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## Interview Transcript Title Page

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<b>Forename:</b>	Milena
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## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV285  
**NAME:** Lady Milena Grenfell- Baines  
**DATE:** 23 October 2023  
**LOCATION:** London  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

**[00:00:00]**

*Today is the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2023 and we're conducting an interview with Lady Milena Grenfell-Baines. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. What is your name, please?*

My name is Milena Grenfell-Baines.

*And when and where were you born?*

I was born in Prague on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November in 1929.

*Lady Grenfell-Baines, thank you so much for allowing us to interview you for the Refugee Voices Archive.*

Thank you.

*Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?*

My father was an accountant by profession who eventually got a job as an accountant with my grandfather who had a hand-embroidery business in Proseč u Skutče, which is a little

town in what we say *českomoravská vysočina* [Bohemian-Moravian Highlands] not far from – in Moravia, if you like. And that is where he met my very beautiful mother – she was the daughter of my grandfather, called Eliška, whom he married, and I was born.

*Tell us a little bit about your mother's parents and, you know, that you said he had an embroidery business.*

Yes, we – there is a chronicle that's been written about this, that by the time of chronicle and I found that he moved there around about 1904 and built the house- where on the ground floor the embroidery took place and they themselves had an apartment on the first floor. [00:02:01] And I know very little about them, about the family. They were called Kosiner and I believe it could go back to Spanish, the Spanish name, Cociná. We don't know. But they certainly didn't come from Spain. I think they came from Dobříš. My mother had a sister, Manja, and three brothers, Frank, who eventually went to Argentina, Bennoš, who became the first radio cultural critic on Czech radio. And because of that, in the summer he used to bring very interesting people to Proseč. One of them was, for instance, the great composer, Ježek. And I have pictures of my father and Ježek, Bohuslav Martinů, who lived in Polička. We have a photograph at home with Martinů. My grandparents had a grand piano and in the archives it says that it's quite possibly Martinů, you know, who had played on that piano. Other names which people will recognise now, of film directors, authors, all who were brought by my uncle, Bennoš, who sadly died of throat cancer. Actually, I discovered just a few days after I left on the Kindertransport he was only in his thirties. And the third uncle who learnt part of the embroidery business eventually married a German lady and was interned during the war. He was a communist, survived and carried on and had quite a good communist career and he had two children, as far as I know. [00:04:00] And that was my maternal side. My paternal grandfather had a farm in the Sudetenland, near – gosh, I'm trying to think of the name [laughs] of – Pernolec, that's right. He evidently had spent some time in America before he started farming and he was known as the American cowboy because he used to ride a horse around with a Stetson on his head. He was the father of my father and he had two boys. My father had a brother and a sister. He divorced my grandmother, who I never knew, and remarried the – I gather the maid who worked there, who I – who became my step-grandmother and with her, he had two daughters, who I presume were my aunts. My

grandfather was very political, he was a social democrat, and also escaped to England. I don't know the story- I don't know what happened but he was very involved in politics. He left Mari and the girls behind and I gather tried to get her to put the two aunts on the train but we do have a letter at home where one of the aunts – and it's in German – is writing, saying that her mother couldn't bear to put them on the train. And they survived the war – they were not Jewish. They were not Jewish. What happened to the farm, I have no idea. No doubt it was taken over by the communists. Because he died in England, did my paternal grandfather. I have some letters at home that he exchanged with my father, some of which actually mentioned how what a difficult little girl I was. And I think – I think it must have all stem back from the Kindertransport but I can't remember being difficult [laughs]. [00:06:06] I had a very strict father. My father was terribly strict with me, yes. So that's my sort of background, going back to the grandparents.

*But also your difficult circumstances because your mother passed away when you were very young.*

I think so. When I was three, my mother died in childbirth. And at that age I was sent to stay partly with my paternal grandfather on the farm and I have photographs of me. I was a little girl. And also, somewhere there was a letter where my father, who in the meantime had got quite ill, had chest problems, was visiting me, and my maternal grandmother was complaining that I was being naughty. And evidently I said if anybody's going to slap me, it's going to be my father, not you. And I quarrelled with my aunts, who were more or less my age. I can't remember anything. Really, it's just what's been written down. Eventually I was then sent to stay with my aunt, my mother's sister, in Brno, who also had two little girls who were almost identical- one was as old as I was, born the same year, and one was a little younger. And they had a nanny who kept a diary and I have five pages of that diary where she talks about us going for walks, about me constantly asking questions about me. She said one day I sat on all the toys to stop the other children playing with them. Again, my mother had just died, you know, and I was three, so there was never any mention me talking about my mother. But I think, you know, I must have been an unhappy little girl, yes.

*So you were in Brno? [00:08:00]*

So I was in Brno for a while and then in the meantime, my father was in hospital, near Proseč, which was manned – nearly the whole, entire hospital was manned by Jewish, foreign doctors, who were not allowed to practise in Prague. And one of them was my then – who became my stepmother, Sonja, who had studied it in Prague. She came from Latvia. But because the quota of Jewish students was only – were only so many in Latvia, she was allowed to study in Prague and there was no problem in Prague, and that's where she graduated. And that's where she met her best friend, there, and eventually they were both moved to Luže, which was the hospital where my father was sent to when he became ill with his chest problems and met her. She was called Sonja, Sonja Zif, married her and with her had a daughter called Eva who became my stepsister. But I was then five I think and we never grew up as stepchildren. And she said – years later she admitted that she didn't – never realised that she wasn't my real sister, not for years.

*So you then joined –*

I mean – yes, and then we eventually, when my grandfather's hand-embroidery business became bankrupt, we moved to Prague and my father got a job as a marketing manager for a medical magazine, and my mother resumed her job as a doctor. She had worked as a doctor in Proseč. She had a surgery there.

*So until then your father had worked in the embroidery business with your grandfather?*

Well, he joined my grandfather as an accountant and then when he went to Prague he – that's what he was doing. He took over this medical magazine and made a big success of it I believe.

*What was it called, the magazine? [00:10:00]*

*Časopis lékařů českých*- Magazine of Czech. And it still exists. It still exists, yes. The story goes, and I believe it's quite true, that he was one of the very first people to offer – and this is very bad – cigarettes, five cigarettes. If you bought a magazine, you got five free cigarettes

[laughs]. And I gather he started doing that, you know, before the war. But he was also very political because of course the story of Thomas Mann is linked with him. Back in 1936, when we were living in Proseč, my father, a great admirer of Thomas Mann and his books, had learnt that Mann had been living in Switzerland, who – had been made stateless, although famous, could travel, but no passport, and suggested to the village council that they made him an honorary citizen, and to see whether he could get a Czech passport. And to that, he had to have permission and he went to Prague and met the Czech president who immediately agreed to send my father to Switzerland and offer Thomas Mann and his family Czech passports, which he did. And we do have a record of this because the Manchester Guardian, funnily enough, printed the whole story which I own.

*One second. We were talking about – you were telling us about Thomas Mann and the visa. Not the visa, the pass – the citizenship.*

The passport, that's right. And my father went to see him and handed over the passports and had to send some documents and he said as a young man he couldn't believe he was standing in front of this great man. And in 1937, Mann actually came with his family to Proseč and there are some photographs of him having tea with my grandparents and presenting the town with some money, which they used. [00:12:17] They planted a lot of fruit trees, so that people could, you know, benefit from the gift. And a few years ago, we were back in Proseč and they put up a very good exhibition with photographs, and particularly the registrar who is there, she did a lot of research into this particular event. And there is a Thomas Mann Avenue and Proseč did, when the Germans occupied the country, the priest of the – the priest was shot and there was some retaliation for what the town had done.

