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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	115

Interviewee Surname:	Worch
Forename:	Renee
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	20 January 1925
Interviewee POB:	Felsödobsza, Hungary

Date of Interview:	5 February 2006
Location of Interview:	Salford, Manchester
Name of Interviewer:	Rosalyn Livshin
Total Duration (HH:MM):	2 hours 7 minutes

REFUGEE VOICES:
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE

INTERVIEW: 115

NAME: RENEE WORCH

DATE: SUNDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2006

LOCATION: SALFORD, MANCHESTER

INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN

TAPE 1

RL: I am interviewing Renee Worch and today's date is Sunday 5th February 2006. The interview is taking place in Salford, Manchester and I am Rosalyn Livshin.

What is your name?

RW: Renee Worch.

RL: And where were you born?

RW: In Hungary. It doesn't matter where, in a village, right?

RL: Where was the village near?

RW: Near the Carpathian Mountains. So that is north, in the … well I am not sure anyway.

RL: How would you pronounce the village that you were born in?

RW: Felsödobsza.

RL: And when were you born?

RW: 20th of the 1st 1925.

RL: What was your maiden name?

RW: Berkovits. B-E-R-K-O-V-I-T-S

RL: And, Hebrew name?

Tape 1: 1 minute 25 seconds

RW: Chaya Rochel.

RL: Were you named after anybody?

RW: Yes, a grandmother.

RL: Now first of all, I would like to ask you about your parents and your grandparents. If you could tell me something about your father's family. What you remember.

RW: What kind of things do you want to know?

RL: Where was your father from and what do you remember about his parents.

RW: Not much, I was four when we left Hungary to go to Belgium; so, they were very prominent in the place where they lived, but …

RL: Where were they living?

RW: In a small village called Gibart, right. I have been back there only once, after my husband died I went, on a pilgrimage, and they still remember the Berkovitses.

RL: In what way were they prominent? What were they involved in?

RW: Landowners.

RL: And what kind of upbringing did your father have?

RW: What kind of what?

RL: Upbringing … did your father have.

RW: Oh, I forgot.

RL: How many siblings did he have?

RW: Eight. There were eight of them … right

RL: And what happened to them? Where did they go?

RW: Most of them were burnt in, well, what do you call them … in the concentration camps, they didn't survive. My grandparents were in, well what do you call them now, crematoriums.

Tape 1: 3 minutes 36 seconds

RL: Did any survive?

RW: Yes, some survived. None of his sisters. Some of his brothers survived and they went to America after the war. They were all in concentration camp. They survived, none of their children survived.

RL: And your mother's family? Where was she from?

RW: Pretty much the same story except it happened in Austria. We lived in Antwerp so we were not involved in it, but the family**,** my mother's mother to Antwerp when Hitler walked into Austria, but, all her sisters died in concentration camp, and their families.

RL: How many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

RW: Eight. Yes, well, actually some of their children survived. The survivors all went to America after the war, like most of them did.

RL: Where was your mother from in Austria?

RW: Deutschkreutz, except it was called in Yiddish Tzelem. You might have come across the name Tzelem.

RL: Do you know what her father did for a living?

RW: Yes, he had vineyards, he was a wine merchant.

RL: And you say that her mother came to Antwerp, what happened to her father?

RW: He died long before then, she was a widow.

RL: How many … so did none of her siblings survive?

RW: Yes, yes. Err, two or three of the brothers, one stayed in Austria after the war, after the concentration camp. And two went to America and they went into the wine trade and that was their living, because that is what they knew best.

RL: Have you any idea of how your parents met?

RW: Like all orthodox, a shidduch, right.

RL: Do you know where they married?

RW: Probably in Austria, yes. In Tzelem.

Tape 1: 6 minutes 37 seconds

RL: And where did they go to live after marriage?

RW: In Hungary. By my father's parents, they were quite well off and they, whatever it was, and, and eventually through private reasons they went to live in Belgium, in Antwerp.

RL: Do you know when they got married? What year would they have got married?

RW: I am not sure. Well I was born in 25, my sister was born in 23, so it must have been before then. Probably before.

RL: So were you the second child?

RW: Yes, yes.

RL: What kind of an education had your parents had?

RW: I wouldn't know.

RL: Did they have any kind of secular education would you say?

RW: They all had secular as well. Yes, yes, certainly.

RL: And Hebrew education, do you know?

RW: Certainly, if you were orthodox you had a Hebrew education.

RL: I mean, to what level.

RW: I don't know.

RL: Did your father attend a Yeshiva?

RW: Of course, if you were orthodox you attended a Yeshiva, if not, you weren't orthodox.

RL: Do you know which Yeshiva?

RW: No … no …

RL: What did your father do for a living?

RW: He was a merchant, a textile merchant in Manchester.

Tape 1: 8 minutes 30 seconds

RL: I am thinking of in Hungary.

RW: I wouldn't know.

RL: Right. And, you were born in Hungary. Do you have any recollection of life in Hungary?

RW: Yes, about my grandparents, yes …

RL: What do you remember?

RW: My grandparents, my father's parents had tobacco fields, because my grandfather was one of two people with the grant to grow tobacco, so, I remember the tobacco fields, because it is something that sticks in your mind, because that is where we lived, but that is all …

RL: Do you remember the home at all?

RW: Yes.

RL: Can you describe what you remember?

RW: No … not really … I remember the fields because I played in it.

RL: Do you know why your father decided to move?

RW: Not really, probably because, no, why should I be guessing, I don't know, it is not a thing that we ever asked.

RL: Whereabouts did you go to live?

RW: In Antwerp?

RL: Mmm

RW: How do you mean where?

RL: Do you remember the address? Do you remember where you went to?

RW: Yes, Langekiviets Strasse, it was called, it is still there, it is not far from the railway station, or the zoo.

RL: And what did your father do in Antwerp?

Tape 1: 10 minutes 40 seconds

RW: He was in the diamond trade.

RL: And if you could just tell me first of all, about where you were living, about your home there, what it was like …

RW: Well, it was a Jewish area, densely populated with Jewish people, as it is now as well. And I only remember very difficult times financially for my parents.

RL: What was it … where was it that you were actually living? Was it an apartment?

RW: Yes, yes … an apartment.

RL: What floor was it on?

RW: First floor.

RL: How big was the block? If you could just describe a little bit about that.

RW: It was a normal block. In fact it is the only block of flats or house in the street which isn't there any more. When I went back to see it, it was gone, I don't know why. Well, they have rebuilt the area because it was overlooking, you can say, the Halle, it was a market, a wholesale greengrocery market in the back. They have built that up, I don't know what it is now, and therefore that building had to go, obviously, but that is all I can tell you about it.

RL: How big an apartment was it?

RW: I don't know what to say, it was a normal apartment.

RL: How many rooms did it have?

RW: Three. Three or four bedrooms, three bedrooms, and it overlooked that market, Halle it was called.

RL: How many children were in the family?

RW: Five, we were five.

RL: Can you tell me who they were?

RW: Yes, I have written it down. My sister, the older one, and then three boys.

RL: Where were they born?

Tape 1: 13 minutes 15 seconds

RW: The youngest was born in Antwerp. The others were all born in Hungary.

RL: Which school did you attend there?

RW: The girls went to state school, because there was no Jewish school at the time, Jewish orthodox one, there was a non orthodox one. And the boys went to Jewish school, because there was an orthodox Jewish school for boys, but not for girls. Just before the war started they did start an orthodox Jewish school for girls, but it started with the first class and it grew with the children, so it wasn't for us any more.

RL: How did you get on at school? How did you find it?

RW: Like anybody, I hated it.

RL: How did you get on with the other pupils?

RW: All right. But, the Jewish girls kept to themselves and the others kept to themselves, like everywhere in Europe, and in England as well, they hate the Jews, but, it was not something we were allowed to show in school. We were not allowed to wear either a Magen Dovid or a cross in school. If you had one you had to put it inside your jumper or blouse, so, in school there was no difference, officially.

RL: Did you come across anti-Semitism in school?

RW: Not in school, no.

