked at the owner of the shoes, thought she looked pleasant, so I apologised for stumbling over her feet. So, we went to have – pottered over to the tea, I mean both of us together. We chatted during the tea interval. We met for dinner after the afternoon session. We bumped into each other the next- following day and stuck together for lunch. She turned out to be- would I- of course I- one doesn't really- I- it came out in conversation what- where you are. And she was local in the sense, she was the daughter of a local farmer. It turned out retired farmer, but I didn't know that at the time. And she had- and while it was the first time in years of membership in the Newman Association, that I'd gone to a conference, it was the same for her. She'd been a member for years and had finally been bullied by an aunt into going to this thing.

[2:03:55]

*What was her name? What was your wife's name please?*



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Rosemary Oldham. Well, anyway, we had- we had dinner together in- as all part of this same... And three months later we were engaged.

*And when did you marry?*

September 1963.

*But she was an English lady. How did her family receive you?*

[Laughing] Very hospitably. You might well say 'English'. It's almost a caricature. Because ...her father was the last of a line of Yeoman farmers, who for 220 years had been church wardens from father to son in the same village church.

*That's really something, yes.*

**[2:05:02]**

They're actually quite an interesting family. If you- the British Museum has a lot of papers of the so-called 'Cely Papers'... which is the story of a family of... merchants- English Merchants of [the] Staple in Calais, when Calais was still English, who eventually became silk merchants in the City of London. And who fled London sometime in the 1660s. I've never discovered whether it was the Great Fire of London or the plague. But anyway, they settled in Warwickshire... in the mid-1660s. The first Oldham burial that I can trace in Wasperton Church was in 1673, and the last one was my brother-in-law Tom in 1990.

*My word...*

So, then which nothing more local- nothing- so it's the other extreme from my cosmopolitan...

*Indeed. What was your wife's occupation or did she remain at home looking after the children- which is a full-time occupation?*

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Once the children arrived, she was very much a full-time Mum. She'd never been a career woman.

*What are your children's names?*

Robert, who is- who will, believe it or not, be fifty in June. And Claire, who lives next door, who is- who is forty-seven, and whose husband died as I say three years ago.

*Oh...*

...Sadly. So...part of my persona was rural Warwickshire. So again, not- not typically Belsize Park.

*No...*

I've ridden- ridden to hounds with the West Warwickshire farm- farmers' fox hounds. And that is just to show the duplicate of my personality. Riding to hounds in an English hunt, I wore the boots which my father wore as an Officer in the First World War.

*Oh, gosh...*

So... personalities do get mixed.

*Indeed. It's that very aspect that I'd like now to turn to. What are your feelings towards your original homeland, now that you've lived in Britain longer than you ever lived there?*

**[2:08:29]**

...I have no intensive passionate feelings about the present Austrian Republic. I like being in Vienna and I like seeing my friends - those who are still alive. My real loyalty in terms of continental... is to pre-1914 Austria-Hungary. I'm of mixed Danubian descent. ...It's... My

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civic loyalty, if you like, is to a country - on the continent that is – that does not exist. And that is pre-1914 Austria-Hungary.

*And towards Britain? What would you value most about having come to Britain and lived here since you came in 1938?*

The fact that I've survived.

*Do you have recurring nightmares for example? Kristallnacht? Thoughts about your mother in Auschwitz?*

No.

*I know we touched upon this earlier, but to come back to it.*

Not consciously. I believe- I'm told one dreams all the time. And one isn't conscious of it. I occasionally dream... and I occasionally- I probably dream every night; I don't know. I occasionally wake up and remember a dream... but they don't normally go back that far.

*Do you have an enduring sense of loss? Of homeland? Of family? Does that still make you feel consciously aware of the pain of it?*

No. But remember, I have admitted to being an absolute brute.

*You mentioned earlier the- the two-headed eagles, which were very symbolic of your feelings and your attitudes towards both Austria and Britain.*

**[2:11:23]**

Well, that's exactly what it is, I mean, you can cut me in half, which I hope you won't. But... I may have lived in England for eighty years, but somehow, I'm conscious of my multinational origins. I am of the most distinguished rabbinical ancestry, as far as Jews are

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concerned. More of which in a minute, I've got all the data here. But there's- does not emotionally... strike any great bells.