*So, the citizenship was really due to the town of Proseč?*

Oh, yes. Yes. Well –

*So your father managed to convince –*

He convinced – yes, not entirely. I believe it was twelve to nine, you know, who didn't because they – already in '36 they could see what was happening and they were beginning to get worried and so – but, you know, it went through. So he did – and so did Heinrich Mann, also got a Czech – the Czech citizenship, although Heinrich Mann never visited Proseč but his grandson lives in Prague and I met him. I met him at the Goethe-Institut. They had an evening about Thomas Mann. And his grandson is very Czech, speaks Czech and he lives in Prague.

*So did you meet Thomas Mann when he came to visit?*

Well, I believe so. I mean I was six, 1936, so yeah. I don't have any pictures but I must have done because I was around. [00:14:00]

*Yes, yeah.*

Yes.

*Extraordinary. Tell me a little bit, Milena, what are your first memories? So you moved quite a lot when you were young. What are – is there anything which stands out in your mind?*

Well, very little actual memories. I think most is what I have been told and what I have read and what I know must have happened. I mean I know that when we moved to Prague my maternal grandfather used to take me to the puppet shows, you know, which were very popular there. And there's a square in Prague called *Karlovo náměstí* and there was a very famous shop which made *bramboráky*, which are potato – like potato cakes, very garlicky. And I believe that was one of the things that we used to go and buy there. I remember I was a *Sokol*, a *Sokolka*, you know, a *Sokol* was a gymnastic organisation. It was very national and I loved – I was very good at sport. There were a few things I was good at and I used to go to *Sokol* and I took part in 1938 in the *Sokolski Slet* where they all met and performed in this huge arena where every Sol – every five years there was a big performance. This was a school *slet*. This wasn't a *Sokol slet*, this was a school *slet*. And so that's a sort of memory I have. [Laughs] Food is a memory, and not very nice because I loathe tripe and I was made to



eat tripe soup before I could have my *řízek*, you know, my schnitzel. I had a very strict father, you know, you could be seen but not heard at the table. [00:16:04] And I remember apricot dumplings and I think mainly because I make them, that I know it was one of the things I used to love, you know. We used to have a – when I lived with my grandmother, when we lived in the same house, there was a maid there called Anička, I do know that, and also which was quite unusual, the house we lived in had a huge garden. At the bottom of that garden there was a tennis court for which I believe my father was partially responsible. And it used to get flooded in the winter to – for ice and, you know, we'd ice skate on it. But we moved to Prague when I was seven, so my memories are – of Proseč are just snippets, really.

*But you went to school in Proseč?*

I went to a local school in Proseč. It was mostly probably Catholic and – but I had no real religious education because my parents were not, although my stepmother was Jewish. She'd come from Latvia and definitely they were a Jewish family. But we were never really brought up in the faith, never went to a synagogue.

*Did you know anything about Jewish- or did you know you were Jewish or did it mean anything?*

Absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing at all. It never came into conversation. My grandparents were very political. My grandfather was. I think possibly he had communist tendencies because two of my uncles were communist. One of them had – was actually imprisoned in Germany for a while for spreading communist propaganda. He escaped to England also and remained communist almost all his life because when he returned after the war back to the Czech Republic and the regime came into power, he was imprisoned by the communists because he had joined the Czech air force during the war in England. [00:18:13] And like many of the army and air force people who returned, and this is another part of sad Czech history, they were imprisoned. And my uncle, who was a journalist, was one day – two men came into his office and said, come with us, and that was the last my aunt had saw him for two years. But that's another story. Luckily, my – we stayed in England. We never returned. My father became a big Labour man. He was certainly a member of the Labour

party in Preston. Also as soon as the war finished he wanted to know what was happening in Proseč and one of the things he did do was start collecting clothes and I remember in our house one room was full of clothes that had been given, that we were sorting out to be sent to Proseč, and Proseč know about that. He tried very hard to help, yes.

*What was your grandfather's name?*

Emil Kosiner, yeah. And –

*Kosinger?*

Kosine, Kosiner. And the other one was called Otto Fleischmann.

*And what languages did you speak?*

Well, I spoke Czech. I was – I never forgot that because during the war I was sent to the Czech school that existed in England for three years and my father insisted we spoke Czech at home. And eventually I trained as a nursery nurse and got a job as an au pair and spent two years in France, so I learnt French. I've never really learnt to write it but I did end up speaking it quite fluently and I still speak French. [00:20:02]

*But I mean in Czechoslovakia, did you – mostly Czech or was it some German as well?*

Just before we left, in 1939, I had a few German lessons because we then discovered that the family we came to in England, in Ashton-under-Lyne, this gentleman had a few German words and I think that was the only way we were able to communicate. But I'm surprised at myself as to how much German I can understand, and I suppose with speaking French, you know, if I see Italian and Spanish written in front of me I don't – I can't say I speak it but, you know. I mean at school I loathed Latin and silly girl, I realise now that if I'd have got on with it, you know, I could have understood far more of the Latin languages. But I am bilingual and pretty well with Czech, and understand a bit of Polish, a minimum amount of

Russian. I mean I did go to Russia and I can't say I could make myself understood with it but there are certain, you know, a Slavonic language, so you get a sort of a background of that.

*And Milena, when you moved to Prague did you – do you remember how you were feeling? I mean did you want to move and –*

Oh, my goodness, I was seven, I probably thought it was quite exciting. We lived in an apartment, I went to *Sokol*, I went to school.

*Where did you live?*

We lived in a street called Plavecká, Plavecká 4, on Rašínovo nábřeží which is the – right next to the River Vltava, you know, and I went to a local school. I was there a few years back. We went with my sister, had a look at the apartment house and I tried to find where the school was and there was a school nearby. I can only think that's where I must have gone. It was a *obecná škola*, you know, it was a junior school at the time. [00:22:01] Yeah.

*Yeah. And at the time there must have been some refugees from, you know, Germany, Austria and – not Germany –*

Well, it's interest – yes, this is interesting.

*Any memories of this?*

Because by now we're talking of 1937, '38, '39, and I personally had absolutely no idea. My parents must have known- because in 1938 we actually travelled to Latvia to visit my stepmother's parents, who went to Daugavpils. To this day I cannot remember the journey. And it was just before the occupation of the Sudetenland. I don't know how we got permits, how it was possible. Not only we travelled, but my communist uncle, Frank, and his wife and Helen, our cousin. I have photographs of all of us with our Latvian grandparents. They had a dacha near a lake, it was their holiday. They had gone through the Russian Revolution. You know, they had been deported and had got back to Latvia- a story I know very little about

