

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Francis
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Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV246
NAME: Francis Wahle
DATE: 12th November, 2019
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

This interview is with Francis Wahle in London on the 12th of November, 2019. Thank you very much indeed for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices project today. May we start by you giving us your name and your date of birth and where you were born.

My name is Francis Wahle and I was - my date of birth is the 14th of August, 1929 and I was born in the center of Vienna in Austria.

Do you recall where you lived in Vienna?

Yes, it was a corner house at the corner of Gonzagagasse and Rudolfsplatz near the Danube canal.

What were your parents' names?

My father was Karl and my mother was Hedwig. He was a judge and she was an insurance actuary.

And where were they born and when?

My- they were both born in Vienna. My father was born in 1887 and my mother was 10 years younger. She was born in 1897.

Do you have any special memories of your childhood in Vienna that stand out?

Yes, but they're all sort of individual ones. There's nothing very [00:02:00] continuous. For instance, we used to have children's parties. They were arranged that the-the friends of the family, you would have a children's party and then in thanksgiving as it were, then there would be another party in the other family's home and so on. I had a rocking horse and on one of these parties, a girl, one of the girls invited was rather vicious or violent in the use of this rocking horse and I wanted to stop her and my father said, forbad to do that, I had to go and let her wreck the horse if necessary. That was part of good behaviour. Things like that I remember and well, I mean, there's also going to school near the- it was in the Judenplatz, the school and there was a charcuterie [delicatessen] there for sausages and things and the *Extrawurst* [Extrawurst - type of Austrian scalded cold cut, light coloured and fine textured well-spiced mixture of beef, pork and bacon fat], I remember very plainly.

You enjoyed that.

Yes, and I think the stomach is very important when you're a young boy. It's remained that way too.

Did you- did you feel that it was a secure childhood-

Very much so.

-an extended family, loving family?

It wasn't so much an extended family because, my father had just one sister and my mother's brother had died in the First World War. So, it wasn't extended in that sense of actually family. Obviously, friends and acquaintances and so on but it certainly was very secure and my parents [00:04:00] were very protective and we had a nursery maid, my sister and I, my younger sister. And we had a live-in maid and we were probably overprotected if anything. It was certainly very secure.

Were you aware of- shall I repeat the question? Were you aware - as a child - of what was happening politically around you?

Not really. My father was not- as a judge, he felt that it was not his role, almost forbidden to be politically active, to be impartial. I - I think my mother was much more left wing than him. She was sort of more on the family side of things and the 'Labour ' side. Whereas by

inclination I think would have been conservative too, but I wasn't really at that stage, aware of politics at all.

Was there any point at which you felt threatened or did you experience anything that was frightening as a boy?

The only one incident which I would regard as frightening is when- I walked away along the quay under the chestnut trees and got lost. And I don't suppose I was lost for very many minutes, but that was a little bit frightening, not- just on your own, but not frightened [00:06:00] because of political movements, no.

Would your parents have been aware or not? Some people were not, I realise, of the developments at that time politically.

I really don't know that. I mean- looking back, they must have been. My mother was very much in touch with all sorts of different movements. The Soroptimist movements' organisation. The - I mean, she heard of Kindertransport very soon after they started because they started in December of '38 and we were on the January '39. So, she must have got- must have heard of that very quickly. She obviously had contacts. She had international contacts through the Soroptimist and so on. Yes, and she was also a very good businesswoman, so - you know- organising the funds and she was, she was the purse of the family. There's an incident which is quite amusing. On their honeymoon, my father's and mother's honeymoon, my father gave- got the wrong change or something and she had at once spotted it, and from then on, she took over the household budget.

She was the actuary.

Yes, she was the accountant as well, yes. So much so that when she died, my father had to go and see how on earth she managed to balance all the books each month and it, it, it was puzzling to him until he noticed at the end of every month, there was a sum 'given to father'. That was the balancing [00:08:00] book my mum that she couldn't account for. And he didn't have that option, of course.

So, at what point were you informed that you would be going on the Kindertransport?

Well, going back a little bit beforehand, we were aware of what was happening personally when we were chucked out of the school. And that must have been very soon after the

Anschluss. That would have been probably something like May - May '38. For one term, at least we must have been at another school and in my sister's account, it says it's a school in the Börseplatz, which is in the center of Vienna. I'm surprised at that but that, it wasn't a Jewish area. Anyway, that's- I don't remember anything about this other school. That was the first bit of... the second thing is, once my mother heard this- my parents tried to get us out to Italy where my mother's family came from, Trieste, and we had lots of relatives there but that fell down because they couldn't get all the papers and all the individual passports for us. And then - until that time, we were busy learning Italian. That switched at some stage to us learning English. Now that couldn't have happened [00:10:00] much before December '38. So, we had about three weeks of learning English before we were left on the 10th of January. So that would be the first personal indication that, that, that we were going to England.

In terms of your family's religious background, could you please describe that?

Yes - my father used to take us every Sunday to the Burgkapelle, the Royal chapel, you know, because, that had a great musical tradition and as you had the Philharmonic Orchestra [inaudible 00:10:55] And in fact, you have to buy tickets from almost all the seats. We, we had season tickets or monthly tickets always in the same spot. So, we- and my sister and I and my Father and sometimes my mother came and sometimes she had a headache. I never knew that she wasn't Catholic at that stage at all. My father had been originally Jewish, had become a Catholic during his student days in his 20s. He had read himself into it, which is very unusual. Normally, it was either because of a strong friendship with somebody or for opportunities in business and so on, [00:12:00] because certain positions were not open to Jews. But I saw the books he had afterwards and as well as the Babylonian Talmud. There was a, a series of instruction booklets about the Catholic Church there as well. I just assumed my mother was a Catholic, too. It was never- we had, obviously, contacts with the Jewish community. I remember Dr. Felzberg. I think that was before the war. It may have been after the war because I returned after the war on visits, but he would come for an evening meal. I remember that because any leftovers on the sweet side would be available for my sister and me. We were, we looked forward to those visits.

Would you consider yourself to have been quite religious as a boy or was it something that grew?

I think going to a Catholic school or having religious instruction in the school, making my first communion and things like that, and yes, I was- I wasn't particularly pious. But you know- with a, with a concert as a, as a central religious thing, you wouldn't be expected to be very pious. I think it was more, sort of a, well, something uplifting, but [00:14:00] I think it was normal.

Did your grandparents convert to Christianity?

No. My grandparents, three of them were dead by the time I was born, and the fourth died in 1931, so before I was two or around about the time, I was two. So, it was long before any of this happened. The religious- the Jewishness of our family was like many of the middle-class Viennese, just they were culturally Jews. My mother, I discovered afterwards, once went to the Jewish temple because a friend of hers sang. That was the extent of it. There was nothing, nothing in the home to indicate any religion. There wasn't a crucifix, there wasn't a picture of the sacred heart, there wasn't a mezuzah, there was nothing.

Did you celebrate Christmas?

Oh, yes. I mean- you would do it as part of the Austrians' tradition and it was, again, mainly, with the food you had, you know, carp and so on, the presents, Christmas tree and so on. The real question would be, did we celebrate anything Jewish? The answer to that was nothing.

I was going to ask. [laughter]

We didn't have a Friday evening meal or anything like that or anything like that or fast days or. I'd say, we were not aware of- that we were according to Jewish law, Jewish, yeah.

You certainly celebrated Christmas the continental way with the [00:16:00] carp?

Yes, yes, yes. Then in butter. [laughs]

Your mother, as you were saying, made contact with those involved with the Kindertransport, how did she broach the subject with you? Do you recall?

I don't. I really don't know. See, I was eight getting on for nine at that time. And I think things were done for children or to children rather than with children in those days. Children were not encouraged to come and-

Consulted.

Not consulted, no. At some stage, they must have sort of given us instructions on how to behave and what to pack and- or probably that's done for us, packing, I imagine. I have real no- no real recollection of that at all.

Do you recall how you felt about coming to Britain? Was it an adventure or something that you felt nervous perhaps about?