*What then prompted you to join the Association of Jewish Refugees?*

Pure accident. I didn't know it existed. But in 1988... Bertha Leverton...

*Oh, Bertha.*

Yes. ...Organised this reunion of the Kindertransport, the first- and so Rosemary and I went along. And there, I met the late Cesar Aronsfeld who was the editor, the original editor of *The AJR Review*. And I made some kind of remark... about being 'a minority within a minority'. And he said, "Oh, will you do me an article about this?" So, I wrote an article about being sort of an odd thing inside the Refugee Committee... for the AJR information. And much to my surprise he sent me a cheque as an authorship fee. Well, I felt, in the circumstances, the least I could do was to join the Association, which I did. And which since has become a more important part of my life in the sense that I read the beastly magazines. I occasionally contribute to it. And I - really yesterday - go to the- to the Oxford Branch meetings, such as they are. I mean there are about seven of us left ...of a branch that originally had about thirty-five members. But specifically, the answer to that question is, I joined the AJR specifically because I felt I ought to, having been commissioned to write an article, for which unexpectedly I'd been paid a decent fee.

*Did your wife take an interest in your background?*

**[2:15:05]**

Oh, very much so.

*And your children?*

Very much so. She was very- she, with no great talent for languages -God rest her soul- was very anxious that the children should be brought up bi-lingual.

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*So, you spoke in German to them?*

That- unfortunately that didn't last, because – again, more detail - Claire had inherited- she is adopted, Claire has inherited something called the DiGeorge syndrome, which is a chromosomal deficiency. Which... You wouldn't think of it now, but when she was a small child, impacted very much on her speech. And...

*That must have been a terribly difficult time for you all.*

It was. It continues to be, because Emily has inherited... I was talking to Emily's aunt Shirley just now. And the background to all this is that both Emily and her brother have inherited some of these difficulties.

*Oh, God.*

Which did not need to be said, because Shirley knows it only too well. No, what happened- Anyway...

*Oh, in that- in those circumstances...*

**[2:16:42]**

No, I mean we were- I think we've done quite well with the bilingualism. But then, the doctors mistakenly said that what Emily was, what Claire was suffering from as a child was not a physical deformation, which it turned out to be. But there must be something deeply psychological, so for God's sake don't try bilingual education. It will make it worse. But in fact, that was all wrong. And it would have been perfectly easy to keep. But Rosemary was very sympathetic. ...You should have seen the four of us. Rosemary and myself. Claire then aged two-and-a-half, and Rob, in *Lederhosen*. Walking in Carinthia in a village procession with both Rosemary and Claire in *Dirndls*.

*That's...*

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You- you would have thought, “Any normal Carinthian village family.” I mean I am about as relaxed about Austria as that – which a lot of refugees aren’t.

*No... no... no.*

[Laughing] In fact, when Rosemary... took the Oath of Allegiance to the Austrian Republic on becoming an Austrian citizen in 19...about ‘76 or whenever... of course she hadn’t a word of German. And she was sworn in by the then Austrian Consul-General in London, who was a married woman of the same age. And I think the common- this senior diplomat and her new customer discussed maternity problems in English. Which again is as odd a background for that sort of thing.

*Indeed...indeed. Would you say that you have reconciled yourself to your forced migration, particularly as your wife took an interest in your background in Austria?*

Oh, very much so. I suppose having to emigrate, allowing for all the difficulties and strains, was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. Of course, it would have been better if none of this had happened. It would have been better if there had been no Hitler. If there had been no Anschluss. But... what’s done is done. And the extraordinary thing is, how without any merit of my own, I’ve always fallen on my feet.