because our parents never talked about it. But we travelled in '38, by which time – I can't remember anything about the Sudetenland but I know by 1939 we were already occupied but none of it actually touched me as a person. I had no problem going to school. I remember we were being made clothes, you know, my mother had a dressmaker in those days, all of which were slightly bigger. But again, at the age of nine, frankly I had no idea. And my father had already gone. He was warned to leave, I'm going back to Thomas, let's go back to Thomas Mann, okay, in 1939 on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, two men came to my father's office and said, 'by tomorrow, 14<sup>th</sup>, you know, the rest of the country is going to be occupied, it's time you left, you're high on the list to be arrested by the Gestapo for what you've done for Thomas Mann.' [00:24:17] And as far as I know – I don't remember – my father left that night. They told him to go to Berlin. They said, nobody will ever look for you there, and then from Berlin you travel to England. Now, here we have a totally separate story. He – and this is his story – he gets on the train to travel to Berlin and in the compartment there's an Indian lady, which he discovers has an English passport, and he starts chatting to her. She must have – she was travelling to Germany. She was married to a German. And when he tells her this story that he's going to Berlin and he doesn't know what to do, she said, don't worry, you can come and stay with me, and my son will help you to get away the next day. So, he goes to her apartment and the next morning there's a ring at the door and there's a German officer there and my father thinks, you know, he'd been caught. And the man knows all about Thomas Mann, travels with him as far as Frankfurt on the train, and in Frankfurt tells the guard that he's now leaving the train but he was to lock, where – there was- where my father was, you know, the carriage and to tell them that he has a very important man sitting there. And my father travelled with him as far as Brussels. This man, whose name he remembered, was a man called Thomas Schreiber, this officer, left him in Brussels. Here, at the airport, he is desperately trying to buy a ticket to fly to England. [00:26:01] They won't accept his Czech money. A stranger standing behind him is listening to this argument, asks what's your problem, and he's explained and the stranger said, well, he said, my son was born yesterday, so to celebrate it, I'm going to give you the money, fly to England. And his name was Buggenhout and my father said, the first thing I will do, as soon as I can, I will repay you the money. Fast-forward to 1945, he finds Henry Buggenhout in Brussels and they became – become friends. But he often wonders what happened to Joachim Schreiber. Now, after the war my father became a radio ham. I bet you don't know what that is. Radio hams were

people who had amateur radios with which they could signal, like today's mobiles, you know, but these were little – and- but you had to learn the Morse code and you had a number and you could literally pick up talks from all over the world. You could pick up French [inaudible] and chats. And he had a message from Heidelberg to say there was to be a conference for radio hams – and this is in 1959, so we're talking twenty years later – would he like to come to the conference. And he goes, takes my mother and they go to the conference. And when he enters the room the people say, oh, hello, Rudolf. You see that man standing over there? That's Joachim Schreiber. And they found this guy after twenty years. And I have a newspaper cutting which I think I've got with me – I'll show you later – where he meets the second man who saved his life, if you like. And, you know, the Holocaust Association had a mantra every year and one of them is One Day. [00:28:04] And when I give talks to the children and I say, you all have one day in your life when something happens. He had two 'One Days' when these two people, you know, saved his life.

*And what was the day?*

The actual date? Oh, well, it would be – let me think. He left on the 13<sup>th</sup>. It was probably the 14<sup>th</sup> of March on his way to Berlin when he met- Mrs Sonni in the train and probably 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, when he meets Buggenhout in Brussels. You know, or around that time.

*And at that point you – where were you?*

We were already in Eng – no, no, we were in Prague. Sorry, this happened before – he then leaves. Now, all I know is that he's left, you know, and I just carry on going to school. And I know that sometime in May my mother must have told us that we were to go to England. I can't physically remember this but I know it happened, and immediately. Oh, and we were to be baptised, Methodist, and again – and to choose a second name and I chose Ruth. And my sister, well, she was two and a half, three. She was called Johanna, Eva Johanna. And I discovered documents many, many years later that I gather my mother was also baptised but that I think possibly came later on. I don't know when that happened. And then- and I was taught a little German because again I wasn't told why but I was told just to – 'cos I'd never spoken German before, I was just taught a little German before that. [00:30:06] And then on

the 31<sup>st</sup> of July we were taken to the railway station and my maternal grandfather came with us because my paternal grandfather, unknown to me, had already escaped to England, first of all because of his political activity. He was a very big social democrat, he was also -I believe- the mayor of the village where he had the farm.

*In the Sudetenland? Where was – in Sudetenland?*

Yes.

*Where was it, exactly?*

In Pernoleč. But he'd already – they'd already been thrown out of there. But I didn't know [laughs] about that. All I knew was that my step-grandmother was living in Prague but I, you know, political things, they were never discussed with us, um, were kept away from us, so – and now I know now that he'd already escaped to England but I don't know how he got there. I don't know how he was supported. I think the Czech government in England had a fund, it was a trust fund, but that's a story that I really can't enlarge upon 'cos I have no idea what happened. But we were taken to the railway station and my grandfather gave me an autograph book in which he sent me – wrote me a message. And he had the foresight to ask some of my aunts and uncles to also – he must have got the book well ahead because in it is a message from my uncle who had worked as a critic on the radio who again, unknown to me, was by now very, very ill with throat cancer and in fact died only a few days after I left. And in that book his message was, "As sure as I am that you will lose this book, I am also sure you, yourself, will never be lost and I hope this journey is just a great adventure." [00:32:10] No mention of, you know, the politics. And some other aunts and uncles who – none of whom survived. They ended up in the camps, as well as my two cousins that I had spent a few months with when I was three years old, by which age they would have been probably thirteen and fifteen when they were sent.

*So what did your grandfather write?*

My grandfather writes, 'Remember to stay faithful to the country that you are leaving, to your parents and to your grandfather who loves you very much. Prague, nine o'clock in the evening, 31<sup>st</sup> of July.' And there's a message there from my grandmother as well, saying, 'Look after your sister, saying look after your sister', and from my mother, who said, 'Don't forget me'. And my other relations, they wrote things more like, sayings about being good, doing good, you know, like phrases from poetry rather than writing messages.

*Which was done at the time.*

Which was done in those days, that's right.

*Yeah. And you brought it with you today.*

Yes, I have my autograph book.

*So we're going to look at it at the end.*

Yes, yes. Yeah.

*So it was you – so before you got there, did you have any sense of danger or anything before your actual emigration?*

Absolutely none at all. No, none at all. And we were given, we both had a rucksack, you know, a backpack, in which we took – we presumably had food and, you know, everybody liked *schnitzel* sandwiches, [laughs] you know. [00:34:05] That was a popular thing. And we took – and my story also, we had books. I – we had books with us. I had three books with me. And again, when I go to schools, I take one of these books out and I show them the cover and I say to the children, now, can any of you recognise what this book could possibly be? And the teachers put their hands up. And it's actually 'Wind in the Willows' but it's a Czech version. I had no idea it was an English book by Grahame but it's called 'Wind in the Willows' but what's interesting, the drawings in there are by Karel Čapek – the brother of the great author, Karel Čapek, was an artist and the drawings and the sketches are by him. So, I

show this book and a lot of the children look blank because 'Wind in the Willows' is not read any more in schools. I've got an English version of it and when I look at the translations, you know, there's – the opening sentences are absolutely identical about- oh, what was the animal that was cleaning his, um, it was living – he was living in the river, you know, this – yeah, so it was 'Wind in the Willows'. The second book was 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'. Now, again, total blank looks, except when I talk to Women's Institutes. These ladies who are of a similar age, they all say, oh, yes, we remember 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'. It's a book that was forbidden for many years and it's now it's being re-established in the States. But 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' meant nothing to them. And the third book was 'Robinson Crusoe', and that was a name that a few children recognise but again, you know, a lot of things aren't taught in history any more. But I do have a story about the 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' because at one point I was giving this talk to a town which is not far from Blackpool and one little boy put his hand up and said he knew 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'. [00:36:10] I said, really? He said, yes, it's a pub in Blackpool [laughs]. It's a pub in – with a [laughs] – and it was a pub in Blackpool called Uncle Tom's Cabin [laughs]. So, he knew that. And the other memory I have, because for the first two years I went to an English school – and I'm sorry I haven't brought my knitting with me, which may seem very strange to you, but do you knit? You don't? You don't?

*Used to.*

You don't, you don't.