I suspect maybe putting later thoughts back into that time because it's very difficult to- I didn't keep a diary or sort of, you know. I suspect it was more on the adventure side because I do remember my parents saying to me, "Now, you're in-charge now of your sister. You have to look after her." So, a little bit of responsibility. You will be going away for the first time as the head of the family as it were. It was...

You must have felt very grown up?

Exactly. It was a little bit of that, yes, [00:18:00] rather than the- and as we didn't know what was going to happen, it was more an adventure than frightening.

Did you - in your suitcase, did you bring anything that was really precious to you?

My stamp collection, [laughs] my stamp collection - yes, which was just an ordinary, you know, child's- just a book.

But precious to you?

Oh, yes.

What did your sister bring? Do you know?

She was very much into clothes, and, and probably she had some dolls or something like that. Oh, I might have had a teddy bear too. I certainly. It was a very well-loved. It was very little left of him.

How was your journey to-

Well, it started as they all did, I think, the Westbahnhof in the evening and the parents were not allowed onto the actual platform. So that there wouldn't be any trauma, I suppose. My

sister remembers much more about it than I. And she's- when I read her account of it, apparently, there was a delay in the train starting because a pipe or something had broken. I have no recollection of that at all. It was a, it was a rather strange situation, stressful somehow. And the children alone with [00:20:00] some policeman, Gestapo, something like that, and he just sat in this carriage waiting for the train to go, went through Germany until we reached the Dutch border. And that I do remember because again, it's food, you know. The ladies on the platform had a prop and little sort of sponge cake or something like that for us. And then the next thing was the boat journey, Hook of Holland to Harwich and I think the- it was it wasn't very calm, the water. Again, it was during the night. And according to my sister's accounts, she was separated from me. So, I imagine boys and girls were put in different sections of the boat. That's the only reason I can see for separation. Must have...

Was that worrying as you were responsible for her, according to your father?

Again, I don't remember being worried. I was probably very selfish.

Did you feel that perhaps because they were adults?

And also, other children and I think it was just- and we were used to being on, on ships, on much smaller ships because we went to Trieste around and so on. [00:22:00] And then the next part was the actual arrival at Liverpool Street Station. The first thing is that one of the pieces of either my sister's or my luggage, we only had one little case, so like- was missing. And my knowledge of English was not as good as my knowledge of French because we had a French governess. I said, "Baggage, baggage," but they thought I was swearing or something. [laughter] Anyway, it turned up and my sister was met by somebody to be taken to the nuns, the Ursuline nuns in the East End of London. And I was supposed to be collected by a man from Norwich. As you, as you know, the children were only allowed in provided there was an individual sponsor or group sponsor who had to provide £50, which of course is a lot of money in those days. Anyway, this man never showed up. Whether that was by arrangement, whether he was just a nominal person who gave his name and address and the money and never intended to come, anyway. The Catholic committee for refugees were the sponsors for as far as I was concerned and they took me to a place in West Sussex, Bankton House in Crawley Down, which was a home [00:24:00] for refugee children. It had been- it was owned by a- a Catholic lady who had moved out of her home. This was her home and she had a place across the road from there. And it was a very nice home - it had a boating pond, you

know, there were about 10 or 12 of us there. A couple of nuns and a priest, I think, and all of course, German-speaking. So, it was as good a place as you could land up in. Whereas my sister landed up in a typically English school, the only one who couldn't speak English. The one who came from a rather spoiling family. you know, if she didn't like food at home, well, that was it, you know, and 'do come and [...] have a, have a spoon for daddy and a spoon for mummy', you know - none of that, of course. And she was very miserable, very miserable and didn't last there very long. Luckily, they transferred her to the Sisters of Sion in Chepstow Villas later on, very soon. So those are the main memories of the actual journey and arrival.

Did you feel very lost and isolated when you first arrived - or the early period? Did you feel that you could settle in relatively easily?

I think we take the relatively away. I think just - at that age, I was nine and a half. [00:26:00] A new, new group of boys and girls to get to know and very nice surroundings, German-speaking. No, I think, no problem at all actually I would say. And there was, of course, a continuous letter contact, at that stage. There was no problem about writing and receiving letters and of course, parents would ask a lot of questions and so we'd send- even sent a card from the journey itself, which is in that booklet that my sister produced afterwards, actually reproduced. That's where I get the, the fact that the train had a broken pipe that was in that card. So, no- probably in being rather concerned with myself, I would just get on with life. I think the first step was then to begin to learn English, to be able to adapt to the surroundings. I imagine even the food would have been rather continental because this is a German- I don't remember it, so it probably was.

I'm just going to ask you how the other children in the school that you went to, the English school presumably.

No, it wasn't the school.

No, but where you said you would have gone to school.

No. At that stage, it was a self-contained situation. We couldn't go to a school because we didn't have any English.

No, but some children were sent to school so- that's [00:28:00] very interesting. It's completely different.

I think it was, and with the nuns and the priests say, I think -if there were any lessons, there would have been actually in, in, in Bankton House, yes.

How long did you stay at the Bankton House?

So, we arrived there on the 12th or the 13th of January '39. And perhaps, one before I answer your question, you asked about schooling. Once I was judged to have enough English, I was sent to the preparatory school for Worth. Worth is one of those Catholic public schools, and that was in Crawley. I didn't last there very long. They thought it was better if I left.

Should we ask why?

Well, I suspect the reason was because I was very bolshie. I was asked to go into a class where they were reading Winnie the Pooh and I had been used to reading Jules Verne. I imagine that I considered that definitely infra dig, and I mean, so I think I lasted two days or three days. So, I put that on my CV, expelled from Worth Priory [00:29:41], and- but obviously, it was a judged that I have enough English to actually go to that school. The Bankton House itself was regarded as a sort of transit place once before we- [00:30:00] found something else for them. But it actually closed, and I think it was Newfoundland soldiers or Airmen then billeted on it. I've heard two different explanations for that. One was that it was within the forbidden limits of where enemy aliens were allowed to stay from the coast.

Oh, yes, there was a security zone all along the coast.

The coast. Of course, at nine or 10, we were terribly dangerous people who might have been telling the people about the Nazis but not just the- who might have been supporting the Nazi invasion when we'd be next to these chucked out by the Nazis. It was completely ridiculous. Anyway, so I was sent for the summer of 1940- so it must have closed sometime probably in the beginning of the summer, to Paignton in Devon with another boy to a couple of spinster ladies to be prepared for how we should behave in a public school. They, of course, had no idea at all about, anyway, how to treat boys. The total entertainment we had was one, was two jigsaw puzzles. By the end of the summer, we were doing them upside down to see if it could make it a bit more difficult. So, the summer was spent there, and then by the winter

term, so it would be September, I suppose in 1940, left Paignton to go to Lancashire to, to, to Stonyhurst. [00:32:00] Paignton was quite interesting because one of these ladies had a speech defect Boys can be very cruel [unintelligible] Then there was, there were air raids warnings, in which we were then equipped with a gas mask and a coat and a torch and sent down to the sort of cellar where there were a couple of bunks to bed down until the all-clear went. Well, on one occasion, there was no siren, but a Jerry plane came and dropped a bomb, presumably on the way back home to lighten the load. So down we went to the cellar as there had been no siren, there was no all clear. So, we were there most of the night till these good ladies decided that clearly this wasn't necessary to stay down there.

Did you feel very rebellious when you were there? Not actually in the shelter but in Paignton generally.

I think we took it out by teasing, talking about these two ladies, you know, making fun of them. Anyway, they were obviously very kind and they, they looked after us and there was nothing you could really complain about. It's just boring there and Paignton is not exactly the most lively of places there.

How did your life change [00:34:00] when you went to Stonyhurst?

Well, there it was a fresh start really because... being wartime, there was no uniform, so that made it a little bit easy because of the ration, the clothes were rationed. So- [unintelligible] - that was abandoned. But apart from that, it was very much of a disciplined thing, dormitory accommodation and in, in, in forms, in lines. So, it was a- there was a class difference too because the majority of the boys there would have come from upper-middle-class families. Quite a number of them from- people abroad as well. I remember one family, the Rainmakers, presumably Dutch, the Esulas from Gibraltar. You know, it was- so... I wouldn't say I felt particularly at home there. I just kept my head down. Also- well, that was later on. I'll leave that for later on the risk. That will do for the moment.