RL: Did you ever become friendly with any of the girls? The non Jewish girls …

RW: Yes, but only in school … there was rabid anti-Semitism, everywhere in Europe, when we came to England it was a revelation to meet non Jewish people who didn't hate you … at first, it is not like now, now you go out and you can tell there is a lot of anti-Semitism here. When we arrived after the war we didn't feel that, there was a tremendous difference between the non Jewish population in Europe and here in England. They didn't mind Jews, certainly, not like now.

RL: How did this hatred of Jews manifest itself in Antwerp?

RW: Like everywhere else, by showing you they hate you.

RL: How did that come out?

RW: By being rude to you, by being very rude to you, like they are now. If a sheigitz these days can kick a Jewish boy or knock his hat off, they won't miss a chance. I don't

say they all do it, but most of them would like to do it. You can feel it, you can see it. It
Tape 1: 17 minutes 10 seconds

is happening all the time, and I know in England when we arrived here, we did not have that feeling. They genuinely welcomed us, the ones who were there to welcome us genuinely welcomed us, and we considered ourselves very, very lucky to be in England.

Can we move on?

RL: I wanted just to continue a little bit more with Antwerp. So, what kind of incidents did you experience in Antwerp, yourselves?

RW: Well, in school there was none, but out of school, in those days they used to shout at you, "Go to Palestine". Now they want to kick us out of Palestine, right, but that was wherever you went. They had notices, that size, on cafes and restaurants and everywhere "Yuden Verbotten", which means no Jews allowed in. So, what else do you want.

RL: When was this? In the 1930s?

RW: I wouldn't know … 1930s I was too young, but towards 1940, '37, '38, '39, yes I remember, yes …

RL: Which Shul did your family attend?

RW: I don't remember the name. An orthodox Shul.

RL: And was your father involved in the Jewish community in Antwerp?

RW: I am not sure.

RL: Did you as children belong to anything in Antwerp?

RW: Yes, to the Aguda.

RL: What exactly did you do there?

RW: Like any orthodox club, you sing, you learn, you … they teach you morals, they teach you right from wrong.

RL: How often did you meet?

RW: Once a week.

RL: What day was that?

RW: I think it was Sunday, when we were off school.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 1 second

RL: Did you have school on Saturdays?

RW: There was Saturday school but they didn't force Jewish girls to go to school so we didn't.

RL: And did the boys belong to anything as well?

RW: I don't think so, they were too involved with their learning.

RL: Did you have Hebrew learning?

RW: Yes, on Wednesday afternoon there was no school so we went to Jewish lessons in the Yisodei Hatorah, in the boys' school. They had for girls on a Wednesday afternoon, two hours or something.

RL: Where was that?

RW: Yisodei Hatorah. Don't ask me how to spell it, I don't know. it is still there, the same building, the boys school.

RL: But girls on a Wednesday …

RW: Pardon?

RL: Girls on a Wednesday …

RW: In the afternoon, for two hours.

RL: Was that the only Hebrew lessons you had?

RW: Yes, yes. I do not have … I regret it … I do not have the tremendous, fantastic Jewish knowledge that children grow up with now, we didn't have that.

RL: Were you aware, as a child growing up, of what was happening?

RW: Of course, there was the German refugees. I had a German refugee friend; she went to school with me. They came in, they started coming in 1933, and, some of them had papers to go from Antwerp. They had to go on to America, but they never did, because they found the life so beautiful in a Jewish orthodox community, they said "Why should we go on?" Unfortunately, they probably didn't survive**.** But we knew it was going, what was happening in Germany, nobody thought it was happening, because you don't want it, you have no choice, you like to think it is not going to happen …

Tape 1: 22 minutes 36 seconds

RL: How would you describe your life in Antwerp? You just mentioned some people didn't want to leave because it was such a beautiful …

RW: Yes … yes …

RL: How was it for you?

RW: Well, I didn't know any different, I didn't know if it was better or nicer than anywhere else. That was my home town. It felt good to be told what a lovely place it was, that is all I remember.

RL: What would you do in your spare time?

RW: Play, like other children do?

RL: What kind of things?

RW: I couldn't say. Go to the park, there was a park, still is, at the end of the road.

RL: Did you ever go on outings anywhere?

RW: Very rarely. We helped my mother in the house. We did knitting and sewing and embroidering.

RL: Did your mother have help in the house?

RW: No, we couldn't afford it. My parents were not well off. They struggled very much for a living.

RL: Did you ever learn any music? Was music ever a thing in your house?

RW: No. There was a chazzan who lived in the same block of flats and you could hear him practicing, and we used to enjoy listening to him practicing. That is the only music, yes.

RL: What about reading?

RW: Reading, yes, school books and books that children read, the same as they read in English, with the Flemish or French translation, but more or less the same ones.

RL: What do you remember? Which ones?

RW: I wasn't a great reader, so I can't remember, nothing ever, I was what you would call a late developer, a truly late developer.

Tape 1: 25 minutes 26 seconds

RL: What language did you speak at home?

RW: A mixture of German and Flemish, well more Flemish than German I suppose, because my mother spoke German, and my father, but my mother spoke German, but my language was Flemish, so …

RL: Did your parents speak Flemish as well?

RW: Yes, but it is only, we spoke German, and amongst ourselves we spoke Flemish, which was quite normal there.

RL: In terms of the Jewish community, was there the provision of all the services that one would require, the kosher food, the kosher …

RW: Of course, yes, yes …

RL: Was it a well set up community?

RW: Oh yes, very well set up. Very orthodox, the part where we lived, yes.

RL: At what age did you leave school?

RW: I didn't, the war came. I was 15 when the war started and I was still in school.

RL: And what happened?

RW: That was it, we didn't go back to school.

RL: If you take me through that time period. What happened once the war had started. What happened to your family? What went on?

RW: On the first day … oh you should read my book and then I wouldn't have to tell you all that. I suppose you know I wrote the book … flight … have you read it?

RL: Yes …

RW: Then you know, what do you want me to tell you all this for.

RL: It is good to hear you tell it.

RW: I don't know … well I went to school on the first day and we were all told to go home. And nobody did nothing, everything packed up to go, because you knew to stay, if the Germans were coming it was suicidal. So, by the time we left, I think the war broke out in Belgium on the 10th and we left on the 20th, well we were already in England on
Tape 1: 28 minutes 29 seconds

the 20th, so during that time, that few days, we just watched people going and going. And, one day we left as well, like everybody, we packed up and gone, we left everything behind. And we went on a train, to Ostend, and from there got a boat to England.

RL: How did that come about, in actuality, did you have anything, did you need tickets, did you have any …

RW: No …

RL: How did it actually happen?

RW: Well, you watched … that is also in the book … you watched the refugees coming in from the Dutch borders, because the Germans were already in Holland and you could hear the guns going, or cannons they were, going just outside the city, I think it is what they call … Antwerp was declared an open city, in return for not bombing it, they let them come in. The same happened to Brussels and Paris, they became open cities which means they were allowed to walk in. So we were probably, a day probably before that we had left and gone to Ostend, and in Ostend, as the Germans were bombing Ostend, everybody ran to the, to the quayside, to the, what do you call it now, I can't think of the word … where the boats are …

RL: The dock?

RW: Yes, and you just got into all the boats which were there … and that is also in the book … You have got separate … because they were bombing there, the docks, so everybody just went for the boats. And my mother and my grandmother who was already with us then, got into one of them, a huge French liner, luxury liner, and it was about to sail, and we were still on the quayside, my brother and I. It was about to sail, when the captain, on his, what do you call it, what do you call it when the captain is on his deck?

RL: Bridge?

RW: On the captain's bridge, he noticed my, one of my brother's, who was with him, had long peyers, not like they have now, but peyers, so he got somebody to ask, "Are they Jewish? That family?" My mother, grandmother and a few of the children, and they said "Yes". And they said "Off, off my boat." So, my mother was terribly, terribly agitated and didn't want to get off, and two sailors had to drag her off, and as miracles would happen, but it is all in the hands of Ribbone Shel Olam, he does everything, she ended up, the grandmother and all her children on the British ship that we were on. We didn't know it at the time, but we met on the ship. There were many ships, all the boats

were leaving then, and then, because the captain from that boat had seen what was happening, because they are all crowded together, he could see what was happening there and how my mother was dragged off by the sailors and in fact the captain from this
Tape 1: 33 minutes 15 seconds

particular boat told his soldiers to fetch that family and put them on the boat. It sounds incredible but that is what happened.