*In school. Funnily enough, we were allowed to knit in school.*

In school. I could knit, I could knit. And we were in this English school, all given knitting needles and wool to knit squares for blankets which were eventually stitched together, you know, the squares for the army. And I could knit and I was happily knitting away when suddenly the entire class went absolutely silent and the teacher came to me and said what are you doing? I'm knitting. I'm sorry I can't show you but on the Continent we knit differently. I mean we hold our needles differently, we don't move this wool across, we just go through, and this is what I was doing. And she said that's not knitting. You have to learn to knit in English [both laugh]. And I had to learn to knit in English. So, this is another story which



entertains the WI tremendously and I show them the difference. And in fact, I swear that the Continental's quicker than having to move the needle around, you know. So –

*I never thought of that. Interesting, yeah.*

Yes. So, I'm sorry, I haven't brought my knitting with me this time.

*No, I think we –*

Yes, so that was my – but I had so – I have a report from my English school. [00:38:00] And within one year I – I remember I have things like ten out of ten for reading and English but miserable marks for mathematics which stayed with me the rest of my life, you know, adding, you know, two and one and one is sort of eleven, sort of thing, five, five, five.

*Milena, just to come back to the actual journey. So, you brought the three – what else did you bring? The three books...*

I had the books and food and I presume there must have been a little bit of change of clothes. But they were just rucksacks. And we, 'cos we couldn't get out of the station, you know, the train was a normal stopping train all the way to Holland, so you had to have what you had with you. There was no question of getting out. And there is this story about a baby being put on the train with a milk bottle and this is one of my friends who travel on the train and she said it happened in her carriage. And they knocked this milk bottle over and they fed this baby on chocolate until they got to Holland. You know, this is one of – you get all kinds of stories but we got – when we did get to Holland, I believe [coughs] sorry, the Dutch met us with hot chocolate and food. And my sister, who was – who can't possibly remember – said that she thinks she was given a banana and she was sick, because we didn't know bananas. But one thing that comes up in a lot of memories, when we get on the ship, this big, English ship, we're all given tea with milk [coughs]. Sorry. Because we mention this and I mention this, and we'd never had tea with milk and we threw this tea with milk out. [00:40:03] And it is mentioned in a lot of memories. And the other thing that we were given were white sandwiches, bread sandwiches, and we were – we missed our rye bread. We didn't like this –

this sort of white, soggy sandwich. We still got used to [laughs] – to the food. But these, you know, food memories are things that you tend to have. There was this tea with milk and these white, soggy sandwiches. But after that on the ship, I can't remember being on the ship. We got to Harwich, from Harwich we were put on another train which took us to Liverpool Street Station. Again, I honestly have no physical memories of this. I just know that's what happened.

*Of the entire trip, you can't remember much?*

Absolu – I really can't. Now, I know I had my sister to look after. I mean she was three and a half and I was nine.

*That's quite a responsibility.*

I know, and I don't know how I coped with it. When I look at my ten-year-old great-granddaughter playing with her three-year-old cousins [music plays in background] – that's my hearing aid.

*Yes, so you were saying you can't – although you were taking care of your sister, you can't remember.*

I just don't know how I did it because she must have needed to go to the loo. I mean, you know, all that. And yet there's a picture of her in the press, all smiling, and it was in the, the paper doesn't exist anymore. It said, face of a refugee. You know, there she is with a smiley face. But then there's another one where she's not smiling, you know. And so, in –

*Were you sitting in compartments?*

We were – it was a normal train and, you know, seventy years later we replicated this journey and the train we travelled in then was a luxurious train but this one had wooden seats and corridors but I can't – I cannot physically remember it. [00:42:19] Anyway, we got to Liverpool Street Station where we were met by this gentleman who was at that time called

Roland Radcliffe – eventually he was known as Daddy Radcliffe – and Mummy Radcliffe, who took us to somewhere where we spent the night, the first night. And I'm pretty sure it was the night it was MP of Ashton-under-Lyne called William Jowitt at the time who eventually became I think Lord Chancellor. He was a big political guy. Because Daddy Radcliffe was actually the chairman of the Labour party of Ashton-under-Lyne, that we stayed with.

*Ashton-under-Lyne?*

Yes, and he was the chairman of the Labour party there.

*And you actually when you arrived, you were wearing a label?*

I was wearing a label.

*Which you brought with you.*

That's right.

*And your sister as well?*

And she had one as well, yes. Yes.

*So were you – do you remember were you – did you have to wait for somebody there, or how was it?*

We were just in a big hall and I presume he must have been there waiting to collect us and we then I presume trained it up to Ashton. And they lived in a terraced house with two bedrooms, a kitchen with a bath in it, and front room, and the loo was in the yard. And we had come from a very modern apartment in Prague, you know, but somehow it didn't seem, from what I know, it didn't seem to faze us at all. But they had a daughter, a sixteen-year-old daughter called Mary but because they didn't want to separate us, they sent her to live with

her grandmother, so that they could keep us together. [00:44:00] And we were very happy with them. They were extremely kind. She was a very good cook, I going back to food, you know, I remember things like having Yorkshire pudding with golden syrup or plum pies. Certainly not tripe. The only thing I remember about tripe is Ashton-under-Lyne had a market, and in the market, there was a tripe stall and people would stand there buying it and eating it with vinegar, you know, they – I know, I know, you know. But no, we were fine. And I saw my first roller skates. We were taken to a pantomime. Now, I remember that was called ‘Goody Two Shoes’. I know it happened- you know. I remember that I was given at Christmas time as a present, half a crown. That was two shillings and sixpence and that was a lot of money. I mean they weren’t particularly wealthy, the Radcliffes. They used to go to a church, they were Methodists, to a place called Dukinfield which was near Ashton but religion was – it never played a big part in our lives.

*Do you know how they came to volunteer or how they –*

I have no – we never knew how they chose us. Whether the – well, I’m going to come back to that because my father by now was there. My father was already in England and he had been ill most of the time with this chest problem but he moved to Ashton and he was living in a house where there was a nurse and he used to come and see us regularly. Perhaps once a week he would visit but he wasn’t in a healthy state to do that.

*So do you think he was involved somehow in choosing the people?*

We don't know. Ex –

*And also I want to ask you, you said you knew beforehand where you were going because you learnt some German. [00:46:01]*

Well, what happened, I discovered quite a long time later that his visiting card was in Nicholas Winton’s scrapbook. So, if we go back to 1939 in March when he came to England, he must have discovered at that point that something was going on. We could only deduce from it, we don't know, because unfortunately all his papers – he was very meticulous but

when he died all his papers were burnt. Unknown to us, his office stuff just got – was just got rid of, you know, and I'm quite sure there would have been some documentation in there. But we can only presume that something he must have known about this because on his visiting card there are a few pencil marks and they were – they are in Nicholas Winton's scrapbook, the visiting card. So –

*So do you think Nicholas Winton had met –*

I think not met, because I spoke to Nicky about it and he has no other letters in there but there must have been some communication. That's the only way we could put it, really.

*But did you know – did your mother then know where you were going to because – before you left?*

Well, she must have known that we were being collected by this man. I mean putting us on the train, you know, because I believe when my sister spoke to her many, many years later, she admitted that – she said her heart was absolutely breaking, you know, putting, particularly her, you know, it was her daughter, on the train.

*So little.*

Yeah, yeah, three and a half. She was one of the youngest children to come.