Did you find it upsetting or irritating or unsettling to keep moving from one place to another?

No, I don't think so. I suppose, Bankton House was in a sense, a bit of a home, [00:36:00] but Paignton, obviously, was an interim place. And then a boarding school would be again, a bit of a home. In the holidays, the Catholic Committee for Refugees arranged that I should go to a sort of foster mother in Blackpool. And there were two other boys there as well she

fostered. And she was very much a, a down-to-earth Lancashire lass. Her mother was still living a place with an outdoor loo, a really earthy, loving, outgoing- she used to go and- old time dancing. She used to go and getting herself involved in local things and then involve us as well. So, it was a - in the evening, she made certain that we got some pocket money to use. Get us some...we used to go out and collect some blackberries and then sell them to her friends, you know, and things like that. Her mother would almost make certain that she'd give us a half a crown when we went back to school. Half a crown for her was a huge amount of money. So, they were very, very kind.

During this period, how much contact did you have with your sister?

When I was at Bankton House, the committee arranged for her to come out on one occasion. And she was so excited. They took her to a patisserie [00:38:00] first, so she had a cake. Then she got back into this wooden -we called it a *Holzkraxe*- a van, I suppose. And sicked it all up because she was so excited so that that trip was cancelled until later. But she did come out once or twice. She also came once or twice to Blackpool. Once during an air raid, so we were not allowed onto the station, onto Blackpool Train Station. Auntie Mary, as we called the foster mother, she was living at Squires Gate which was about four miles near the aerodrome, Squires Gate aerodrome, going towards Lytham St. Annes. So, we went into, to the center of Blackpool and weren't allowed onto the station. And - so we went back home to, with auntie Mary to find my sister at the neighbours. She had come into a taxi and the first words, she had never meet met her before, she says, "Auntie, you owe me half a crown for the taxi." [laughs] So she, obviously, felt herself very much at home there. She's very independent, my sister.

Were you able to share your feelings about your personal situations or not? Were you feeling homesick? Was she feeling homesick?

I think feelings were suppressed [inaudible] ...you would- if you'd asked me then, I said, "I didn't have any feelings." [00:40:00] I certainly didn't show them. Just got on with life.

And letters from your parents- were they frequent enough?

Yes. In fact, they were complaining that mine weren't frequent enough. This was cured automatically at the boarding school, Stonyhurst where the- there was- it was timetabled, letter writing, once a week. So, you, you go down the road. Except that from 1942 onwards,

there were no letters in reply because on the 1st of May, 1942, my parents went underground. The Gestapo came to get them, and they just walked past them. My mother anyway, my father was out of the house. And from that time onwards, until probably 1946, there was just silence, nothing.

That's a long time.

Yes. And that - I think I compensated for that by just studying. I wasn't good at sports and so, I made certain that I was good at studies. And, you know, I was usually top three in each subject or something like that as a result.

When did you leave Stonyhurst?

1947. [00:42:00] Was it '46? I know I was 18 anyway, so 1947.

Where did you go then?

I ...I had a- I think I came to London to stay at the boys' home in Streatham. But before that, or was it afterwards, I had this cousin in Cambridge and I stayed with him for a fortnight in Chesterton Road or Chesterton something, anyway, but that was just a short visit. And I had the, again so-called aunt, distant aunt, and her husband in Swiss Cottage and they were substitute parents while the parents were not available as it were. My sister and I previously had met their- at their, at their home and they'd feed us make us feel part of their family.

And did that endure or was it just-

Oh yes. That was ongoing. She was very much a pusher also in getting me into Stonyhurst because she went to the Catholic Committee for Refugees. She was Jewish herself of course, and said, "you know, this boy is an intelligent boy," you know so the committee said, "Well, all the refugees are intelligent." [00:44:00] She said, "But even among the refugees, he's regarded as intelligent." So, she pushed and Stonyhurst took me on for nothing, without paying any fees at all. So no, it was very much an ongoing thing, not just an ordinary occasional cup of tea as it were. It was a caring relationship.

That must've been very important.

Very important, very important. And... you know...it's...I call them uncle Edwin and aunt Cara and they were just- of course, we had known each other from Vienna because they had,

were Viennese, was so-called Viennese used to help her, uncle Edwin had a factory in Poland but was in Vienna for much of the time. And... they had a son, Theo and I inherited his matador, which is a sort of, "eccano", I don't know what the English equivalent is, Lego, that's right a Lego set, but out of metal. And he used to do magical tricks with an egg, things like that, you know. He was just a few years older. By blood, it was a distant relationship, by actual circumstance, it was quite a close relationship.

When did they escape?

About the same time, but not through [00:46:00] the Kindertransport and much more adventurous in different, different... The family escaped not altogether but in bits and pieces. I think Theo came first and then organised things at the age of about 11 or 12. You know, you grew up very quickly in those days, you had to.

Yes. Would you say that this family in a way, was an anchor for you here?

Yes. This flat that I'm in now belonged to the daughter of that family and she left me this flat because she regarded me more or less as either a child or a brother which I don't know which-

What were you actually doing in London at that time?

Because the parents had surfaced in '45- physically, the moment the Russians liberated Vienna. And my father, in fact, got himself injured during the last days of that fighting but the moment he was well again, he offered his services again and was put in charge of reconstructing the *Handelsgericht* [Commercial Court], the court of dealing with commercial cases and then was at once engaged with getting things going but the post didn't work at that stage right away, so the first letters didn't come right away. [00:48:00] So it was either late '45 or early '46 that the actual first news came that they were alive. That first letter came to the Catholic Committee via, I think, Portugal because that was the only, the address they had which- the last known address they had for us. Sorry, what question did you ask? I forgot.

What you were doing.

Oh, what I was doing. My parents had once got in touch with the émigrés in America and friends of theirs to go and A) tell them about the news, that they were alive. Tell them what had happened to them and it's out of those letters that my sister constructed the, the family history and to see whether there could be anybody who could help me in my further

education. And they arranged for a family in Canada who was in timber and they've got very wealthy. My father was dealing with his restitution claims in Vienna and so, they felt that as a way of thanksgiving, they would be able to do something for me. So, they sponsored me, well, they paid for me I think five pounds a month or something so that I could and do university studies here in London. and so, I studied economics at the university college from '47 to 1950 on the 'Pick money'. Pick was the name of the family. [00:50:00] Then I was at a loose end. And I thought, "Well, as I don't know what I want to do in life, let's do something which leaves things open," so I started doing accountancy and got myself articled to a, a firm which didn't require you to pay a lump sum upfront, so I did four years with them. When I qualified, I got assistant- got a job as assistant to the Chief Accountant in John Lewis Partnership. And that is the sort of...

How long did you stay with John Lewis?

I was there five years, mainly with 'Organisation and Methods'. It was very exciting because it was the beginning of computers and the computing of voice recognition, things like that. I was in on the right at the beginning of these things, going to trade shows, you know, one in Manchester, I remember going up there.

Did you ever have any connection or links with the Lyons Company and the way they were developing their accounts?

No, I went to Lyons' Corner House but there was nothing in there.

They created a special system.

That's right. They were one of the people who actually had [00:52:00] their own computers in there. No, I only learned about that much later. I wasn't too keen on introducing these new mechanisms. They implied, they involved people on very, very boring operations, punching holes, and things. I really didn't feel that this was a human occupation. I rather put the brake on and probably delayed the introduction by about six months. So, I don't- feel- I don't regret that at all. I think I'm rather proud of that, I think because things did get better after that. They felt that- they agreed with me basically that that was not... So, but I was moved from branch to branch to introduce what was called the cycle billing system, which involved fertile cropping, the basic principle was instead of sending out accounts all in one, on the same date, a great peak of operation and then nothing for the rest of the month, to spread it - so let us

say- those whose surname began with A and B would have their bill on the 3rd and those with C and D would have it on a different date. In order to do that, you had to install ... machines which would photocopy the bills and also some other things like that and train the girls, the many girls to, to operate the system. So, I started in Reading with that, and I went to George Henry Lee in, in Liverpool and to Bainbridge's in Newcastle. I was also sent to Lance and Lance in Weston-super-Mare, but that was mainly to close a [00:54:00] branch down. So- but it was a very nice summer appointment, dare I say, near Cheddar [unintelligible] good walking country. And then I finally ended up here in London, at...all this time I was based at their head office, which is above their- their store here in London. And then I was made acting accounting house manager of John Lewis itself and from then I went into the priesthood or training for the priesthood.