And then later on he made sure that my mother knew, that he had been, you know, there is wires that went between the ships, that the big liner had been bombed by the Germans, because it was a sitting duck, wasn't it, and it went under. So, that French Nazi did my mother a very great favour, and did us all a very great favour, yep. We heard that on the boat. Can we move on?

RL: This is …

RW: Time … you know …

RL: Can I just ask you … you had become separated, the family.

RW: Yes, because they were bombing the quayside there, it was being bombed. Some of the boats went under without even sailing … yes.

RL: What was the ship that you were on?

RW: Funnily, I remember the name, King George the sixth I think it was called. It was a coal carrying ship, but I don't know whether they were taking coal from Newcastle or fetching coal from Newcastle, but it certainly was a coal carrying ship. That is all that it had on board, I mean, I don't know if you get coal on it or off it, but it was, yes … and all the sailors smelt of tea, which was a new smell to us, tea … They were very, very nice to us, but of course they had no facilities for refugees.

RL: How many people had managed to get on board that ship?

RW: I couldn't tell you. It was full, the decks were full with people with nowhere to sit, but we were just glad to be on it.

RL: How long was the journey across?

RW: Over a day, it is only a journey of a few hours, or less, but it had its reasons why it was going that way, zig zagging, it wasn't going direct, you could tell it was zig zagging, so … then we arrived in Folkestone.

RL: Was there any attempt to bomb it on the sea?

RW: I don't know, probably that is why it was zig zagging.

From Folkestone we were taken by trains to Crystal Palace, that was a huge place, it was … and from there we were billeted out to different places.

Tape 1: 36 minutes 42 seconds

RL: How did that happen? How did you, how did it take place that you were billeted out? What happened when you arrived in Crystal Palace? How was it organised?

RW: Well, all the women, there was a huge tent that was for only for women, then there was a huge tent that was for women and children, and then one for men, but if there were couples, which there were very few, they were in another tent, separated, so they were together. If there were families …

RL: You were kept together then? As a family …?

RW: No, my father and my brother were separated; they only came to England a few years later. And from there, from that Ostend port …

RL: Where were your father and brother? What happened to them?

RW: Oh, you read the book …

RL: We need to know for the …

RW: Oh, it's too long, it's too long … Well, they stayed behind, they couldn't get on a boat because there wasn't enough room, all the boats had left. Because within a very short time they all left, they weren't just … all of them were sailing at the same time away, to get out of there, and they were left behind. I don't remember all the details, but if you read the book … I mean, I should have read the book before you came, but I didn't think it was necessary. They had a very, very traumatic time, and eventually they were back in Antwerp held by the Nazis because they wanted everybody back where they could keep an eye on them. They asked them to get back from where they came from, all of them.

RL: And how long were they there?

RW: Where?

RL: In Antwerp.

RW: I think they were there for another eight months or so, and then they went to Paris. They stayed, and then they went to … it is too long, it is too long …

RL: And when did they come back? When did they manage to come over to England?

Tape 1: 39 minutes 20 seconds

RW: Through Portugal in 1943, or '4, during the war, most people didn't believe that they came over during the war, but they did, from Portugal, by plane. Separately, first my brother came, then a few months later my father arrived. My father was a very forceful man who never took no for an answer, and it worked. They went over the Pyrenean … oh …

Have you read the book? You should. It is interesting. You see I wrote the book because of my children. Already, they were all married, and they said "Mammy, we know nothing of your background." So, I decided to sit down and write and tell them all about it. At first I thought it would be just a story for them, but people liked it. And it did two things at the same time you see, I told you, I was a late starter, late developer, I was labelled "retarded" in school. So I never breathed a word about it, until I wrote the book and it was a best seller, and it was reissued, and I thought "Well, now I don't care who knows I am retarded." True. Now I have got a book to prove it.

Are you bored to tears or are you interested?

RL: Coming back to your story …

RW: My story … do we have to?

RL: Yes.

RW: I have proved everything now …

RL: You arrived in Crystal Palace, and what happened?

RW: I will tell you a little incident which happened in Crystal Palace. It was in the summer and they had the trestle tables out where we ate and of course, as I said, we were orthodox, and you don't drop your orthodoxy just because there is a war, so it was very difficult, what we had to eat, and there were two or three Belgian boys who sat down at the table with us. There were, they had British nationality and Belgian nationality, I think the mother, not brothers … but they were allowed to come over as one said, they were trying to get away from joining the army. Of course they were taken into the army as soon as they came to England. They didn't want to join, they thought they will get away, but they had British passports, or they couldn't have got away with it because they were army age you see. So, we were talking, and they sat down next to my sister and me, and they were having a meal, and we were having dry bread, or a drink, I don't remember what we drank. And they said "Why do you …" No, they said "Why does your brother look so funny with his peyers." Now you can, now goyim also have peyers, but in those days they didn't, it really stuck out, so we said "Because we are Jewish." And then when it came to eating and we fetched the bread, and they fetched a plate of food they said to us "Why aren't you eating like we are?"

Tape 1: 43 minutes 42 seconds

So my sister and I looked at each other, and we thought, well we have not got to start explaining, we had had this before, so we knew by looking at each other, explaining kosher, meat, you mustn't eat, so we both said "We are vegetarian."
So one of them slapped his hand on the table and he said "Not only you are Jewish you are vegetarian as well, how can you live with so many disadvantages" and they walked away. So they went. Although they were coming over, running away from the Germans, they still liked the Germans more than the Jews, you know, and they weren't going to sit with us after that.

RL: How long were you in Crystal Palace?

RW: Not long. Only about at the most a week.

RL: Where were you sleeping? What accommodation?

RW: In these tents, with these folding beds they had. We each had a blanket, and each child got a big penny, we all got them and we didn't know what it was. It said "Ohna" on it, one, yes, that was how we said it "Ohna, ohna", but they were very, very nice to us. And then they allocated. While we were there we must have been busy allocating, they took names and … and then they allocated and we ended up in Catford. Do you know where Catford is? A lovely place, it was then, I have been there once since, it is very dilapidated. It was a beautiful place Catford at the time. On the Kent border, on the very, very border of Kent, which is the garden city, garden county of England, so it was very beautiful Catford at the time.

RL: Who went to Catford?

RW: My mother, my grandmother, my sister, me, and two of my brothers because one stayed with my father, and a girl which I call in the book "Little Edith", she is a cousin, she came with my grandmother from Austria to us and she was only four years old at the time. She lives in New York now. She has never seen any of her parents or siblings again. She remembers nothing about it. She was four years old when grandmother brought her here. She is a lovely, lovely girl. She was interviewed by the Spielberg … about two or three years ago, she enjoyed it very much. Right.

RL: So … In Catford where were you put?

RW: We were billeted, it was called, with a home, a very beautiful home, with an old lady and her bachelor son, and they were very, very nice to us, but then … it was a lovely, quite, peaceful time, but from May to, I don't know, August or September we were there. I am not quite sure how long because my mother made arrangements. She made enquiries to get us into an orthodox environment, which there was none there, none whatsoever. There was a little Jewish community. They were very nice and they sent us in some kosher food, which was very, very nice, and, well we enjoyed it there, but we
Tape 1: 48 minutes 18 seconds

children enjoyed it there, but my mother was always making, looking for ways to get us out of there into an orthodox community, which we did eventually.

RL: Can I just ask how did you manage there, with food … and … ?

RW: Well, as best as we can, we didn't eat meat or anything, only what we got from the Jewish people, and that was once a week, which they brought … the local Jewish butcher. She cooked it and sent it to us cooked every week, so on Shabbos we had meat.

RL: What did you do in your time there? How did you occupy your time?

RW: Nothing in particular. We did our own cooking in our kitchen by the lady and the cleaning and so on, nothing much besides that.

RL: How did you … ?

RW: We knew we were there in transit. It was not a permanent place.

RL: How did you manage with the language?

RW: Children pick it up very quick, it didn't take long, it doesn't take long, not at that age, if you hear nothing else all day long except the language it doesn't take long to … it's not a big deal … and then we went to …

RL: What was your first impression?