*And you said that you got baptised before. So, do you think they – why did they do that? Did they think that would help or –*

Well, I think, well, we believe now that particularly the Barbican Mission people almost insisted that some of the children got baptised because – in case they were going to Christian families. [00:48:08]

*But was the Barbican Mission involved in your [overtalking]?*

I think they must have been involved because Nicholas was involved with the Barbican Mission and I think that's where we happened to, you know, to be chosen, because a lot of the children that were chosen I gather were the ones from the Sudetenland who had been thrown out of homes where all the chaos was going on, with all the ones who were camping outside Prague. Now, we knew nothing about that and we only learnt about it when the Esther Rantzen film came on. And I particularly – we were particularly ignorant 'cos we were living in the north of England, we were cut off from most of it. During the war, I have to say, when miraculously my mother arrived in 1940- and that was another story- who had been contacted by the Norwegian people, who had been told to go to the Norwegian embassy where she got her tickets and flight to fly to Oslo to come to England. I only discovered all of this properly when I got in touch with the Norwegian embassy five years ago and they discovered some papers in Norway about her, which I have. And two weeks after she flew into England, Norway was occupied by the Germans, so she was lucky. And we were one of the few that actually had their family, that we were a family. And so, when we got together, we moved from, we lived in Alexandra Street with the Radcliffes, we moved to a place called Cedar Street, not far from there. And we were allocated a little semi-detached house which was paid for by the Czech Trust because I gather the allowance my parents were given was £2 ten shillings a week. [00:50:04] The rent for that was fifteen shillings and my mother managed on the rest 'cos they weren't allowed to work at the time, although my father was given- I believe a little job by a Jewish friend who had a fur shop. So, they must have had some allowance from the Czech trust fund. And it was soon after that when my father decided that I was to go to the Czech boarding school which was paid for and my sister stayed at home and she went to the local junior school.

*So by when did your mother leave Prague to Norway?*

In March, no February the – I think the date was – I have to have just a look. February the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>, something like that. And she flew from Prague to Oslo and from Oslo she flew to England. And to fly to England in 1940, she was given permission to do that. And somewhere it said that my father had actually paid – had sent money for it. Now, how it all happened, there's some Norwegian stuff there that's not been translated, so, you know.

It's still a mystery, yeah.

*And what was it like for you to then see your mother again?*

Well, again, you know, I say my mother. Now, my sister had almost forgotten her. She'd forgotten Czech. So, she had to relearn to be with her mother. And she said, you know, talking about it later because she's a retired headmistress and she's had quite a lot of counselling because of this. Now, I wish she was here to tell you because she's got her own story about this. She said it took a long time probably to – because we were very fond of the Radcliffes, you know, we – they were our parents, we loved them very much, and we came to – we went to live with our parents again. **[00:52:03]**

*Yes, but you had some understanding but she probably didn't.*

Yeah. And even- and then I was sent away to the school.

*And were you sad to leave the Radcliffes when you –*

We were and – but they lived quite close so we saw them, you know, regularly. We saw them regularly. And I think mainly because, you know, I mentioned this later because my father was always a very strict person and thinking back, I mean he was a young man. What it must have been like for them, what they must have – you see, we knew nothing what was happening to our grandparents and of course they didn't either. And in Manchester, because we lived very close to Manchester, there was quite a Czech Jewish community and I remember – but I do remember we used to go travelling to Manchester on a bus. And there was a club, a Czech club and I do have in fact with me – I think I brought them – programmes where the Czech army had an evening where the army had a choir, where there was a Czech pianist called Líza Fuchsová who – I remember the name – would perform. There was a club in Liverpool, I also have some programmes from Liverpool where the Czechs got together and performed. But all this was going on really without me being conscious of it.

*Yes. How did you speak to your foster parents? How did you manage to, when you arrived, how did you manage to communicate?*

Oh, heaven knows. Because I must have picked up English very quickly because soon after we arrived in England we went on holiday with them, because Daddy Radcliffe was also a member of the- it was called the Boys' Brigade and they had a holiday camp in Rhyl, near – in Wales. And I have a photograph of me standing, putting some sun cream on some boy's back and my sister is standing beside me, holding a doll in her hand, watching me.

[00:54:09] And this is August. And I suspect, well, I was in school by September and you, as a child, you know, you pick up languages probably very quickly. And at that point we were speaking – although Father used to pop in with the Czech, and I have found a letter which I was write – which I sent to my mother in Prague, saying that I am now going to an English school but I'm going to my father's room before I go to school every morning to tidy up. I know. I was ten. And it's written – it's my handwriting. And I was asking about my grandparents. It's a very short letter which I happen to have. That's right. She said – and I have to go to my – stop off at my father's to tidy up but I can't remember doing it. I really can't remember doing it [laughs].

*So, it was an unusual situation in a way, to be with foster parents but have a parent nearby.*

Absolutely. And then to get together to all live as a family, yeah. And we stayed together until we then moved from Ashton-under-Lyne. My father got a job in Preston with an accountant and then my mother who started going to the hospital working as a – voluntarily and eventually had enough – learnt enough English to actually start working as a doctor. And when we moved to Preston, she then got a job as a doctor in a hospital without having to do any exams at the time. And my father worked as an accountant and then he started doing a bit of import/export. He was not a very good businessman really. By then I left school in, when I was sixteen and by that time we had moved to Preston. [00:56:04] So I came back to Preston, I had to find work and it was suggested I might try working as an – did I like children? I mean I left school without taking any final exams. I wasn't old enough to do the *maturita* [leaving qualification of secondary schools], you know, the matriculation. I was



sixteen. I was very sporty, arty. I should have possibly gone to a college to do art but again, we couldn't afford to do that. I had to go to work. So, I got a job as a nursery nurse, I started training and got – eventually got a nursery nurse's diploma. I worked in the local day nurseries and eventually in a children's home near Lancaster and then [laughs] my father, I gather one day said, I'm going to turn into a cabbage, shouldn't I do something more interesting. And I had already loved the French language. I remember listening to General de Gaulle on the radio, *Français, Française*, you know, it intrigued me, this sound, so I put an advert in *Le Figaro* and got a job in France as an au pair and went to Grenoble and I spent a year with a French family with three children. And when *Madame* was about to have a fourth one, I decided I'd like a change, so I got a job with their cousins and there were two boys and that family had a – lived in Paris because they boys went to school there. So the summer was spent in a chateau near Grenoble and school years in Paris, which was a great education for me. I certainly learnt French. And again, didn't take the opportunity living in Paris of visiting all the museums, learning all about the culture. I was purely a *gouvernante*, you know, with the family, until two years later I finally came home again. [00:58:08] And at that point I stayed at home for a while, I sort of looked after the house and then my father said he'd met a very interesting architect that he introduced me to, whose name was George Grenfell-Baines, who by the time I met him had divorced and had two daughters. And although he was a lot older than I was, I fell totally in love with him, although by which time I had met a chap in Grenoble who had come from Luxembourg, who while I was in Grenoble, as they used to say, I used to go out with him. And when I came back to Preston he was very much hoping I would eventually come to Luxembourg. I'm afraid I ditched him and met George and eventually married in 1954.

*Okay, well, I wanted to find out more about that but let's just go back to – yeah, yeah, to the time before you went to the Czech boarding school. So, what was it like? Did you – when your father said you should go to the boarding school for your Czech, were you happy to do that?*

Well, at the time I was going to the local Ashton- to the local school in Ashton and it was – it was quite soon after we moved with my parents, so when my – when he found out about this

boarding school. And funnily enough, I remember that Daddy Radcliffe actually putting me on the train 'cos I had to travel to Crewe and from Crewe you had to get to Whitchurch.

*Where it was at the time?*

Which was a town nearby and the school was in Whitchurch in a place called Hinton Hall, which was in the outskirts of Whitchurch. [01:00:01] I don't know how I got there. It must have been a train and a bus, and I ended up at this school.