I'd like to explore that more, but what prompted you, what motivated you to do that?

It was a gradual thing. I mean, I'd been an active Catholic even at school. I mean, I spoke on the outdoor platform at Hyde Park, for instance, for the Catholic Evidence Guild. So, I wasn't just a slouch Catholic, you know. And I really felt that, that was quite good enough. And... I think people did suggest occasionally, you know, "Have you thought of becoming a priest?" I really put that one on the side. I didn't fancy the idea of staying single all my life and generally, you know, being dependent on what other people wanted rather than your own life. Then one day, Priest Daniel put the question the other way around, he says, "Why [00:56:00] aren't you a priest?" and that hit home. There was no- I had no answer to that. So, I let that niggle at me. I had an agreement with my boss, the Chief Accountant at John Lewis, he wanted me to go on a three-month or six-month notice period. I was on a one-month notice period and I, I said, "Look, that's very one-sided. You can always buy me out, as it were. I can't do the same to you. If you don't mind, I'll stay on a one-month, but we'll have a gentleman's agreement, if I'm thinking of leaving, I'll give you a longer notice if that's at all possible." So, we left it at that. I went to him when I was in this sort of in-between, doing this thing. I was thinking of leaving, so he said, "Are you going into another store?" I said, "No, no." He says, "I know what you're going to do." He says, "You're going into the church." He was a Church of England person. And that, that really put the cap on, if somebody from outside could see that I had the makings of a minister. So, I still had a question mark, but I went in with that question mark then to the interview, an interview with the church authorities. So, it was a gradual thing, not, not... I didn't have a vision or anything like that.

Did you have many doubts before you finally decided?

The- I was sent to Rome. That's actually perhaps so - it's, it's quite amusing, that one. The, the actual [00:58:00] procedure was that all those who were applying to be taken on as trainee for the priesthood would come on one day to Archbishop's House. All those applying for Westminster Diocese, would come to Archbishop's House here in, near Victoria Station, and they would see the doctor to check that they were male, that was all he was interested in, the vocations director, the rector of the seminary, the place where the priests were- the students were trained for the priesthood, and the cardinal himself. So- doctor plus three interviews. And I had heard that the normal training period here in England was six years but that there was a four-year short course at the Beda College in Rome for those who were older. I was 30 at this time. So, when it came to these interviews, I mentioned to the first one that I would love to be sent to the Beda. So, he said nothing. Then I went to the second one and again said it, you see. And he said, "Have you seen the cardinal yet?" I said, "No." He says, "Look, I would advise you not to mention that to him. He likes to make up his own mind where he sends his students." So, I said, "Thank you very much." When it came to the cardinal, I didn't mention it, but I sort of let slip that I could speak Italian, which was a little bit of an exaggeration. But I mean, we had gone to holidays in Italy, so I knew it little more than just the numbers, you know. And not knowing that he was a former rector of the English College in Rome, which he did seven years, so I got an extra year. Now, to come back to your question, which was- [01:00:00] what did you ask?

I had originally asked you, what motivated you [crosstalk]?

No, no. The next one. The next one. You said- never mind, it'll come back.

So, where did you ultimately go?

I went to the English class in Rome. Oh yes, you asked me, that's right, did I have any doubts? That's right, that's right, sorry, I beg your pardon. I was coming on to that, too long in the detour. The beginning of the first year, the first thing you did was you had a retreat, you had a week, basically, of silence. Most of the lads who came, and they were very young, out of the 12 in my year, 4 were under 18, found that quite a- an ordeal. For me, it settled my doubts. I came out of that retreat knowing that I was in the right place. For many of them, it took them three, four years to decide whether to stay or to go.

How did you feel once you were in Rome?

Well, as I told you, there was a great age difference between me and most of my year so I was a sort of daddy. Now, the rules were tremendously strict. You weren't even allowed out on your own, ever, [01:02:00] unless you were going to a doctor or something like that, and probably you'd have to wear a special uniform so you could be recognised as having that. Other than that, you went in fours except on a Thursday when you could go shopping for non-food things in threes, presumably because the shopkeepers wouldn't have four in their shops. Even going out for a cup of coffee was off-limits. Being the eldest, I had to keep these rules.

Did you find that difficult?

I found that very difficult because having come from being in charge of- then when I was at John Lewis accounting as a manager, I had I think something like 80 people under me, and I was now older than the vice-rector in the seminary. So yes, it meant re-adapting, shall we say, to a new situation. And once you do that, then you get on with it. I'd done a lot of re-adapting already. So-

I was just going to say that, yes.

So, I had practiced, sort of. I can't say that I really enjoyed life in Rome. First of all, I don't like heat, and also part of the climate in Rome is also quite damp. And it was pretty primitive. You washed in cold water. In- there's a jug and basin in your room, and your room was- [01:04:00] well, the kitchen here is probably bigger than the room I had. You know, it was...one student is supposed to have come along and seen his room and says, "No, that's for my luggage, now where's my room?" So, and in the holiday period, we had rented a villa, and the only way of washing yourself was by a cold shower. So, I like a nice hot bath. It was not exactly my, my, my choice, should I say, but it had, obviously, tremendous advantages because I went in 1959 and I stayed till '66. And if you remember, the Vatican Council was from '62 to '65. I was before the council, saw all the preparations. There was a Pope John XXIII, the election of Paul VI. The lectures were by those people who were actually drawing up the documents, the Jesuits of the university then, and afterwards, the aftermath, we had all the English and Welsh bishops staying in the college, so they got to know us, and we got to know them. The- we had the Archbishop of Canterbury coming out. It was, it was an exciting time and all the assembly of the whole church from worldwide, including the Eastern Church,

which nobody had ever heard of, you know. Dressed in different robes, you know, and speaking different languages. It was- and also, you got to know Rome. [01:06:00] On Thursday afternoon, which we didn't play games, and as I told you, I am not a- I've never done any exercise sport-wise that I didn't have to. You had to be out of the building and the only places which were basically open were churches- in the early afternoon, so we got to know all the Roman churches. There were more than one per day. There was a lot of churches in Rome.

Did you speak to people? Did people come up to you and want to speak?

There were so many seminarians in Rome that we were more of a nuisance than some, you know- like tourists now, you don't go up to tourists to go and make them welcome, there's too many of them, you know. I think we were in that position. But we did have days when we went- what we called 'gita' [Italian for trip] days. Gita is a trip or outing, and we used to go explore bits of Italy that way and, of course, then, we spoke with the natives, as it were.

Any Italian would've been very useful.

Italian was quite - and it, of course, improved. And also, when you went to university, The Greg University [The Pontifical Gregorian University], you had people from all nationalities, and the lingua franca in conversation was Italian. In lectures incidentally, it was Latin. So even...even non-Euclidean geometry was lectured in Latin. Things changed since then. All these rules have changed, [01:08:00] of course. The council has put a bomb under these things. Yes, we had plenty of, of contact. We, the senior students went up to the rector at one stage and said, "Look, can we have permission to visit the local hospital?" Now, the rector was very old-fashioned, and he said, "No, your job is to go and study. This is what you're here in Rome for. You'll have plenty of time to go and do pastoral work when you're- your're ordained." Okay. The next year, the new, new, new senior student did it again you see, so the rector said, "Okay, the top year or something, or - you can go and visit the hospital." So, the local hospital, there were people without their teeth in, speaking a dialect, so conversation was not exactly easy, but at least we got to know ordinary people. Very much so, very- it was useful, very useful.

Did you relate well to them?