RW: We loved it, as I say. We never in those days, we never met an English man or an English woman who was at all bothered by the fact that we were Jewish, it just didn't exist. We loved it … And we never met any English person who was not 100% convinced that they would win the war, which was a new feeling for us, because we came from a place where the only person who was winning was Hitler, and it was so, ingrained in you, because wherever he went he succeeded, and then you came to England and they say "Oh no, we are going to win this war." I remember, it was a fantastic feeling … can we move on?

RL: OK. Just one more question, and then we will move on. What struck you as being strange or different about England from what you were used to abroad, was there anything in particular that you found?

RW: Well, everything was nice. At that time there was no shortage of anything, there was no ration, no shortage, no nothing … and the bombing hadn't started yet … that only came in the autumn, and by that time we had moved to the east of London, the east end, I forget what it is called, but … and then the bombing started and didn't stop. We spent every night, as soon as it got dark in, or … we were near Victoria Park, I forget what that

Tape 1: 51 minutes 18 seconds

area is called, but it, but the apartment where we were lived, we were billeted there, was overlooking the park, and we had to go into the park to go in the shelter … every night, because there wasn't a night when there were no bombing, and once we couldn't go home in the morning, because the house had been bombed, or the area was bombed. No, a huge bomb fell in the park, very, very near the shelter entrance, so everybody was evacuated. They used to send teams round to diffuse the bombs, which is what happened, but we could see afterwards the huge crater that it had left, unexploded, luckily it didn't explode. They diffused it, so they had to clear the area and we were put up, I don't know where, in the convent, and it was Shabbos and we couldn't do anything, and the nuns were very, very nice to us, and they made us sandwiches and we couldn't eat them, we told them because we thought it was thin meat in it. It turned out, we didn't know at the time, it was smoked salmon, but we had never seen smoked salmon before, so you can see we weren't affluent in Antwerp. We had never, mama had never seen smoked salmon, and we had never seen, and we thought, no we can't eat this, so they had just plain bread and butter and they gave it to us, and by the evening we were allowed to go back to our home, but they were very nice to us. But they understood that we, they said, "No, we didn't make you meat, we know you can't eat it." They spoke French. Yes.

RL: Who were you billeted with in London?

RW: Pardon?

RL: Who were you billeted with in London?

RW: In the east end … no, we had our own apartment, they took over houses and they, we shared the house with people from the Channel Islands. They were there from the Channel Islands, and they always spoke French, not English, French, yes …

RL: Who organised that for the family?

RW: The government, yes … yes, and from there, that was already a Jewish area, so my mother, with the help of some Jewish friends found her own apartment in the very Jewish area, and they let us move on. I don't know where that was, it must have been very near there, and then we were every night, my sister and I worked, what they called the city. I don't know where the city is now. We worked in a factory. I was still only 15. We worked in a hat factory or something which had also been bombed but there was still working there, so we went in every day, took a bus, no idea how. I remember we got paid 10 shillings a week, of which, how much went, I think two shillings or something went on the bus there and back, and I don't remember how much we paid for a carton of milk each, and the rest we took home to my mother. And then somebody also from Antwerp who we met on the ground, in the Victoria underground shelter, from Antwerp, and he said, "What are you doing here? "Why don't you move to Manchester?" Well, we didn't know Manchester, but he made arrangements to go to Manchester, with his, he, that was a man, his wife and only son, who was my age, the boy.

Tape 1: 57 minutes 5 seconds

RL: Now, before we go on, this is about to end, this film, so …

RW: Pardon?

RL: This film is about to end …

RW: Oh, I never noticed …

RL: So we will just stop here and then we can carry on …

RW: Right, right …

TAPE 2

RW: Where was I?

RL: So this is the interview with Renee Worch and it is tape 2.

Well, we were in the east end of London and you were working in this hat factory. What were you actually doing there? What was your job?

RW: I had a pair of scissors cutting out the patterns, and my sister I think was sewing, and from there we moved, it was too far to travel every day so we went to a nearer one, also in the city I think, and we did, what was called mantles, ladies coats, and I learnt their machining with a twin needle, but there we met, we met this gentleman with his family in the underground shelter in Victoria Park, and he said "I am going with my family to Manchester and what have you to lose by coming? There is no bombs in Manchester, they are all in London, why should we spend our life in air raid shelter?"
So, he was as good as his word, he left, and then he wrote to my mother and he said "I will find you an apartment. You come." So we did.

RL: Who was this name?

RW: Shidloff was his name, Mr and Mrs Shidloff and their son.

RL: Where was he from?

RW: From Antwerp. They were originally from Germany but they came to Antwerp in 1933.

RL: Did your family know him from Antwerp?

Tape 2: 1 minute 47 seconds

RW: No, no … we met in the shelter there. But …

RL: So how long were you in London before you left?

RW: I think we came to Manchester in December 1940, about a week or so before the bombing started in Manchester. And we lived in Bury New Road, and every house had these sand bags for incendiary bombs, in those days it was incendiary bombs. And being a stupid teenager, as I was at the time, I enjoyed running out in the morning looking for bits of shrapnel and bits of green pure silk from the parachutes. The heavy bombs didn't come right down, they came sailing down with parachutes. It was a beautiful sight to watch, because they were accompanied by flares to make sure they were on target. Or so they thought … yes.

RL: Just one last thing about London. Did you meet or become friendly with other Jews whilst you were in London?

RW: Yes, well we even, for many, many years we stayed in touch with the people where we stayed in Catford, for many, many years.

RL: What was their name?

RW: I can't remember, I think I have got a letter that I kept somewhere, but I don't remember. No … right … what else?

RL: I was just saying in London, who did you mix with …

RW: You didn't … At the time we were there the Jewish, by that time it was heavy bombing, it was getting up in the morning from the air raid shelter, going having a wash and then going to work, and then when you came home going back to the air raid, that was the life there. We did meet a few people, yes, who to this day, those who are still alive, we are still friends with, yes … but …yes …

RL: You came to Manchester and it was December 1940, whereabouts on Bury New Road was the place that you were living? Do you remember the number?

RW: Yes, it was a huge, huge manor house, it must have been very well to do people who originally lived in it, it was a Mr Epstein, who lived incidentally next door here, in this corner house. He owned this huge property with huge garden surrounded by a detached house, huge, with huge cellars and as I know now, there was some valuable furniture and ornaments and all sorts in the cellar, put away to, I think it got thrown away in the end … but every room he had made into an apartment, the rooms were so big, it had a kitchen, but he had it partitioned off, it had a kitchen, a gas stove, sink, all sorts, and cupboards and it was partitioned off into a bedroom, a living room and a kitchen, and

Tape 2: 6 minutes 9 seconds

each one held a family, or, well there wasn't a single full family, either a husband or a wife or somebody was missing, but each room was an apartment, it was huge.

RL: How many apartments were in there?

RW: I don't remember. And the one who got the kitchen, became the caretaker, because there, if you put coal on the fire it heated the water for the house. It had one bathroom for the whole house, and I don't know maybe two toilets for the house, certainly not more, for all the residents, but that was not unusual in those days, and, yes …

RL: Do you remember who the other families were that shared?

RW: All refugees, all refugees … yes, Germans, not many came from Germany, they were German refugees … yes …

RL: What number Bury New Road was it?

RW: Errr, it must have been three … three something … it is the corner, corner of Murray Street and Bury New Road, later on it … no, I don't know … it was huge and there were some very nice people living there. Interesting, but …

RL: Do you remember any names of the families?

RW: No … There was one interesting gentleman. He was a rat catcher, or a mice catcher, and still from at home in Germany that was his living, and it was there as well. He soon got himself a little round to kill rats and mice, yes …

RL: What did you think of Manchester?

RW: We liked it. We, it was peaceful and … don't forget, a teenager with a lot of life, and an incorrigible optimist, it has got to be pretty bad not to like a place, I loved it, but …

RL: What did you like about it?

RW: Everything, I went straight away, I went, I worked in a factory, and I got told off, because I was underage and I turned up too early in the morning, and if the safety inspector comes you got fined, you are not to turn up until … I don't know what time it started in the morning, but I started with the early ones and the young ones were supposed to come later. I forgot what the age was …

RL: What was the factory?