*What was your memory of the- of Kristallnacht itself?*

**[2:20:40]**

That we didn’t know what was happening. ...Except I think we didn’t discover what had happened till the following morning. ...And I’m not quite sure when the decision was taken, on which of the days... first or the second day. The 9<sup>th</sup> or the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, I’m not quite sure, the decision was taken to ship- unship me. To extra- to the home of the Argentine Consul General which was ex-territorial territory. There was no- there was no suggestion that I was in danger of automatic arrest, but... you never know.

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*But... either way, you were going to be ending up migrating.*

Oh, yes. That was- that, by that time, was fairly obvious.

*Yes. Yes. What would you consider to be your main achievements in life?*

I, I wish I knew. I wish I knew. Because I'm a dilettante at everything I touch. ...I have immense, though I say it myself, I have an immensely wide general knowledge, but it's incredibly shallow. I'm a Jack-of-all-trades if ever there is one, but a master of none. Perhaps my achievement has been to spread goodwill, in the sense that I'm alleged to have a genius for friendship. And it's certainly true... that... I maintain loyalties, and I maintain intense friendship. I mean, next week, Emily and I are going to my bank at Banbury to go into the safe deposit, because I've promised to take a birthday present for her out of the family jewel- But- and this is the point of the story- we're also meeting at the same bank, a friend of mine, now eighty-five, to whom I was going to leave a piece of jewellery in my will. And she said, "Can I select it in my daytime- in my lifetime- in your lifetime?" So, she's joining us. And this is a woman who- whose youngest daughter now forty-seven - is one of my godchildren. And we've been friends for over sixty years. So... And... my last surviving close friend in Austria is two years younger than I am. So, we go in- no that is not quite true, that's another friend... who works in Vienna for the Albertina Museum. And we were on the phone the other day, and she said, "Did you know..." [sound interruption]

*Sorry...*

**[2:24:55]**

She said, "Do you know- can you tell me what the family connection is?" I said, "I can tell you exactly. Your grandparents rented a summer villa from my great- my grandparents in 1893. And your uncle Richard was my father's godson in the early twentieth century." So, we stick to what we know.

*It's been a combination, because on the one hand, The Reform Club is still very establishment in London.*

I've been a member of The Reform Club since 1950.

*Indeed. Yes. Throughout your life, has religion- has religion played a supporting role in your private life? I don't mean just in education, but to you personally? Has it sustained you or have you rejected it in the intervening years?*

My... It has been- it has been tremendously important and the church has been a great supporter of mine. If you think that it was... the Catholic church which maintained my parents in Hungary. Not maintained- but allowed them - arranged for them to stay. And I believe, though I can't guarantee it, that they actually might have survived if they'd accepted the offer of- of sanctuary. They were apparently offered, that they could disappear – as a lot of Jews did - into convents and monasteries respectively. But they didn't want to separate. So, anyway... And something which I haven't even mentioned which explains my Papal Knighthood. I've been, since about 1963 or four, a member of something called The Catholic Union of Great Britain which is a lay organisation... ...And through a particular freak, which would be too much to go into detail, so I'll edit. It was actually quite funny. I was co-opted in 1982 into the Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee of The Catholic Union, which eventually I came to Chair, believe it or not. Which is how I found myself sitting in the committee room of House of Lords, presiding over a meeting of the Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee of The Catholic Union. And as a result of which I found myself, after the death of the last Duke of Norfolk, writing to his son inviting him to become a member of my committee. And writing the same letter... to Lord Guthrie, the retiring... the Chief of the General Staff.

**[2:28:55]**

*Are you very proud of that?*

Not particularly. It's all part of the funny fabric of things you don't expect. I mean, so to that extent the organisational and public Catholic Church has been a great support and prop of my life. ...Though, and this is not I think to discuss in a very public interview, once you reach my life, my state of life, obviously you think of other things. You think of what there is to come



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or not to come... and that affects one's religion. Is there an afterlife? Is there what has been promised by the Church? I don't know the answer. I'm a loyal parishioner- here... and now that I can't get out of the house quite easily, I'm very grateful for the fact on Tuesday- on Tuesdays the local parish Deacon comes and brings me Holy Communion. But what that does spiritually, is not a thing I can answer.