Yes. Yes. Subject to facts, not being able to understand each other, but yes. I mean, I'm a pretty shy person, but once you get through the barrier, you're good. Yes,

When were you ordained?

I was ordained in 1965. I left in '66. Now, the normal ordination was in the- later than, than, then that. [01:10:00] Two students were ordained early so that there would be priests to say mass during the Villa period, during the holiday period. See, the students stayed in Rome for the whole of their seven years with the one exception of after their philosophy, after the first three years, they could go home. Now, all those other times, the holidays were spent in the villa owned by the college in the Auburn Hills, which, again, was a self-contained establishment and therefore, needed a priest to say mass for the students. There were two of the students ordained, the senior student and the deputy senior student, and I was deputy senior student. So, I was ordained at the Villa in July '65. The rest of my year, if they were old enough, you had to be a certain age, 24, before you could be ordained, would be ordained on one date in- later that year, and those who were too young for that, another later on. But later on- towards the end of their studies period. But I had a full year as a priest still as a student. Does that make sense?

Yes. When did you start your pastoral work?

In- I left in '66 at the beginning of the summer, I had a break and then I was due to go to the Westminster Cathedral- except that my room wasn't available for a week or two, so I had to extend my holiday for two weeks, during which I was staying [01:12:00] in, in Swiss Cottage, and the local priests said, "Would you like to go and do a baptism?" And I did a baptism of twins before I'd actually started my pastoral work. [laughter] So...

You got to practicing early.

Then, when I actually got to the Cathedral, the first weekend, they said, "We won't give you any work to do, just get your- feel your feet." So, I said, "This isn't on," but I knew the parish priest in Pimlico. So, I rang him up and said, "Look, can you use any help over the weekend?" I did my first weekend in Pimlico- because that's ridiculous, just twiddling your thumb when you've been newly ordained, you're raring to go and do something. I was eight years in the Cathedral. The first five of those were as a hospital chaplain to a hospital which no longer exists, the Westminster Hospital. It's now the Chelsea and Westminster, a

completely different place. But the Westminster Hospital was in Page Street, towards the Thames, not far from the Thames. The Houses of Parliament were in that area. And then was a that was a - I had no training for this, except I think, a day with my predecessor, and his bit of advice was, "Ignore all the sick people, first of all, and get on- get acquainted with the ward sisters and staff nurses, then you can do your work." And that was very good advice. [01:14:00] Once, you know- because then you were part of the team and you're coming barging in and so on, treading on each other's toes. So, we had a very good relationship. In fact, one of the non-Catholic ward sisters got me a bleep. She said, "you know, it's so difficult to get hold of you, and we, we always need you," so she got me a bleep, first, first one. [laughs] The Anglican chaplain said, "Would you like to say mass in the chapel here?" So, I said, "I'll have to get permission." So, I went up to the cardinal and I got permission, much against the wish of the other clergy in the, in the Cathedral. Say mass in the Protestant chapel, it was...so you know- but of course, it had tremendous advantages. First of all, it was much more dignified than saying mass in an out-patients. Secondly, it had the facility of transmitting the mass to every bed if people wanted it. So, you know it was- and that also meant it was much easier to vest and so on. It was, there was, I saw no reason at all not to be ecumenical, to go and put it on the negative side.

[inaudible] ...broad-minded of you.

Well, I mean. That's what the whole council had been about, you see. But of course, the other priests had not had that advantage of actually having that teaching grilled into them from the word go. They were still on the old mode. And... so I had to develop my own techniques of dealing with [01:16:00] hospital-visiting. I thought to myself, "If I was a Catholic lying in the ward who was a little bit distant from the church and the Catholic chaplain made a beeline for me, I would feel very embarrassed." So, I said, "Well, how do we get around that one?" I said, "That's very simple, you'll say you'll make a beeline for everybody so he is not- he or she is not singled out." I did that, I said hello to every patient. It- I don't know how I did it because I was only given a day and a half to a week to do this, and it was a 500 or 600-bedder. But it worked, and it really was the right thing to do, with no embarrassment. Also, it meant that you picked up on people who were not down as Catholics, who might have a Catholic boyfriend or a Catholic husband or you know, some problem or something. Yes, it was great.

*Did you ever feel or should I say, how frequently, perhaps, did you feel drained afterwards?
Did you feel that you had done something worthwhile and felt better for it?*

Both, both, drained and not. I mean, on a Saturday morning, I used to take communion down to those who'd asked for it. That meant getting up at about 5:30 in the morning. So that I could start before their breakfast in the hospital and, and finish the, you know, seven floors or whatever it was before the breakfasts were being served. [01:18:00] So and then I would go carry on with these cathedral duties. Confessions, the solemn mass, and so on. So, by the evening, I was shattered. I remember on one occasion, it was just before supper time, and the phone went. I had a phone in my room because - as the hospital chaplains, so I thought it was the hospital. It was the Samaritans, they said, "Can we put somebody on to you?" I said, "Okay." So, they did. And he was somebody who was- it was a November evening but not as nice as today. It was raining, and this man was going to go and jump into the Thames. He was, obviously, not a happy bunny, very much in need of talking. So, I, I listened, and I felt myself not listening, and he spotted that too. He says, "You're not listening." I said, "Yes, you're quite right. Can we break off and I just have a- my supper and then I'll ring you back and we'll continue?" So, I had a quick supper, I rang back and found the line was engaged. So, did that mean that he had taken the phone off the hook and actually decided to go and commit suicide, or did it mean he was talking to somebody else? The second would be wonderful; the first would be awful. You know, it's my fault, I'd broken off this conversation. Anyway, after about half an hour, I got through, and we continued this conversation until it reached a natural ending. [01:20:00] At the end of which I still didn't know what he was going to do. About six or eight weeks later, about midnight, I had a phone call from this man, it could have throttled him, he said, "I've been to the Lord's Supper, I've decided to continue life. Thank you very much." [laughs] But at midnight, I could have done without that. [laughs]

On the other hand, you must have felt very relieved.

I was very, very relieved, very relieved, yes. It would have been nice if he'd rang at 6:00, let's say [laughs] And then after five years at the hospital, there were...I was really asked to take part - take charge of part of the parish, visiting. So, I did the same thing, visiting door to door, I had done with the hospital beds. It was amazing, what you discover there. Right in a very wealthy area, there was utter poverty. A single parent with a- where the total furnishing was a portable stove, a bed, and a television set. When I say total furnishing, no chair, no table. The

bed was the chair, the television set was the table the- and the door, the glass had been broken. She'd left her key or something at home, so it's the only way to get in. There being no man, nobody to prepare, to prepare- she had to leave the boy with the child alone [01:22:00] because she had to go and to earn some money. You know, things like that. Now- finding that, we had a very good- what we called the St. Vincent de Paul Society- attached to the Cathedral. I sent them in, they had the thing, you know, furnished out in, in, in a few days, and you know, I helped out with... There was no question of asking what religion they were, they're just somebody in need, and they just got on with it. Another woman who couldn't leave the house because she had big feet and the women's aid or whatever didn't have shoes her size or something, so she had to borrow her slippers from her son or something. It, it was extraordinary, what you met.

It's so often hidden.

These are people who would never have dreamt of asking, of course. They had to be discovered, and then we were to do things.

Did you, during your ministry, come across many Jewish people who needed comforting, needed advice, or scripture about their experiences?

Certainly not many... I'm just trying to remember because I've met any who are in actual need. I, I think the answer is probably no. I mean, I've had no problem in relating to them, and I think [01:24:00] they had no real problem in relating to me, although they were a bit suspicious, you know. Here is somebody who comes from Jewish roots and has left those roots somehow, they would think that I was a convert.

Yes, I did wonder. Yes, if that's the case.

There would be a sort of hesitancy or perhaps even antagonism towards me from that.

Did you resent that?

No, no, no, I could understand that. You see, I've also come across people from the Spanish Civil War who were bitterly against the Catholic Church and let it out on me, and I could sympathise that because there was a lot of hatred around and massacres on both sides and atrocities. So, yes, but on the whole, I remember the good things, rather than the bad ones, you know, where people from all religions sort of opened up to me, and I was able to do

something to go and at least to listen... and to learn, very often. That was in my first parish as a parish priest, which was Enfield. I set aside one evening, Friday evening, to go and do door-to-door knocking, just cold-calling.