Tape 2: 9 minutes 42 seconds

RW: Well, I never stayed long in one place … so that works against me, doesn't it. But I learned a lot, we always had to be apprenticed by somebody. Actually, one machinist would have say ten apprentices working for them, either for raincoats or for soldiers battle dresses or whatever, in the end I went on my own, we earned more that way … Anyway I worked in Kessler's factory, which was off Waterloo Road somewhere. Oh, I worked in a lot, and then in Wellington Street, but they made soldier's battle dresses, they had 300 machinists, I think it is still a raincoat factory or something now …it is near Bury New Road in Wellington Street East … it belonged to … not Kesslers, I think it belonged to Beenstock, I think it belonged to Beenstock that one. I worked there quite a while. Actually I didn't give it up, it gave me up, because they always had the time, there were seasons for it, when they sent all but the key workers away, and then … then they were looking for new workers when they got a new contract again, which happened quite often. Right …

RL: And your sister?

RW: She worked in another factory, she stuck in one, one factory … and we both went to evening classes to learn English. That is the only English education I ever had, it was I think one year, it was called Loreburn College, in town, in the evening, I think twice a week for a year or so, I don't think I did two years, that is the only education I had, and I remember it was the black out, and I remember coming out of the college at night, and walking straight into a lamppost, which was not unusual in those days, and for two days my ears were ringing, literally my head was … it took me two days to get over it, I walked straight in … but it happened to a lot of people, but I do remember that whenever I think of Loreburn College … right …

RL: What was your mother doing?

RW: She was at home. And Mr Eckstein brought her a sewing machine and she did sewing at home for him, yes …

RL: And your brothers?

RW: They were little boys, they were in Northampton, evacuated, and my little cousin was also together with them, evacuated.

RL: They were evacuated from London?

RW: No, from Manchester, from Manchester …

RL: What did you see of the blitz in Manchester?

RW: Pardon?

Tape 2: 14 minutes 0 second

RL: What did you see of the blitz in Manchester?

RW: Burning houses, there was, when you drive into town now, there was a fork in the Road, one went up Deansgate and the other one went, I don't know where it would have gone, I think Market Street or something, and there was in between a huge, huge hotel, a huge hotel, which was on fire. And, how did it come on fire, they shot a German plane down and I think it landed on it, and the German pilot bailed out with a parachute and landed on top of the building … yes … and it is only after the war, years after the war, when they demolished the building that they found the woman still dressed in a silk evening gown with jewellery on, I remember that, many years after the war, when they came to demolish the building. You can look it up somewhere in the library, in archives … yes, that is the sort of thing we remember. I also remember that the refugees thought it was peculiarly absolutely British, one of the, one of the pilots or co-pilots or the bomber or whatever it was from a German plane who came down in one of the side streets, you know in the Salford area or wherever it was, and he came down, and he managed to come down whole, with his parachute. And the whole street came out, and they felt very sorry for him, and they took him indoors and gave him a cup of tea, and we all said to him that a British pilot wouldn't have got such a reception in Germany, but I do remember that …

Can I finish now? That is enough now?

RL: No, no, no … Were you frightened of the bombing?

RW: Never, never. I can say that with my hand on my heart, I was never frightened.

RL: Did you go to a Shul here? Did you join … ?

RW: Of course, yes …

RL: Which one?

RW: Machzikei Hadass. The old building was the head office of the black shirts or the brown shirts or whatever they were called. You must have heard of it … yes …

RL: Did you begin to make friends with people there …

RW: Oh yes, yes, with everybody, it was a very tiny close knit orthodox community, and it was very nice.

RL: Which families did you become close to?

RW: Oh, I don't know … whoever lived here, everybody, there was just nobody who was left out. The few that were here were friends became friends. From Shul, whoever

Tape 2: 18 minutes 1 second

came to the Shul, it wasn't big at the time, it was small, so everybody became friends, yes.

RL: And you were working in these, eventually you went on your own …

RW: Yes …

RL: Where were you working from?

RW: Pardon?

RL: When you worked on your own … where were you working from?

RW: No, I went to a factory where I was my own boss and got my own work, as a machinist, that was called working on your own, not working for somebody as an apprentice. Yes.

RL: Where was that? Which factory?

RW: I don't remember the name.

RL: And is that what you were doing at the end of the war?

RW: No, erm, I went, I got a job in an office. It wasn't difficult to get a job in an office. In fact I thought I was ever so lucky, because if I had been in Belgium and I had gone for a job I would have had to give my school report and that would have been the end of the job. Here when they asked for my school report, because I wanted an office job, I didn't want to be a factory girl. I don't know why, but I didn't, because factory work, machinist, if you were good at it you got a lot more pay than if you were in an office, but office work was easy … and everybody was looking for office girls, so when I went for an interview, "Show me your school reports."
"I haven't got, I come from Belgium, from Antwerp."
So I got the job, and he was very happy with me, until I got married I worked in one place.

RL: Where was that?

RW: It was textile, export textile, and it was very limited work, very little work, because there wasn't much being produced. There was still, the looms were working in Lancashire and I remember, it was not unusual for them, of course his customers were in Africa. He made special materials that the Africans used for their clothing, and, it was not unusual to get a letter to say that the shipment sunk, but, very little work, but he was very, hmm, what is the word, he always found something interesting, that he got an allocation of artificial silk and cotton and all sorts and he would make these materials which then
Tape 2: 21 minutes 22 seconds

the factories that made, weavers used to come there and try and get his order, because they were all looking for work, yes, very interesting work, and nobody was overworked.

RL: What did you do in your spare time?

RW: Well, like any young girl. You made your own work, you made your own entertainment, you neither had the money nor the where to go, you entertained yourself. You got a few friends together, and you, there was nothing in particular that you did. You didn't wait to be entertained; very few could afford to go once a week to the pictures. They were clean at the time, there was a moral message, every film had a moral message, now they wouldn't pass the, what do you call it, the censor, now he wouldn't pass it if it had a moral message, would it?

RL: Did you use to go to the pictures?

RW: Everybody went to the pictures in those days. Now, I am all for not going, not because … if it was the same films as was then, it would be all right, but they are disgusting. The only reason I know it is disgusting is because you see them on the aeroplane. You squirm in the seat, if you are not used to it, if you don't have a television in your house and you are not …….. or whatever the word is, to these immoral goings on, when you see even the censored version of it on a plane you squirm, right … so, I am sure you probably won't agree with me, but there it is. I am not conditioned to accept it as the norm, the immoral goings on of people these days. Right … now … you didn't want to hear that, did you?

RL: That is fine …

Your brothers, how long were they evacuated for? Did they come back to the family?

RW: Yes … yes …

RL: How long?

RW: I don't remember how long it was …

RL: And then did they go to school here?

RW: Did they go to school here? I don't remember. They must have gone to school, but I don't know where, I don't remember …
RL: And how were you reunited with your father? Did he find you?

Tape 2: 24 minutes 34 seconds

RW: Well through the Red Cross, of course. That is how he was able to come to England because we were already here, and he persevered, right … he didn't take no for an answer, but it was the Red Cross who put us in touch with him and him with us.

RL: Do you remember his arrival?

RW: Pardon?

RL: Do you remember his arrival?

RW: Yes, of course.

RL: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

RW: It was very low key, it was wartime, nothing was done on a grand scale, it was very, very low key, we went to the station and fetched him, and while I was waiting I was hoping I would recognise him when I would see him, because it was two or three years later, that is all …

RL: And did you?

RW: And we came home on the tram.

RL: Did you recognise him?

RW: Yes, yes …

RL: And what did he do once he had arrived?

RW: I don't remember.

RL: Did he work here?

RW: Yes, yes … he learned to sew on a machine here. I found it strange to see my father sitting by a sewing machine, but he did, he wasn't afraid of work.

RL: Did he work at home?

RW: Yes, yes. He had a machine at home.

RL: And do you remember the day war ended?

Tape 2: 26 minutes 20 seconds

RW: Yes. There were parties in the street. We lived in Murray Street, and the next street, every street had a party, there were tables outside, don't forget, it was also in May, wasn't it, yes … every street had a party.