*Has a- a rabbi in Britain ever approached you to try to return to Judaism or to develop a feel for it?*

I don't think so. I've certainly never- but remember it isn't a question of getting me back to Judaism. If I was an apostate. If I'd left the Jewish community... it might have been different. But they don't normally go for people in the second or third generation.

*Finally, would you have a personal message for members of your family, or researchers, anyone who might be looking at this interview in the future? A personal message to them, based on your life?*

**[2:31:41]**

I hadn't thought of that. My immediate reaction would be to quote the German proverb: "*Ersten kommt es anders, zweitens als man denkt*" "First of all, what happens, secondly, it will be different". You can't expect anything. My life has taken any- any number of completely un- has led me into any number of completely unex- unexpected places. I did not, as a child imagine that I would be in the private office of a British Minister looking at the red boxes of the Cabinet papers. I did not expect to be made a Papal Knight of the Order of St Gregory the Great. I did not expect... ...to celebrate a ten-year long service Jubilee as a Member of an English County Police Force.

*Of which you have a certificate.*

Yeah.

*So, your advice is not to expect. To take opportunities as they come, perhaps?*

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I didn't even consciously think any... I mean, things have just- as, I think it was Churchill who- or was it Macmillan who said about, "Events, dear boy, events." In other words, things happen. The message is: ...Don't change loyalties too easily. Stick to your friends. Maintain your friendships if you can. And they certainly are unfashionable messages now. Which is the modern events- the modern trends, of changes in family structures, are to my mind an unqualified disaster. The way in which so-called relationships, or marriages break up easily is a disaster for the children. And so, one tends to take the line that 'any change is change for the worse', which of course isn't true at all. Things are much better for many people than they've been for- for hundreds of years. The humblest ...recipient of benefit in this country in this year, is better off in material terms than a Squire would have been 150 years ago, in terms of health, longevity, public health... comfort... I mean to say that everything is worse, is nonsense. But it's automatically one feels at my age that developments are wrong.

*That's your privilege.*

**[2:35:40]**

Certainly, I don't, I can't approve of what I see is happening to family life. I think government are wrong to try and... I mean the government are now working on extra childcare for three and four years, specifically in order to get more mothers into the labour market. That, I think, is wrong. Particularly as I come from a background where women valued their education but knew where their priorities were. My mother might have had a better aca- academic education than a lot of professional women now, but she still decided that her elder- sick elder child was her priority, so the... That's a very reactionary remark on my part, but I do not approve of the government forcing women out of their home. It's alright when children are at school, but to make a policy of driving the mothers of three-and-four-year-olds into the labour market, seems to me quite immoral.

*Well, we shall see what happens in the future. Thank you very much indeed, Francis Steiner for kindly agreeing to this interview.*

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Well, thank you for coming. I'm sorry if I've been chatting the hind legs off everybody but... Anyway, I regard this as a privilege.

*Indeed, for us also. Thank you.*

I would bow from the waist if I had one.

**[End of interview]**

**[2:37:41]**

**[2:37:49]**

**[Start of photos and documents]**

Photo 1

This picture is my late mother, Paula Steiner, née Leiter, aged about fifteen I guess, and her younger sister Marietta, aged I guess at about ten. If I'm right, the picture was taken in about 1909.

Photo 2

This picture is my late parents. Doktor Richard Steiner and Paula Steiner, née Leiter. Taken six weeks before their marriage, in March 1918, when they announced their engagement in February. My father was in civilian life, a district judge at the time, but serving in the Army as a what would now be called an Advocate... I've forgotten the correct title but he was a sort of military judge. And he was at that time attached to the clemency department of the Supreme Military Tribunal. And they were married on my mother's twenty-fourth birthday in March 1918 and went on a week's Army leave as their honeymoon.

Photo 3

This is a picture of my mother and my elder brother and myself. Taken when I was about a year old and he about five.

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Photo 4

A family group photograph taken at the celebration of my maternal grandmother's eightieth birthday. Myself in my mother's arms. My brother dressed ...like a primary school boy. And my father, his two brothers, his two sisters-in-law and his two nieces. I think that's all.