That must have been very brave, actually.

Yes, I've felt that too. [laughter] I said a few prayers before each door [laughs] but the reaction you got varied tremendously. [01:26:00] In one case on a positive side, I was invited in, in, they were a- a house church. This is an offshoot of the Baptists. We spent about a good hour. And they were telling me their problems, and I could see the same sort of thing cropping up with them that- as they tried to get away from, you know, as if they were already in established churches, about you know, authority and things like that. And, and- there were other people who said, "You're the first person apart from the Jehovah Witnesses who were called, there has been no other religious person who's ever dared to come to-" There were others who came in their dressing gown and said, "No, thank you. We are Christians." [laughs] You know. You, you saw the world, you know.

Did you- come across many refugees from Europe or had cause to listen to their experiences during your ministry that you could identify with their situation?

Yes, the Vietnamese boat people. Let's separate them. The parishes I've been in have been Enfield, [01:28:00] which where I was 11 years, which is a suburban parish where you wouldn't get the refugees as the first port of call, as it were. Anybody who got their ex- from refugee status originally would already be well-established. The second one was Queensway where I was 12 years. Now, that was a much more place for transients, partly because there were 90 hotels and guest houses within a very small area. 9-0. And also, everybody I met, the [unintelligible] I had been- the parish priests at Queensway said, "Yes, we lived there." It's the sort of place where you stayed almost the first wave into London and then you, you moved on from there. Yes, I certainly met people in need at that- in that parish. And then...we were very lucky, Boots said to us, "If you want to collect any sandwiches that are unsold at the end of the day, just come along. If we- we may not have them every day, but if we have some, we'll give them to you." So, we were able to, you know, redistribute it and things like that.

And when did you retire from the ministry?

There is a policy in the Westminster Diocese that at the age of 75, you are expected to [01:30:00] hand in your resignation, to, to offer your resignation is the right term. And when- in my days, this was automatically accepted because there was a sufficient number of priests in this diocese, largely because of the influx of ethnic chaplains. We have- with Southwark we have 40 different ethnic groups with their own priests from all over the world. The convert Anglican clergy who'd become priests and the Neocatechumenate movement, it's a Catholic movement, which- a lay movement - which produces an enormous number of priests. They go out as laypeople to countries other than their own. They're sent out in pairs for- like the Mormons, as it were. Out of that experience, there's a lot of vocations to [join] . They are trained together with our Westminster priests. So, in those days, we had plenty of these priests. Without them, they would say, "Oh, please, stay on with us."

Yes, because in certain former communist countries, there's a definite shortage of priests apart from Poland where it's [crosstalk] [inaudible].

Not just in- this country. If you go to Lancashire or places like that, which were, you know, buzzing Catholic centers, those priests and laity have dropped tremendously in number. So, anyway, that was 15 years [01:32:00] ago. And I've been here since.

May I get back to your family? What did your parents think when they discovered that you wanted to join the priesthood? How did they react?

My mother was already dead. She died in '59. My father was far from overjoyed. The idea of no grandchildren was not really- my sister was a nun- already. She became a nun much more- earlier.

When did she become a nun?

In the '50s, early '50s. She had intended to become a nun right away, but my mother said, "Look, you'll finish your university first so that you've got something under your belt if, if you decide, or if they decide, that you're not suitable." I think she rather thought the second, that they would decide she wasn't suitable because of her rather powerful character, so and my father, but my father said, "Provided you're doing something which you're going to be happy at, I'll, you know, I'll back you. Well, I won't oppose you," because it didn't need any backing, actually.

Did he feel the same way, did he have the same approach regarding your sister, your sister, Anna?

I think he probably felt that even more that- because she was daddy's, daddy's girl, you know, and very much so. [01:34:00] And but anyway, she was the spot, and he visited her every week, you know, or at least once.

Because she took a different name.

She took the name of her mother. She took the name Sister Hedwig. My mother's name was Hedwig, and- so yes, quite deliberately.

Is there anything else that you would like to add? I would like, I would like to ask, how do you identify yourself? How do you perceive yourself now, as English, or Austrian, or a combination?

I- I'm English, yes. I'm 100% English with Austrian roots. I mean- Austria may have been late in acknowledging its responsibilities, but it's made up for it, I think, since. As far as one could make up for that. So, I have no hard feelings, as it were, largely because of what my father said to me. After all, he was hunted for three years. He was... and then he was having to work with people who had been Nazis, and he [01:36:00] knew it. And I said to him, "How on earth can you do that?" He said, "Yes, they were Nazis. They went with the flow. Some of them may have even gone with it more than with the flow and took advantage of the situation, but very few- there were very few heroes, and they were ordinary people. And so, you know, I'll challenge them when I'll have to, but I'll work with them." So that helped me enormously. If he could go and actually live the rest of his life in that situation, well, then I can go and do the same. I must admit, I, personally, have been very well-received by Austrians. Mrs. Lessing, you know- we regard it as a personal friendliness.

When did you first go back to Austria?

Well, the...after the war, the Austrian currency was worthless. So, there was no question of the parents coming here, but there was no reason why we shouldn't come to Austria, provided it was in the place where there was something there. I mean, we couldn't go to Vienna. My sister couldn't come to Vienna because the headquarters of the Russians was right next door to the place that my parents had occupied and made their [01:38:00] own after the war, just

behind the parliament building. So, we met in Austria. Austria, as you know, was divided into four zones like Germany, and Vienna was sub- subdivided again into four zones, the four zones together, the four occupying posts [inaudible]. We met usually in the English zone for the summer holidays until my sister was able to get back to Vienna and lived there permanently. I continued before coming for holidays. So, for instance, when I was studying for my chartered accountancy, I had rather neglected my studies because you did your studies by post, while you actually worked with the accountant- the accountancy firm. So, I did about three years' work in four months at home. [laughs] It's a great company, what of Mozart and you know. It was really nice.

Do you recall which year you first went back to Vienna, roughly?

I don't think it was in the '40s, so it must have been in the '50s because my mother died, you see, in, in '57. So...it was probably early '50s. I could look it up in the passport, I suppose, but I don't really know because, in those days, you had these passports stamped then.

Was it a shock going back? Was it a very emotional visit?

My mother had come to London for a short visit in 1947. And... I had then all these- my sister's written up, you know. The letters that they had written, so I knew what it's- their story. Ad they weren't living in the- in their old home that still exists to this day. But they simply billeted themselves onto a vacant flat in a prime situation which had been occupied by a Nazi, the German who had fled, and then legalised it afterwards. So, I didn't have the comparison between before and after. And both my parents very quickly built up a new life, and a very successful one. My father finished off his- the equivalent of lord chief justice, so quite a- couldn't get much higher than that. [laughs] And it was a nicely furnished place. After the war, it was possible to buy antiques for knockdown prices because people didn't like antiques. They wanted modern furniture, so all this lovely stuff was going from next to nothing. It was cheaper than the equivalent modern stuff. So, he made the use of that. It's a very beautiful flat which he rented. [01:42:00] There, we stayed- where I stayed.

Did you ever think of returning permanently to it?

Yes, I asked him about that. In fact, I suggested it to him. He said, "For heaven's sake, no, there's nothing here." This was early on. It was destroyed, there was nothing, "and you're earning more than I'm earning," he said. I was, you know, just starting off in John Lewis on

£500 a year, I think. And that was a little more than he was getting as a judge, so he said, "No, you stay and visit us regularly." That's it. So... they were very brave to let us go and to support us. I'm very proud of my parents... and the fact that they didn't let things just go. If they saw that a neighbour had still got some of their belongings, my mother would go in and say, "Those are ours," and get them back.

How do you feel as a religious person regarding the Holocaust in terms of your own background and becoming a priest? How do you, in yourself, cope with that?