*And were you happy to do that or –*

Yes, I was. I think I was happy because of the strict father, possibly. And strangely enough, the nurse – we had nurses at the school – she also came from Manchester and she was Anja Lustigová. I remember her because both her daughter and her son were at the school, Richard Lustig and Eva. Sadly, both died quite young actually. And I was in the third class, *třetí třída*, that was in the third class. And of course, I was a fluent English speaker. Now, a lot of those children had come from the Sudetenland, hadn't spoken Czech, who were having to learn Czech, some of them were from the Baťa families, Baťa the shoe people. Bata had a factory in England, so they were known as the Baťa Baťůvky children. And then there were us who were the – we weren't known as the Kindertransport that we came on the train and met at the school.

*What were you called at the time or was there a category or –*

Well, I – well, I was in the third class, I was called Flei – we were all called by our surnames, Fleischmannova. And fasting-forward many, many years later when I re-met the headmaster in Prague when he was old and I was an adult, he still called me Fleischmannova, you know. So we were called by our surnames, not called Milena, which was – yeah. And we were in Hinton Hall probably for about a year. The place was very old, very cold. We were well-fed. [01:02:00] I must say, in spite of the war we had Czech cooks who probably were able to adapt the food better than English cooks, you know, so we were not – certainly not hungry. And I can't remember being cold [coughs].

*And did you still speak Czech when you got there? So, you hadn't forgotten?*

Oh, we spoke – yeah, we spoke Czech all the – no, I hadn't forgotten and we spoke Czech all the time. And our lessons were entirely in Czech, except we had one wonderful English teacher called Miss McKenzie who taught us English literature. I remember the one Shakespeare play we did was 'Julius Caesar'. We had one Czech master who taught English in Prague, Professor Fried and he was our master where we were taught translations, you know, English and Czech. And the rest was entirely in Czech. And our Czech master, Professor Krušina wrote wonderful Czech poems in my autograph book [coughs] that I could recite in Czech, telling me that although I sing like a bird, it's a pity that my grammar is so poor [coughs]. Sorry. *'Mileno, zpíváš jako tá pěnice Škoda, že chabá je tvá mluvnice Mileno, pomněj ta naša mluvnicka. Hezká je právě tak jak naše písnička.'* I don't know whether you understand.

*No. Translation.*

It was, 'you sing like a bird but it's a pity that your grammar is poor. Just remember that our grammar is just as nice as your song.' And then it goes – there's another verse after that. So – and our maths master – I was hopeless – and in my autograph book he writes, if you sit in a corner, nobody will find you. **[01:04:01]** A silly phrase, yeah.

*And what was it like for you to suddenly be with all the other children?*

Oh, fine. I –

*I mean I guess in the – in your school, you were the only refugees beforehand. Or were there other –*

No, there were other children who'd come from English families. They were – in fact most of the children didn't have their parents there. The Bata children did. One or two, but mostly they had been living with English families and some of them had been sent there because

families didn't want them and the school basically took them over and during holidays they had to stay there and they were looked after. But again, I don't know their history, you see. I only found out many years later with a few of them that I met.

*So were there other people who had come on the Nicholas Winton, on the transport?*

Well, eventually I discovered that many years later when we re-met at the Esther Rantzen.

*At the time you didn't know?*

Well, the people that I came to the Esther Rantzen show with, I knew had been on the train, you know, Vera Gissing, Hanuš Šnábl, oh, gosh, sorry, my memory. The names have gone. All those had come on the Winton train. And then of course when Esther Rantzen says in the second programme they'd been thrown together, will those of you stand up, who came on the train, a whole load of people stood up, that I didn't know, that had been scattered all over the country that were living with English families.

*Yeah. So, you know the people who were in the school?*

So, the people I knew were some at school and the new I met on the Esther Rantzen show because I had known those in London previously because we had stayed together from the school. Many of the school friends I had, whether they were Kindertransport or not, we stayed friends for all the years afterwards and I have them in my book. **[01:06:08]**

*And at the time of course you didn't know anything about Nicholas Winton when you were in school.*

No, absolutely not. He was a total mystery for forty years until I had this phone call [laughs] in the kitchen, you know, this is Esther Rantzen and my reply was, and I'm the Queen of England, because I thought some fool was playing a – I knew who Esther Rantzen was. I thought, for God's sake, Esther Rantzen isn't going to be phoning me, you know.

*How did she find you?*

[Coughs] Through the list. It seems that she then said – checked out my name and said, I found your name on the list. [Coughs] Sorry. And I said yes, I said, but there's – and she said, we'd like you to come to – we're going to bring this gentleman to the studio. And I said there are other people in London and she said, we know that, we've got them, but, you know, we've just chosen a few names and we'd like you to come along. Sorry, I'm – I'm [coughs].

*Shall we take a little break?*

**[Break in recording]**

*Esther Rantzen, when she called you.*

And saying, you know, we'd like you to come down to the studio, which is when I said I've got five friends in London you can ask, so– But prior to Esther Rantzen, and I had forgotten about this, Elizabeth Maxwell had discovered us and persuaded her husband – there was actually a page. What was that paper? He had two papers. There was a Sunday one which stopped but there was another one and there was a page in that paper printed about some of us and I haven't got it but I know it existed. And I feel – I think there was an actual photograph in there. **[01:08:02]** It could possibly be traced back, like the one I've got from the Picture Post [coughs]. And so I had been in touch with my friends in London previously.

*And one of them was Hugo Marom, yeah?*

No, one of them was Vera Gissing, not Hugo, no. Vera Gissing, Hanuš Šnábl, because we used to have odd reunions in London and –

*At school?*

Prior to that, Vera Gissing, and I don't know whether I brought them, [coughs] we had a school reunion before we met Nicholas Winton and we had it in- let me think. We met in

mid-'85 I think and we had it back in Wales 'cos I remember taking some photographs. And I remember the reunion because Vera and her then-partner, Harry – because she had divorced and she was now living with Harry from school – they organised it and nearly ninety of us turned up, including some from the Czech Republic who were allowed to come. And that was the first time all of us had met after about forty years.

*When was that? That reunion.*

That was in Wales.

*When?*

In – I think it was '88. It was before we met Nicholas Winton, before we knew about him, because Hanuš Šnábl, who during the war was our school reporter – we used to have a school magazine called A to Z, funnily enough – and he used to write in it and we had a machine that printed it off. There's a whole page about this reunion on there. There's no mention of Nicholas Winton at all – because Dr Fried turned up for it. He was the only teacher that came. [01:10:03] And the school nurses who lived in Llanwrtyd turned up because the boys used to be mad about one of them called Connie. She was very pretty. She must have only been two or three years older than the oldest boys, you know.

*So this was when the school moved to Wales?*

In Wales. The school in Hinton Hall was very basic.

*How long were you in Hinton Hall?*

About a year I think. No more than that.

*And in the holidays in that time, you used to go home?*

Oh, yes, yes. We wouldn't have – we would be sent home. And then we were sent to Llanwrtyd. And that was another thing, when we arrived in Llanwrtyd, which is right in the middle of the Brecon Hills, they'd hardly seen any English, you know, and then all these foreign kids turned up. But we were housed in a very nice hotel which had been used by – previously by a London school who'd been sent out there from the Blitz. They had left it and we were housed there. And so we decided to put a concert on and invited the locals 'cos the place only had about 2000 people living in it, you know, and this hotel had a huge, what must have been a ballroom. And we sang for them and we sang a lot of Czech songs but we ended up by singing *Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, which is The Land of My Fathers, in Welsh, the nation – and they adopted us from that minute. And today, they are still twinned with a Czech town. And a few years, I've been back, they still have exchanges, the mayors still exchange, a link has remained and in their local museum there's a whole corner which is now devoted to our school.