Photo 5

This picture is just taken when I was five, of myself and my elder brother. It's unusual in the sense that nobody had ever seen him without spectacles, except for this picture.

[2:41:00]

Photo 6

Picture of my elder brother and myself with our cousin Susi. Literally, our second cousin, but very close. And in a way, the sister we never had.

Photo 7

This was taken in December 1938, the last time we four were together. It must have been a day or two before I left Vienna, because I wouldn't have taken this sort of suit with me on the journey to England. So, it must have been a day or two before. Somewhere about the 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1938.

Photo 8

Belmont Abbey School, Hereford, Summer term, 1939. ...Myself, second from left.

Photo 9

This is the back of the house in which I was born and brought up. It's- the address does not match the picture, because the address is Habsburgergasse number 5, which is the next parallel street. Because the house goes via a large courtyard, goes through to several parallel streets. So, the address of this side of the house would be Bräunerstraße number 8, but in fact the postal address is that of the front door, which is Habsburgergasse *fünf*. The series of windows is that of the back of our flat. And the window on the extreme left is that of my brother's and my bedroom for the whole of our childhood.

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### Document 1

This is a diploma nominating me as a Knight of the Pontifical Order of St Gregory the Great, which is not anything like an English Knighthood, because with continental orders the degree of Knight is the lowest. And not like with a British Knighthood. So, I mean in France, the Knight of the Legion of Honour could come at the bottom of the scale. You then have Officer, you then have Commander. And the same with Papal Orders. So, this is nothing more than at best the equivalent of the OBE. The reason why I have this Papal Order, is that I served several years as Chairman of Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee of the Catholic Union of Great Britain... which is an organisation that deals with organisation of Catholics in public life. And all Members of either House of Parliament- all Catholic members of either House of Parliament, who want to join the Political Committee of Catholic Union, are *ex-officio* member- members. And... How I came to chair it, is a long and complicated and rather unexpected reason. Why I joined the committee, is that after being twenty years or so, a member of the Catholic Union, I happened to write a letter to *The Times*, in which I took a particular piece of legislation to bits, fiercely attacking a judgement of the Court of Appeal. I may say, I was- I was upheld in the end by the House of Lords. But that's neither here nor there. But the joke was, that my old friend Philip Daniel who was then Chairman of the Parliamentary Public Affairs Committee, reading my letter to *The Times*, mistook me for a qualified lawyer, and co-opted me onto the committee... from which I went on to eventually chair it which I had never expected to do in my lifetime. But hence the Papal Honour.

**[2:46:37]**

### Document 2

This is a Chief Constable's Commendation for ten years as a volunteer in the Thames Valley Police. This is not a very fearsome police operation. But the police forces in this country can save a great deal of money by getting certain jobs done by unpaid volunteers for which you do not need trained police officers. My own contribution in the course of those ten years was front counter duty, as it's called, at the police office in Deddington, where we acted as a kind of information office. I also did... work- archive work at police headquarters- Thames Valley Police Headquarters in Kidlington. And my last job was to run a press cutting service of items as they related to the local police, for the Area Commander in these parts. The Area

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Commander for Cherwell Valley based on Banbury Police Station. The funny thing was, that on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March... 2015, at the annual commendation ceremony, two people announced their retirement. One of them was Sara Thornton, the Chief Constable...who was being promoted on to London's- to greater things.

*[phone interruption]*

What made the occasion more humorous is that the two people whose retirement was announced, were the top boss of the form- of the force who went on to greater things in London, and the most insignificant member of the force, the humblest of all the volunteers. But I was unusually old, that was all. *The Oxford Times* gave me- gave a little report on this ceremony under the headline, "Contemplating retirement at 92". [Jana laughs] I admit it's a bit unusual. But I was rather sorry to give up... but it was high time.

*Thank you very much Frank for your interview and for sharing your photographs with us.*

Pleasure.

**[End of photos and documents]**

**[2:49:41]**