[01:44:00] When I went along to talk about my father, the Jewish paper in Vienna wrote up my visit and headlined it, "Jewish priest." [laughter] I'm rather proud of that, I had learned because I'm on sort of the border of two, two groups. I think I've always regarded myself as being on the borders of everything, testing the grounds, and not just with Jews but also with Muslims, Hindus, whatever. The, the Shoa is, is my history, is my relatives. Luckily my grandparents were dead. My aunt, my father's sister, she was a victim of the Holocaust. When they came to get her, I was already here in- in 1940, 1941 in January she jumped out of the window and killed herself. Of course, it left marks even on my parents, of course, three years of what they went through. And it probably left marks on me too, but not in the same way as Auschwitz and those- so it's a secondhand almost. It's, it's not completely personal. Yes, it is personal because it's my ancestors. So, for instance, Hohenems [01:46:00] which is the place where my mother's family, the Brunners, originally came from. That's certainly a place I visited, seen the graves there, and I had gone along to their meetings and so on. I've joined the AJR before, before the Kindertransporte. I make no secrets of the fact of my Jewish roots. And I find that- neither do I make any secrets of my Catholic priesthood. For instance, on Ash Wednesday, there was- the AJR had invited a group of parliamentarians from Vienna to visit, and they wanted me to- as representing the AJR. So, it was Ash Wednesday so I came with a grey big ash- ashen cross [01:46:56] [laughs] to the meeting, you know, and with my collar. I, I pushed this into people's faces almost, you know, [laughs] as I am part of both. But of course, it's a horrible thing. I mean, it's unbelievable that any human being could organise an extermination ...so systematically.

Has it made you react angrily at times?

Probably my experiences means that my emotions are very much under control- across the board, you know. [01:48:00] Feeling, feelings- have- I've seen what feelings can do, I

suppose. So, anger would not be this sort of it's... it's nonproductive if it just stays as anger. I can't do anything about what's happened in the past, but it certainly makes me courageous in the sense of pushing the fact that I am of Jewish roots with my Catholic priests and others and so on. If they want to give any stick against the Jews, they have, they are sticking at me as well. I think that's a much more... productive way- of, you know, efficient way of using my situation rather than just simply anger.

Anger or bitterness.

Bitterness, it's non- product- it's, it's, it's actually stupid. It eats you up, so bitterness is, is- that's not been in our family at all.

You heeded your father's advice.

Yes, example. Yes. Yes.

If you were asked to give a message, or is there anything that you would like to say in terms of addressing perhaps someone watching a video of this interview, is there something that you would like to say?

I thought of that. And I think the answer is no, because it's very easy to come up with platitudes. They sound very good, [01:50:00] very convincing and so on, but useless. People have got to go and make their own life and use the facts, that of my life, you know. This is why I'm putting it out under their noses and then it's up to you, up to them to react to that in their way. I'm not going to tell him how to do that.

Is there anything left?

The- my, my parents' experience was probably semi-miraculous. And... they- as I told you, they lived in really a very good part of Vienna. And so, as the Germans, the Nazis, increased the restrictions on the Jews, they also billeted another family on to my parents. They would have billeted in fact two families, but the family they billeted was a doctor who needed another room for his patients- to have seen his patients. So, they were able to stay in their home longer than most Jews in Vienna. The porter downstairs had been instructed to warn them if there was anything happening. Well, whether he warned them or not, on this particular day, on the 1st of May, 1st of May is Labor Day, and they expected there would be no [01:52:00] Nazi, no Gestapo activity on that day. But I think on that particular year, they'd

be transferred or something. Anyway, they did come on the 1st of May. My father happened to be out of the flat. My mother was there. She- either she was warned by the porter, or she heard something. She got her handbag and simply walked down the stairs as they were coming up to get her, and muttered something about a hell of a- to do in the house today, and just left. They obviously made provisions in distributing their belongings as far as they could and making- having arranged the place to meet in a case like this. And from then on, they were non-persons because they couldn't, couldn't use their identity that they had. They had no home, no place to actually spend a night in; couldn't spend it in the open because, A, the winter is too hard in, in Vienna, and secondly, because if you were found in the open, what excuse is there? What a reason? So...and then they had no ration cards. Anyway, of those three, they- and no money- no earning- no, no money earned. Of those four, the important one- the first important one was a place to stay. They experimented a little bit. After a time, my mother came up with the, with the idea of spinning a yarn that she was a married woman, married to a policeman, but having an affair with my husb- with my father who was living outside Vienna but coming in to visit her [01:54:00] regularly once a week, and they needed a place where they could spend the night together. And for heaven's sake were they not reported to the police because her husband being a policeman that would wreck her marriage. That story was spun perfectly for the Viennese mentality; sentimental, romantic. And so, with this yarn, they went from landlady to landlady. Three landladies at any one time, regularly. The more, the more the landlady was a Nazi, the better; it's safer. So that was the lodgings settled. The- also, my mother wasn't a shy lady at all, so she started private tuition in people's homes. It didn't matter whether she knew the subject or not, provided she was one lesson ahead of the child. And it meant that she was warm during the day. Occasionally she was given ration- either fed or given some ration, so they had something. Also, in Vienna, and generally in, in occupied German countries, the rat- the food rationing applied also to restaurants. In England, it didn't. It was a money rationing here. Beyond a certain price, you couldn't eat. So- but there were one or two watery soups and things like that, or, you know, vegetable things on the menu which you could get without ration. So, they went to one of those places where they knew the [01:56:00] Gestapo also ate because, because- quite logically- that was the safest place. Once you got yourself established as part of the furniture, they would never dream of having a razzia in that, in that restaurant. It was their base. So, they would meet also in places which had two exits, like churches, so that if they saw somebody suspicious coming in at one, they would, not hurriedly but just gradually, move, move to the other exit. Then, identity. My mother's name, Brunner, is a very nondistinctive

name. In fact, one of the great Nazis was, was a Brunner. So, I think she never even changed her surname- my father- her maiden name. My father knew that if anybody recognised him from his acquaintances and called him by his name, he would react, so he had to have a name which sounded like Wahle, so Taler, Maler, something "a, e". And you could get travel cards, you know, for the trams and the buses. And he would give a name and address which was actually taken from the telephone book so that if somebody challenged him, then he would say, "I'm sorry, I've only got my travel card here but here's my-you know- " If they then rang up, it, it was okay, at least for this first. So that [01:58:00] was identity, lodging, the food. The- and money, yes money, my father suddenly realised- the penny dropped- that as he was now hunted, he was not- outside the law, he was an outlaw. Although he was a judge who had to keep the law and make certain other people kept the law, he was no longer a judge. He was able to tell lies, cheat. He would do anything because this is an illegitimate government. And he could do whatever he needed to go and save his skin. My mother did some smuggling, dealing with all sorts of things. They once spent the night in a brothel or place used by prostitutes where they actually- the police raided it, so were taken into custody and released the following day. My mother said, "Well, where's the jewellery? I'm back for the jewellery." And again, absolutely logical. If she hadn't, that would have been far more suspicious than to boldly brazen it out and say, "I want my money. I want my jewellery." So- and they loved it when there was an air raid because then they could get to the shelters. And in the shelter, there was no control and they were safe. Air raids were a Godsend for them. And once, in the whole of those three years, my mother went outside Vienna to [02:00:00]. recuperate and get some, some real food from- you know- you could buy a black market outside Vienna. So... it's, this was written up from letters they wrote after the war to, to the people in America mainly. These, these are the stories they told- now of course, I'm sure they beautified those stories. I'm sure there were some horrible things as well. But for three solid years, watching your back the whole time.

It's amazing that they survived. It's a miracle.

They had some very narrow squeaks. On one occasion, so I think when they were in custody, they discovered afterwards that the person whose name my father had was also in custody at that very moment but under a different section. If they'd had modern computers- gone. Their tremendous bravery and, and not giving in, not saying we can't, we can't fight against this huge organisation, this, or this great efficiency- my mother said, A, it's-they're not as, so

efficient as they portray themselves to be, and secondly, we've got no other option. We've just got to go and... fight for the children as much as anything-

I was just going to ask that. That's what I wanted to ask.