RL: Had you moved from Bury New Road.

RW: Yes, when my father arrived we were living in Bury New Road, three two five Bury New Road, next door to the Haffners. They lived three two seven, and we were very friendly with them of course, and that is where we lived. Well, when the war was over, wait a minute, no we didn't live in Murray Street, we lived at 325 Bury New Road when the war was over … yes …

RL: Was that a house?

RW: Yes … yes … it belonged to a family Crane, C-R-A-N-E. Do you know the Crane family?

RL: There is a Doctor Crane?

RW: Pardon?

RL: There is a Doctor Crane?

RW: There could be one. One son at the time, he was still a bachelor, he must have been in his thirties or maybe forties, he was still a bachelor, he married after that, he was the examiner of the R. A. F. to become an officer, he was the examiner, and he was an orthodox Jew. Very brilliant, all the Cranes were brilliant, in fact I think he was the oldest of them, and that was their house, but during the war, during the bombing, they moved to a house in Nelson, the most fabulous manor house that I have ever been in, because I was very friendly with the Crane daughter. They had one room they kept in the house where we took over. They had one room where they could come. Renee, she lives in Israel now, I believe she is a writer or so I was told, she went to Cambridge and she met her future husband in Cambridge. They met because they were both orthodox and they started a kosher kitchen in Oxford, and I believe it is still going. And, so they married, his family was from Sheffield or Leeds, and they went to Israel and I think he sits and learns. Well she is my age, so they are old people now. And they are living, she is a writer I was told, but her, they lived in this fabulous mansion with huge grounds, and a sunken garden, an unbelievable place. I have never been in anything like it, and I stayed there quite often over Shabbos to keep her company. One sister got married there and the father died there. And many, many years after the war I always thought of this dream building, this dream house, the bathroom was at least this size if not bigger with a bathtub in the middle of the room, it was fabulous.

Tape 2: 30 minutes 34 seconds

About twenty or thirty years after the war, I happened to pass, I was in Nelson, and I went to have a look at the house and they had turned it into flats, oh, it looked horrible, oh, run down flats it was, not nice ones like they have these days, in those days it was awful, I didn't go inside. The hall and the staircase was so fabulous … oh … and when the daughter got married there and the guests arrived, and of course I was already there and I stood on top of the staircase and when they all came through the door they all went

"Ahhhhhhhhhhh" when they saw this winding staircase and one of the boys had polished it and it was shining. Of course the handle on the staircase was, they made it shiny and it had this enormous orb at the bottom, it was fabulous, and then they turn it into flats, ugh … anyway …

RL: Were they an English family the Cranes?

RW: Yes, yes … the Cranes were an English family, very much so.

RL: Did your family get any assistance from any refugee committees?

RW: Only for the first few months, that is all. Not after, because we always worked.

RL: And, how did you meet your husband?

RW: Oh, he was my brother's best friend in Yeshiva.

RL: Which Yeshiva was that?

RW: Egham, Staines.

RL: And where …

RW: Oh, it just happened …

RL: And where is your husband from?

RW: From Germany.

RL: What was his name?

RW: You have got it. Worch, Ze'ev Worch, yes.

RL: And when had he come over?

RW: He came in '38, he was 11, and he never met any of his family again, he was the sole survivor.

Tape 2: 33 minutes 15 seconds

RL: How had he come over?

RW: Children's Transport. Can we call it finished now?

RL: No, not yet …

When did you marry?

RW: ’46

RL: And where did you marry?

RW: Here in Manchester.

RL: At which Shul?

RW: Oh, what was it called … Mrs … oh you must know … Mrs … at the back of the Jewish Day School, that hall …

RL: Fruhman.

RW: Fruhman … yes, yes, yes … That is where the chuppah was and that is where I got married.

RL: Who was the Rav?

RW: Rabbi Feldman. And the Rav of Staines Yeshiva, of course he came as well, because my husband got married from the Yeshiva.

RL: Where did you go to live?

RW: We lived in Murray Street until we came here?

RL: What did your husband do once you were married?

RW: He was a handbag manufacturer.

RL: Was he set up on his own?

RW: Yes, yes.

RL: Where was his place?

RW: On Bury New Road.

Tape 2: 34 minutes 48 seconds

RL: How big a place?

RW: A little place, it stayed little all the time, just a small place.

RL: Did he have a trade name?

RW: No he didn't, no …

RL: And what children did you have, or do you have?

RW: Well, I had eight children, you have got that down.

RL: How many boys and how many girls?

RW: Four boys and four girls, my husband was very neat. (Laughs)

RL: And where did they go to school?

RW: Jewish Day School and the boys to what is called Number Eleven in Wellington Street.

RL: Was Number Eleven a secondary school?

RW: No, it was from nursery until they go to Yeshiva.

RL: So you didn't send them to Jewish Day?

RW: At one stage, yes, some of them went to Jewish Day, not all of them.

RL: What made you send them to Number Eleven?

RW: They were like me, slow starters, considered backwards, and they are all very bright grown up people, considered below, how shall I put it, below the plumb line [Laughs].

RL: And the ones who went to Jewish Day, where did they go after Jewish Day?

RW: Yeshiva.

RL: Straight from Jewish Day to Yeshiva?

RW: Yes … yes …

Tape 2: 36 minutes 48 seconds

RL: They must have only been 11?

RW: Yes … don't ask me, I don't know, they did go to Yeshiva but I don't know when, they must have gone somewhere else as well. Well there was this, it is still there isn't it, Jewish High, or whatever it … it wasn't called Jewish High, for the girls it was called Jewish High, I don't know what it was called for the boys.

RL: Jewish Grammar?

RW: Er, yes … or to Number Eleven, to the school in Wellington Street, yes, before Yeshiva.

RL: How big a school was Number Eleven?

RW: Small school, because there weren't many … because we have had kneine hora an explosion of orthodox people in Manchester lately, but for a very long time it was a very small community. My husband was one of the founders of the Number Eleven School, but it is beyond recognition now.

RL: Who else helped to found it? Who else was involved with that?

RW: Mr Waldman, Mr … er … Moskovitz, Mr Moskovitz, and let me see, and Mr Kornblue, that is all.

RL: Were any of them refugees?

RW: They were all refugees, yes, yes …

RL: And when did they start the school? When was it founded?

RW: When they have got children, boys old enough to start going to school, they started it …

RL: Approximately when was that?

RW: 49, 50, something like that. Yes, first it was just half a dozen little boys, with runny noses …

RL: Who were the teachers?

RW: There was an old gentleman, he was already, well we considered him old at the time, because we were very young. I forget his name, he is not alive any more, he was the sole teacher but he only had a few. He used to go and pick up each child from the home

Tape 2: 39 minutes 34 seconds

and take them to Wellington Street and then take them back to the home again when they finished.

RL: Was he also a refugee?

RW: Yes, yes.

RL: You don't remember his name?

RW: From Germany. No I don't remember his name.

RL: Were they learning secular and Hebrew subjects?

RW: No, they were toddlers, they were just learning Hebrew. They didn't need to learn anything yet.

RL: And as they got older?

RW: Well yes, they learnt secular as well, that was the law, yes.

RL: What was the language that they learnt in?

RW: Probably Yiddish, yes.

RL: Did your children know Yiddish?

RW: Yes, of course, they all do.

RL: What did you speak at home?

RW: English. By that time we spoke English.

RL: So where did they learn their Yiddish.

RW: Probably from the school and from … my husband spoke Yiddish to them, my father spoke Yiddish to them, yes …

RL: Was Yiddish something that was spoken in your home? Because you know you said you spoke German and Flemish.

RW: Yes, yes. We did in England, yes, we got into speaking Yiddish, because that was a common language amongst all Jewish.

RL: Did you speak any Yiddish as well?

Tape 2: 41 minutes 22 seconds

RW: I learnt it in England.

RL: And after …

RW: Am I waking you up?

RL: After … did they belong to any clubs your children?

RW: No, no … the cheder was the club that was everything, the kingpin.

RL: Was there no Agudah here?

RW: Not the boys, I don't remember …

RL: And for the girls?

RW: Yes, yes.

RL: So did they belong to Agudah here?