*So they're proud of their history.*

To the school. And strangely enough, I visited the school, or the building, many years later and when I went into the entrance hall, on the wall were photographs of our school and the reception lady said, 'we don't really know very much about it.' [01:12:16] And Vera Gissing had written the book, 'Pearls of Childhood' at that point and I told the owner of the book because she mentions the school in her book and he bought fifty copies of that book so that every – because that building had been turned into an adventure school by then and different schools used to come for a holiday. So, each school that came would be given a copy of this book – to be told of history of the school that they were actually visiting. So that's another bit of this story, [laughs] if you like, yeah, which has been linked with a school in Wales. So Llanwrtyd has quite a history of us.

*What songs in Czech? You said you sang some at the first concert [overtalking].*

Oh, gosh. I mean I used to – I used to know, yes, the –

*Like what?*

*Červený šátečku kolem se toč, [sings] Na tom pražském mostě rozvalinka roste.* My goodness, my mind's gone completely blank and I'm very fond of my Czech national songs actually. And – because one of the things I was good at, I was a very good singer and I used to get all the solo parts at school. In fact, my singing teacher was hoping very much that I was going to take it up as a career and I used – I knew at school concerts I used to sing, you know, I mean I remember one from 'The Bartered Bride', you know, there was a solo song from there which I can't possibly – my voice has gone completely too. [01:14:00] So singing was one of the things I was good –

*You enjoyed.*

I enjoyed, I was good at, yes. And sport. I was – I played – I was left wing on the school hockey team, yeah.

*So what was the curriculum like? What did they teach you? What –*

It was exactly like you would have in a high school in Czech. You had to have all subjects, maths, Latin, physics, chemistry, geography, history, art- some of it was – art except was voluntary, you know, it wasn't a serious subject, was art, drawing. And you had to pass in all of them. And my *bête noire* was absolutely maths and Latin, which I failed and I – and to my disgrace I sat in this thing. It was just – to the great school amusement, I was one of the few who had to sit in the same class for two years because of my maths and my Latin, which I failed. Yeah. And –

*What about anything Jewish? Was there anything?*

Well, there was. There was a rabbi, there were religious classes but I attended one which was an – which was called *bez vyznání*, without religion because all – because, although I'd been christened Methodist, I had attended – I attended no religious instruction, no.

*So out of the children, how was it split? How many went to which?*



Oh, there were Jewish children, Catholic children, Methodist children. They all had their own different – but I can't give you any details of that. I just don't have them. I do have one school report actually, funnily enough, back home, which dates back to about '43 which will have – which will probably state in there about the divisions but I didn't think of bringing that with me. [01:16:00]

*And was it because before you were in an English school and now in a Czech school, was it – did you feel – was it a better thing not to be different, I guess?*

No, the funny thing was I had come from Lancashire, yeah, and I did, I gather, have a Lancashire accent.

*Uh-huh, in England.*

Yeah. Because we used to have recitations, yeah. And one of the things I do remember that the teacher, and this would be Miss McKenzie who would be the one, she kept saying [imitates Lancashire accent] somebody keeps saying blood, because there must have been the word blood, you know, and it – I mean I must have had a really Lancashire accent when I went there, yeah. It sort of grew out of me over the years but I can still do it if necessary, you know, [laughs] yes.

*And did you feel that the school in a way helped, being together helped some of the children?*

We were literally very – you could say, looking back, a happy family, except in Prague in a museum there is a huge deposition of all our memories. We all went one year and there was one particular girl in America who collected a lot of materials which is now sitting in Prague. Sadly, no, I don't think they're alive anymore and I gather there were some very unhappy children there, some of the Sudeten children who had never really spoke Czech before and had to learn it, you know. But my memories of me being there were absolutely perfectly happy and having good friends there. I mean one of the girls, funnily enough, was Madeleine Albright's cousin, which was discovered years later. And eventually when the school finished

and many of them returned – we never did – they returned to a very difficult and unhappy life because the communists took over. [01:18:11] And then they left and we're scattered all over the world. And I have friends in Washington, and Joe Schlesinger who became a famous Canadian journalist, a lawyer in Washington, who were doctors, psychiatrists, teachers, people who are living in England now who returned and went to universities, got degrees. And I was a total dunce compared to that lot, you know. But they all made a career and – but some of them suffered, were imprisoned. For instance, now in Prague there is one boy who became a pilot, who is now a hundred years old. The last – two days ago he's just been given a big medal from the Czech president. So they all have a history, they all have history.

*Yeah, not everyone was happy.*

No, not everyone was happy, no.

*But in the school did people feel at the time that any – everyone would go back to Czechoslovakia or what was the experience?*

Oh, I think the school – I think the whole teaching was very much what you are the future citizens of the new republic. And also, we – I discovered I have some Russians in my autograph book and we believe now, we know – history books are being written – there was a lot of Russian influence being pumped into the government in exile. President Beneš was resisting a lot of it. I mean there was a second government in Moscow which was being quietly groomed to eventually take – you know what happened – take over in the Czech Republic. And unknown to us, some of the teaching, especially in the older classes, which I wasn't aware of, they weren't teaching Russian but there was this, yeah, beginning to filter in, absolutely. [01:20:11]

*Hmm. So the idea was everyone would go back.*

Yeah, yes, yeah. Yes. Yes, originally everybody was being, you know, the thought was, we are the new Czech citizens.

*Yeah. And did people come to visit the school? Because I've seen some pictures.*

Oh, well, the president, he didn't but she – his wife came, Hana came, and some Russian delegation –

*Beneš?*

Beneš, yes. And I've got Jan Masaryk in my book as well, the son, but he – that wasn't a visit from a school. I forget where I met him. I think it must have been Manchester. He came to Manchester. And certainly, a Russian delegation came to the school which I do have in my book. I can't tell what's – it was some greeting that's written in there. But we weren't particularly indoctrinated, except I have a feeling the *octava* and the *septima*, the two top classes, I think there would be some sort of, you know, Russian input into their teaching.

*Yeah. So, some of the children there were probably children of soldiers, I mean of people in the Czech exile army.*

Oh, yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, yes. There were some – not many because the army- Now, this story, of course the army first went to France, escaped, you know, from France they had to get themselves to England. And it so happens that I have a – a sort of a diary at home of a soldier. In fact, I'm just translating a little bit of it to talk at the Abbey when we go, how the Czech army and the air force were seconded to the French air force and were trying to fly miserable French planes, and seeing the British planes coming over, you know, to sort of flying over to do the bombing and then eventually getting themselves over to England and forming the first official Czech squadron. [01:22:12] I've got all this little information. And then one particular day going out and shooting down seven Messerschmitts and big headlines in English papers, Czech army, you know, being very proud of actually taking part in the Battle of Britain. It is a book called 'We Flew in the Battle of Britain.' So, some of those army people were seconded to teach us but the only members who were in the army who had families would have been Czechs who were living – perhaps the Bat'a people who were living in England, who joined the Czech army when it came to England. But they of course,

most of them returned and sadly paid for that because so many of the Czech army and air force were imprisoned by the communists.

*When they came back?*

When they came back, after 1948, in the '50s mainly, like my uncle.

*What other things do you remember from the school?*

Oh, there was a drama society. I think mainly the sport 'cos I really, you know, oh, and the handball, *házená*. I think I remember the music and the sport mostly and the art, which I was good at really.

*Yeah. And how did the war affect you? I mean were you aware [overtalking]?*

We were hardly – the only thing we knew that one day there was a plane crashed near Llanwrtyd somewhere and the boys, particularly the older boys evidently saw it, went out to it. And a lot of them found, you know, the Perspex that the win – you know, and brought back bits of Perspex and sort of made items out of it. [01:24:08] But apart from that, the war did not encroach on us at all [coughs]. Sorry, my voice is going. I've got a problem with my voice [coughs].