-for the children. That was very much, very much what was in their minds. We, we- we've sent them away, but we should be needed by [02:02:00] them and so on, and we want them of course. So- relying on God, relying on this thing, and, and, and just press the initiative and, and courage.

I've personally known people, women in particular, saying that the children gave them a reason to live.

That was certainly what they put in there, and they put it the other way around. "The place seemed empty," he said, "Now that the children have gone." They were asked how they felt after they, they'd sent us away.

That was terribly hard for people. For mothers, they may still be wives, but in terms of their own sense of identity, then without their children, they were always no longer mothers.

The sad thing is, many of the stories I've heard of kinders, are angry with their parents for having sent them away...you know, because they've never seen those parents again. We have had that opportunity of actually-

But the reunions were not always very happy ones. Was that- was your reunion?

It was gradual. It was gradual. There was- particularly between my sister and my mother, there was quite a lot of friction. My mother being a mathematician, my sister studying mathematics, mother wanted to help my sister, and adolescence thing, "I want to do it on my own." [02:04:00] You know, there was- quite apart from anything else, there was a friction. Then the question of wanting to become a nun, mother not wanting her to become a nun. Certainly, there was friction. But it's- there was time to resolve it because they were together.

And get to know each other again because [crosstalk] --

We were, we were strangers. My mother would not even send a photograph to us because she had changed so much- during those, those years. Because we remembered her as a young, you know, radiant woman, and she came back as haggard, I suppose.

Understandably.

She wasn't actually haggard but that's how she saw herself., you know

She must have felt it, or both your parents have felt deeply that gap not watching you grow up.

Yes, yes. Which is not the same for the children. For us, it was we were growing up ourselves, con- concerned with ourselves.

Independent.

Yes, but very grateful for what they had done, what they did, and for the fact that we- we were reunited because that is- was the exception.

Your sister also has her story about the teachings and going into the state school.

That's right. She was-was a- took after my mother. I think the women in our family are the ones who got the go and the guts. [laughs] The, the story of that is that- [02:06:00] she was a teacher for mathematics, religion, and physics, Judaistic. And- well, she wasn't teaching Judaistics, actually, but she was teaching in the school attached to the convent. She felt, really as a nun, she was not just to teach the well-heeled Catholics, but to go out to the general population, so- go to the state schools, which was unheard of for a nun to do because Vienna was governed for many, many years by the socialists, who were, if anything, anti the Catholic religion. Anyway, she went along and saw the schooling authorities, and put this proposal to them that she should teach in a state school. They said, "well, If you do, you won't be allowed to be dressed as a nun." She said, "That's okay, but do I have to conceal the fact that I'm a nun?" He says "Oh, no." She said, "Okay." So, she went in on that basis. The first day, the girls of course at once sussed that she was a nun. And she was there for several years as the first religious to teach in Vienna in a state school. I'm very proud of that, too. She broke through all those, those barriers because she felt that was her real vocation to go and do that. [02:08:00] And she was trailblazer wherever- wherever she went. She, she, when she came- the last two years she spent in London, and I was in parish very near where she was living- I was in Queensway and she was in Bayswater. And I had a computer, and whenever anything went wrong with the computer, I'd bring up my sister and she'd come around with her bicycle and put it right. She was also the one who bought the computer for me. The two of us went in

and the salesman, of course, talked to me first. I said, "No, no, you want to talk to her." She knew more about apples and tomatoes than me.

Did your religion bring you closer together, the fact that you both had this strong vocation, sense of vocation?

I've never thought about that, but I think we were always- certainly, from my sister's side, she was always very attached to me. I probably felt that as a sort of a hindrance, almost. And I sort of I remember the time when we used to fight and she gave me a bloody nose [laughs] and I'd get blamed for it because I was the older one. I don't know whether that actually had much to do with it, because she was independent. She was very much into Jewish- Christian understanding that the order that she joined was founded by two former Jews, convert Jews with the idea of converting [02:10:00] Jews to Catholics. At the [unintelligible] of the Council, the, the... purpose of the order was changed into converting Catholics to being less antisemitic. And this was- she was very much in that correcting textbooks against- taking out the- properly not appreciated antisemitism in them. And she, she worked very much hand in glove with the Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal König, so much so; when Cardinal König came over to this country, I was a chaplain at the cathedral at the time, and the- one of the priests introduced him to me. He said, "Your Eminence. This is one of your priests." So, he looked me up and down. He says, "I don't know you." I said, "Your Eminence, you know my sister, Sister Hedwig." He says, "The brother of Sister Hedwig." I became a real person because they've worked hand in glove on these things. She's done radio things and training days and all sorts of things. She was a trailblazer.

That's tremendous. Did you- speaking about the conversion- did you yourself have anything or very much to do with the Barbican Mission here in Britain, the Barbican Mission for Jews?

No. No. I've never done any missionary work for Jews. I think my sister would go up in horror that the idea [02:12:00] that, that Jews needed conversion. She would say that they're the first chosen of God, and there they have their way to heaven. She, she would never have sanctioned any sort of Jews for Jesus movement.

Because the organisation is responsible for helping a number of refugee children.

I heard about that, but I don't know. As we were already catered for by the Catholic committee for refugees, we would not have a- and we were coming over, as already baptised Christians. I was baptised probably at three days old. Certainly, my mother would still have been in the hospital. I was the firstborn. So, that's, that's why godparents came in because mothers were not there at the baptism yet. godparents came in- the importance of godparents came in because of that.

What a remarkable family. What a remarkable family. Lives lived in a worthwhile way, would you say?

Very much so. I'm very grateful for what has happened and what I've been able to do under God, and still can do so. I, I haven't finished yet.

Certainly not, I hope.

[laughs] Thank you very much for coming and interviewing me. So.

Thank you very much for very kindly agreeing to be [02:14:00] interviewed for the AJR Project. You have contributed a great deal. It's been an immense pleasure to meet with you today.

Thank you very much.

Thank you so much.

Cup of coffee? [laughs]

The top one?

Yes.

That would be my mother and my father, probably just after they were married on their honeymoon. Judging by the trousers of my father was wearing, probably around, if it was the honeymoon, it would be 1928. They were married in August. So, it's as close as I can get.

Please Francis, tell me about this picture.

That is almost certainly a holiday snap of myself and my sister. If it was taken in 1938, it would have been the last one we took in Austria, probably in a, at a hotel. If it was the

previous year, my sister would have been five then rather than six, and it might have been in Hungary, either on Lake Balaton- probably on Lake Balaton. This is an identity card of my mother towards the end of 1939 after my sister and I left Vienna, and before the parents went underground. [02:16:00] This is my father's identity card at the same time towards the end of 1939. This is the tram travel card that my father used while he was in hiding, using a false name, and disguising himself by growing a moustache. This is the tram travel card that my mother used while in hiding, using her real maiden name because Brunner was such a common name used even by some- the name even of one of the prominent Nazis, and not disguising herself in any way. This is a holiday, a photograph of my parents with me taken between 1950 and 1955. If it was - it may even have been taken by my sister if it was in the earlier part of that period.

Where was it taken?

In Austria, Western Austria. I don't know when exactly that was taken, but it looks very professional which probably means it was taken in Vienna, again, early '50s.

Who is in the picture?

It's me. [chuckles]

Yes, please.

This is, again, a professionally posed photograph of my sister before she entered the convent, so early '50s. [02:18:00]

Okay. This, please?

This is at a private audience, with Pope Paul VI, who's thanking my father for giving both his children to the Church. And this was taken in the summer of 1965.

Yes, please.

This photograph is of my- of me in Vienna in October 2011, from- taken it from a Jewish magazine, after I'd spoken about my father at something organised by the Austrian parliament; the 10th anniversary of the restitution laws.

What is the headline?

The headline is 'A Jewish Priest'. This is the address I gave in Vienna in October 2011. I was invited to come on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the work of the panel, arbitration panel for 'In Rem restitution' at the invitation of the general settlement fund of the Republic of Austria for the victims of National Socialism. And... that was about it.

Thank you.

The reason I was asked to come is that my father was a member of the commission, the original commission [02:20:00] from 1949 to 1957 to deal with restitution claims. **[END OF AUDIO]**