RW: Yes, yes …

RL: And where was it here?

RW: I don't remember, I think it was on Bury New Road, but I am not sure where it was.

RL: And from school where did the children go?

RW: Home.

RL: I mean when they finished school. Having gone beyond school age, where was the next …

RW: Yeshiva.

RL: Which Yeshiva?

RW: There were several, I don't remember which one, there were several at the time … ya …

RL: And you don't remember where they went?

Tape 2: 42 minutes 40 seconds

RW: No.

RL: Did any go to Gateshead?

RW: One went to Gateshead, yes.

RL: Did any go abroad?

RW: To Israel, yes .. yes …

RL: And the girls?

RW: They stayed at home.

RL: Did they go to sem?

RW: There was no sem in those days, that came after. The last one, well the last three went to sem, because by that time there was sem.

RL: Where did they go?

RW: One went to Gateshead sem, one to Manchester, and one in Aix-les-Bains.

RL: What made you choose there?

RW: I don't remember why at the time …

RL: And how did they find their marriage partners?

RW: Shidduch.

RL: Did the girls get any work before they got married?

RW: No, no. They got married, I think from sem, yes.

RL: And where did they go to live.

RW: They all three live in New York, and my oldest daughter who didn't go to sem because there was no sem at the time, she lives in Manchester.

RL: And the boys? Where did they settle?

RW: Well one lives here, and two live in New York.

Tape 2: 44 minutes 28 seconds

RL: And what do they do now? What are they doing at the moment?

RW: Work.

RL: In what?

RW: Well, one is in business, one is struggling, and the other one, he has a butcher shop in Bury Old Road.

RL: What is that called?

RW: I think it is called Kosher Butcher, I am not sure. It used to be Abrahams, he took over.

RL: And the girls, who did they marry?

RW: Men!

RL: Whom?

RW: How do you mean? Orthodox boys, from Yeshiva.

RL: Where were they from?

RW: And they lived happily ever after …

RL: Where were they from the boys?

RW: From New York.

RL: They married American boys.

RW: Yes, yes …

RL: And what do they do now? Their husbands?

RW: They are all in business.

RL: What kind of business?

RW: One in carpets, one in wholesaling something and one is an accountant.

RL: Do your daughters work at all?

Tape 2: 45 minutes 56 seconds

RW: No, funnily, no, they don't. They said they seen me working, when children, and they came home and I wasn't home so they said they weren't going to go to work …

RL: What were you working?

RW: So …

RL: What were you doing?

RW: Ironing. (Laughter in background)

RL: What as? What were you doing, what were you working as?

RW: Wholesaling, fancy goods.

RL: When did you start that?

RW: Long time ago, I have finished now, it is a long story.

RL: Did you always work?

RW: Yes, I always worked.

RL: So was that your own business?

RW: Yes, yes …

RL: You started that?

RW: Yes, yes … and I enjoyed every minute of it, and I enjoyed my children, and I enjoyed cooking and baking, I can't say that at any time I didn't enjoy what I was doing, I may be a freak but there it is.

RL: Did you have people working with you?

RW: Yes … not big, I never had a big business, no …

RL: And this was independent to what your husband was doing?

RW: Yes … yes …

RL: Did you take out British Nationality?

RW: Yes.

Tape 2: 47 minutes 31 seconds

RL: When did you do that?

RW: Oh a long time ago, I don't remember, maybe thirty years ago or more, we did it together. All the children were born here, so …

RL: Did your parents also?

RW: Yes, my parents became British subjects before we did. My mother said one day "We are British, your children are British, isn't it time you became British." So we did.

RL: Where were your parents living?

RW: In Broom Lane. Higher up, number thirteen.

RL: And where did your brother and sister go to? Where did they settle eventually?

RW: My sister in Manchester and my brothers, one in New York and one in London and one in Blackpool, yes.

RL: Who did your sister marry?

RW: She married a Mr Eckstein and raised ten children, and then my dear brother in law had a stroke and died and about six or seven years later she remarried and lived in Israel. She still lives in Israel.

RL: Were you involved in Manchester in the Jewish community in any way? Did you belong to any societies, or were you active in anything?

RW: Well, only one … I was one of the founders of the Beenstock home and if you can call it involved, I have been involved for 30 years in the Chevra Kadisha. That is all.

RL: Was that the Machzikei Hadass?

RW: No, both, Machzikei Hadass and the community, both.

RL: Was it already formed when you joined?

RW: Machzikei Hadass was already formed, because my mother was one of the founders, but the Beth Din one was reorganised when I joined it, it was just in the, Rabbi Ehrentreu did it and he wanted volunteers.

RL: Was your father involved in the community?

Tape 2: 50 minutes 38 seconds

RW: I don't think so. He was known as somebody who gave a lot of tzedokah, but he didn't have any official titles or anything.

That is all, can I go home now?

RL: Did he go on to do other work? You described that when he first came he was working on a machine.

RW: Well he became a textile merchant until he retired.

RL: Where did he work from?

RW: In town on George Street, and his company was called City Textile.

RL: And your mother? Was she involved? You said she was one of the founders of Chevra Kadisha …

RW: Yes … yes …

RL: Was she involved in anything else?

RW: She did a lot of charity work, a lot, but not with an official name, and so was my father, but they didn't, not official, not with any organisation, they just did a lot of charitable work, yes …

RL: Which Shul did they belong to?

RW: Machzikei Hadass.

RL: How would you describe yourself, first of all in terms of nationality?

RW: I am proud to be British. That is all.

RL: And in terms of identity, how would you describe yourself.

RW: As an orthodox Jew who is trying to do her best.

RL: Do you think you have any identity with, any European identity?

RW: What do you mean by it?

RL: You were born abroad … do you have any … ?

Tape 2: 52 minutes 54 seconds

RW: Affiliation or something? No. Of course all Jews are, my ancestors come from there, so of course we do, but I am Jew, not a European or a English or a … I'm a Jew, an orthodox Jew.

RL: You mentioned that you went back …

RW: To Hungary, once, well … twice. Yes …

RL: How did you find that? Can you describe it?

RW: Well, it, it cured me, I wanted to go back and see what it is like, and I am cured … they hate you as much as they ever did, and who wants to go back there … I have no desire …

RL: Have you been back to Antwerp?

RW: To Antwerp I have been back a few times because it is a big Jewish orthodox community and orthodox Jews intermarry from other orthodox Jewish communities, so I have been back for weddings and so, but that is all.

RL: How do you feel going back there?

RW: The first or second time I went back I walked in, I liked to go on my own and I liked to inhale the place, because to me it is my home town, and now Manchester is my home town, but there is something from your childhood, and I walked in Langekiviets Strasse and I stopped a man to ask him, I don't remember why I stopped him and why I asked him, but he says "Can you see all these Jews here?" And he said "That is nothing, you should have seen it before the war, it was crawling with Jews." Ya … ya …

I will give you a bonus, a little incident, the very, very first time I went back to Antwerp, it was a very emotional thing for me and I arrived at the station. And the last time I was there it was packed with refugees with their little bags going for the train full of soldiers with the rifles, and that was my last picture. So I stood there and I really enjoyed it, I just stood there, I had so many different emotions about it, and it is in the book that the last time I was there, the goyim we have known from before the war, you know, the people you lived with, next door was a pub, it is not called a pub there, and it is still there I think. I think that it is just before the building where we lived, and I think the pub is still there, and the people, they used to be very nice to us, to the Jews, because they used to come and buy beer there, and when the Germans were already outside, not when the Germans were in because then we weren't there any more, but when people, when the Jews were moving away, and the Jews were hiring cars and all sorts to take them away, it was just as normal to see a horse and cart coming along to pack the Jews away, and there was a grocery shop, directly across from where we lived, and there was this horse and cart

Tape 2: 57 minutes 20 seconds

outside and we were putting, making it, the seat comfortable for the grandmother, and the people from the pub, they were standing outside laughing and laughing, as they were putting this bedding in, because there was nothing in the cart, she was a very old lady, then the old fellow comes out, the husband comes out, not the old man, a youngish man, with a long beard, black beard, and a goy who was in charge of the horse and cart kept them entertained by saying "I am afraid of the beard, I am afraid of the beard." And this is how it went, and all the Jews were looking and nobody was saying anything." By then

we were terrified of goyim, right, and that was only the Belgium goyim, before the Germans had moved in … now why I am saying this is because when I came back to Antwerp and I was staying with the people I was staying with and I looked out of the window, I will never forget it, I looked out of the window and across the road they were building, they were rebuilding a house, and one of the workers, one of the builders, was a man with a beard and I thought … my goodness, how they made fun of my father, he also had a beard and of this poor fellow, we had hired him to take him to Ostend … yes?

RL: This tape is about to end …

RW: Oh, oh, oh … sorry …. I didn't realise that … and here was a goy with a beard.

RL: We need to finish now, sorry.

TAPE 3

RL: We were running out of tape, I was just trying to tell you … I was just going to tell you we were running out … we have got part of it … so I am just trying to tell you we are going on to tape 3 … so you were saying …. You looked out of the window …

RW: Yes, and on the building site, I saw a worker with a beard, I couldn't believe my eyes, because the last time I had been in Antwerp, they were making fun of the, of every Jew that passed with a beard, they wouldn't, they were frightened of it, it was a horrible feeling, and all the Jews kept quiet and tried to shrink away, and here my first impression, I look out of the window, and there is a builder with a beard, now when I go to Antwerp, I mean it doesn't mean anything, but that very first impression was unbelievable, because they still hate you, because when I walked in the main road in Antwerp with my son, Simon, the one who is the butcher here, and a goy passed, and he spit at him, and he said "Mama, how could you have lived here." That is now, that is now …

RL: Would you say you also experience that kind of thing in Manchester now?

RW: Yes, you do … yes you do now.

RL: When did that start?

RW: You must know as well as I do. I don't know when it … surreptitiously is the word, it just happened, and before you know it, it becomes blatant.

RL: How long would you say that has been going on?

RW: I couldn't say … I couldn't say … I heard about it, don't forget a woman wouldn't know. If I go in the street they don't even know I am Jewish some of them, but it is

Tape 3: 2 minutes 13 seconds

different for the men and the boys, it is quite different. They have been harassed for years already, here in this area … in this area, wow, the boys, coming home from cheder, terrible …

RL: What kind of things?

RW: What shall I say? Anti Jewish … All right, we will call it a day, yes, there is nothing else you need to know …

RL: There are one or two …

RW: There is nothing else you need to know …

RL: There are just one or two rounding up questions and then I will stop.

RW: Yes …

RL: First of all, how do you feel towards the Germans?

RW: I don't feel anything, I don't want to think about them … what shall I, if I would go on harbouring hatred inside of me it would do more harm to me than to them, I just don't think of them.

RL: And Israel, how do you feel towards Israel?

RW: Well, what do you want me to say about Israel? I live here, I don't live there. It is a lovely country, it is a beautiful country, and they haven't got a moment's peace … so …

RL: When did you first visit?

RW: Oh, first visit is already 30 years ago, but lately I have been going quite often because we have family there.

RL: What was the occasion of your first visit?

RW: A wedding.

RL: And how did you feel going there for the first time.

RW: Beautiful. Interesting, beautiful …

RL: How safe do you feel here?

Tape 3: 4 minutes 20 seconds

RW: I feel safe, but a Jew is not safe anywhere. What happened in Europe can happen anywhere, anywhere …

RL: Do you think you have been psychologically affected in any way by what happened?

RW: I am psychologically affected because I am a Jew, right. To pretend that we are the same as others … we are not … we are Jews, right.

RL: So when you say you are psychologically affected because you are a Jew, what do you mean?

RW: No, I don't know what you mean by psychologically affected. I am giving you an answer as I see it, but I don't really know what you mean by it.

RL: Well, when I was asking, I was wondering if you have been disturbed or affected in any way …

RW: No, not, no … I don't have a chip on my shoulder … no. We are different, well, if we accept that and don't want to fight it or integrate then you are alright. As long as you are a Jew, and know you are a Jew, and know your place, then it is all right. Yes.

RL: Has your religious observance changed at all over the years?

RW: I hope it is better than it used to be. I could go less, I could go more, nobody stays the same. So I hope it is more and not less.

RL: And, did your experiences, did they in any way affect your belief.

RW: What do you mean by that?

RL: Was there ever a time when your belief … when you questioned or worried or asked or faltered …

RW: You mean questioned the … ? No … I don't think, no … no … I come from an orthodox background. I have not lived a sheltered life in any shape or form, and the more I see of the outside world, and I have mixed all my life in the outside world, the more I thank G-d having made me an orthodox Jew, that is all there is to it.

RL: Is there any message …
RW: And it is not because I have lived a blinkered life all my life, I haven't, and when I have been in business, I haven't dealt with Jewish people at all, I have been on the outside world, and I know how fortunate I am for being what I am.

Tape 3: 7 minutes 43 seconds

RL: Is there any message that you would like to end with?

RW: Who am I to give a message?

Can I go home now please, that is the message I want.

Thank you very much, I think you have been very, very nice and extremely diplomatic and patient with me, and full marks for it, and I think you are a nicer person than … you must be a very nice person, that is what I mean, to put up with people like me. And thank you very much, and I am sorry if I disturbed your sleep now and again.

RL: I didn't ask you about grandchildren, which I should have done …

RW: Yes, go on then …

Which grandmother doesn't like to be asked about the grandchildren … if you ask me about the grandchildren, I will say, "Don't ask" … [Laughs]

RL: How many have you got?

RW: No …

RL: You don't count …

RW: No, I don't count … no …

RL: Are any of them married?

RW: Yes, and I have great grandchildren. And please say … "You don't look it" …

RL: You don't look it …

RW: No, no … I am very, very fortunate, very, very fortunate … yes …

RL: I think we will stop there. Thank you very much.

RW: I thank you.

PHOTOGRAPHS

RW: Now when this photograph was taken, in approximately 1936 in Antwerp and working from left to right the first one is my sister Edith, she is the oldest, next to her is my brother Ziggy, then my mother, then my eldest brother Kalman, next to my father, then it is me, Renee, and my youngest brother Shmuel.

RL: And the surname?

TAP Tape 3: 10 minutes 8 seconds

RW: Berkovits that is family Berkovits.

This photograph was taken in Manchester in approximately 1960, it is my dear parents, mama, everybody called her mama, and papa. Mama and Papa Berkovits, everyone in the community knew them as that, Mama and Papa Berkovits.

This photograph was taken in the late 1980s, probably 1988 or 89, my husband is carrying a Sefer Torah, which we, the whole family donated ilui Nishmas, Yechezkel Shrager, my son, our son.

RL: Where was it taken?

RW: Here in Manchester, it happened here in Manchester.

RL: And your husband's name?

RW: My husband's name is Ze'ev Worch.

This photograph was also taken in Manchester, in fact in number 11 Wellington Street, in the Cheder, Chinuch Noarim, and it is of my husband Ze'ev, he is giving the prize to his grandson Pinchus Woch, the son of Shimon and Riah Worch.

RL: And the date?

RW: The date will be approximately, well, 19 … '90 … won't it?

RL: Will it?

RW: Yes, I think so, around about 1990.

Well this one is an old wedding photograph taken in New York at the occasion of my son, Shimon's wedding, to Riah, what is her maiden name? Billitzer, Riah Billitzer, who became our dear daughter in law, and the rest of the family.

RL: And the date?

RW: The date is around about … What did I say? … Around about 1980 … approximately 1980.

This photograph was taken in New York on the occasion of a Bar Mitzvah, it is a photograph of my daughter Simi, with her husband Yossi, on the occasion of the Bar

Mitzvah of one of her sons, and the date is approximately 1990 … 1996 or ’97 in New York.

Tape 3: 13 minutes 44 seconds

This is another happy occasion taken in New York, taken at an occasion, probably a wedding, and it is a photograph of some of my granddaughters when we managed to get them together and on this happy occasion …

This is taken in London at the occasion of a wedding, at my sister’s, one of her grandchildren, and this is a photograph of my sister Edith, Esty, and my brother Kalman and myself.

RL: The date?

RW: And the date is 2-0-4, 2-0-0-4 …