*Shall we take a –*

**[Break in recording]**

*Yeah, we were saying about the wartime and whether you were aware.*

We weren't. I mean again, you see, I would be, what, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fourteen coming on fifteen. Of what I remember of the school, war was never really – it would be the older children, the fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, they could tell you a lot more about the school itself than me.

*And what was it like then to come back home after the holidays, to your sister? How did she develop?*

Oh, she'd gone to an English school. She was at the local grammar school and- let me think. Well, she would be, well, I would be sixteen, she was five years younger. She'd be nine, ten, something – ten, eleven. She just had a normal English schooling. She was a bright girl, yes, and eventually she went to the local grammar school. But she got – she married very young. She married at nineteen, she said to me to get away from home, [laughs] she got married. And she also married an architect. In fact, she married somebody from my husband's firm.

*Okay.*

Yeah.

*But for you it was no problem to switch from the boarding school to come home, to –*

No, I mean I came home and then soon afterwards I was told that there was no question of me going to a music college or anything like that. [01:26:03] And looking back now, seeing what it takes to become an opera singer, I mean I knew I had a good voice, I could sort of knock off arias but whether I would have lasted an entire opera, that's a different thing.

*But that's what you wanted to do?*

I want – that's what I wanted to do, yes. And I did join a local choir for a while but then it was a question of getting a job. And getting a job as a nursery nurse in those days, it was shift work. It was like hospital and you started at six in the morning, you know, if you were on the morning shift it was six till two. If you were on the middle of the day shift, it was ten till four. And then it was two till six. So, my life took on a completely different, you know.

*Milena, when you left, did the school actually close? Or did you –*

No, no, the school finished.

*The school finished. When?*

Yeah, the school finished, yes, there was nothing, 'cos all the children left.

*At the end of the war?*

At the end of the war, yes. All of the children, they either went home – some of them were actually sort of flown back in old bombers. I mean you had stories of them sitting on the – in these empty planes, being flown back to Prague, you know, getting rid of, and then looking for their families. And now of course most of them are now in their teens, you know, and there was a clearing house which I know, which in fact is a theatre at the moment, and it's right opposite the *Obecní dům* [Municipal House] in Prague. It begins with H, the theatre. And in there, there were notices full of – saying, looking for so-and-so, looking for families, and everybody sort of went there to find out, you know, if there were any families and a lot of them found out that there were not. [01:28:00] And some may have found the odd uncle or the odd aunt. Literally, we did – my parents, through my mother, really, decided that we're staying in England because she had gone through the Russian Revolution, Father really wasn't fit enough, you know, he had this – he still had this chest problem, Mother was working as a doctor. I personally, I remember would have liked to have gone back. I was – I felt very Czech, you know. Now –

*Because of your schooling [laughs].*

Yes, and I've always felt in sort of- culturally, you know. Yeah.

*You wanted to go back?*

Yeah. But then we became British citizens. It wasn't until- let me think, '56 we got our British passports. We –

*So long?*

Well, yes, because during the war we were aliens, you know, we were foreigners, we had our – what were they called? I think they were called alien books. And then it was Father who applied so that we could become British and I was then very proud of my British passport.

*But in the '40s or the '50s?*

In the – let me think. The war finished in '45. Sorry, in '45, '46. In '46. In '46.

*In '46, not '56?*

No, no, in '46.

*Yeah, after the war.*

Yeah. We became British citizens, yeah.

*But of course your father, because he was Czech, he wasn't interned or anything like that?*

No, no, we – he was very lucky because a lot of them were interned in the Isle of Man. But because he came over in '39, with – a very early one, and we don't really – as far as I know, he went straight into hospital when he came here. He was ill most of his life with this lung problem and he was funded by the Czech Trust Fund. [01:30:00] I think that's the only way I presume he could have done that. Yeah.

*So you wanted to go back but your parents basically said, we –*

Well, I think I must have – I don't think I made any noise about it. And in fact, the first time I ever returned back was with my husband in 1959 when we drove back and we only spent – I'm just trying to think, oh, no, that's another story. We were driving to Yugoslavia, then – Yugoslavia, and then drove back via the Czech Republic and we only spent four days there at

the time because it was very difficult. And I didn't really start – I went once back in the '70s to the *Spartakiad*, the big *Sokol* – they called it the *Spartakiad*, the communists, because of the gymnastic movement. But the proper first time when I started returning was after the communists left in- '68, '69, when, yeah, when I started going back first of all with the Merseyside Youth Orchestra, we toured. And then I went back as an interpreter for the big exhibition for the architects. There was a big exhibition there. And we were also, my husband's firm, we were the first British firm to actually have Czech architects who were allowed to come and study and work in England – not study, but work in England.

[01:32:00] And then- and the other thing that began, we started bringing in Czech catering students from schools for three months, for work experience and then the *pan*, the story of the Czech Remoska pan, and slowly my contacts with the – and the music I think because one of the big things that happened in 19', er, now, let me get this right, '66, 1967, Libor Pešek, a great Czech conductor, became the conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and he was there for ten years. And I started the Friends of the Liverpool Phil and we took the orchestra to Prague three times and that's where my link, before any of the Esther Rantzen stuff happened, I really started going back with the old country.

*So you – for you it was important to have these cultural [overtalking].*

Yes. And I remember when Dubček was in – was there and I had little labels and I used to – when I was in Prague and I used to stick them secretly all over the place and we also – I also used to smuggle forbidden Czech novels because the communists forbid them, and these were printed in Toronto. A lot of the authors who are now famous, like Skvorecky and his wife, and I had these copies and I used to smuggle them through to Prague and eventually gave all the copies to my Czech friends. But of course, that was in the '50s, yes. Yeah.

*So what was it like, the first time you went back to Prague? [01:34:00]*

Well...

*What was it like for you?*



The first time it was interesting because we were not allowed to visit – we saw – my uncle had been released from prison by then. He'd been imprisoned by the communists. But we were – we could only meet him in a hotel. We were not allowed to visit his apartment. And unknown to me, a number of years later, when I was there as an interpreter for the London Chamber of Commerce, and I was there for three years running, still under the communist regime actually when I think back, and you had to have special permits – many years later I've got – I got documents that I had been watched by every st – I mean – and in, you know, I was doing nothing suspicious but I was friendly with Czech architects, with Czech engineers. Every telephone call I made, every dinner I'd been to, every acquaintance I had, had been recorded. And another interesting thing happened in the '70s – and I am skipping forward now. I had a phone call from the Foreign Office in London, would I come down, they wanted to see me for an interview. And I said, you know, what is it? Oh, we need to see you down here. By that time, I'd already been – my husband had already been knighted [laughs] and I was Lady Grenfell-Baines. I was taken into a room and a chap sitting there in the corner. He said, sit down, Lady Grenfell-Baines, and he brought out a load of photographs. He said, do you know this man? This man? I went through the whole file then he brings up another one. He said, we have it on record that you've been having an affair with this man and giving away secrets, and I started laughing. [01:36:01] I mean he was very serious and I literally started – he was still serious. I said, "well, I'm married to an architect. What secrets possibly could I have?" He said, "well, you know, it's, er, it doesn't concern me but we advise you not to discuss this with anyone." I said, "I want to tell my husband." He said, "well, we're not asking you to sign the, you know –

### *The Secrets Act?*

But we would advise you not to discuss this with anyone. You may go." And for the first time when I left that place, I suddenly felt, not frightened but thinking, Christ, what's going on, you know. I just couldn't – and I went home – I came back to – we were in – my husband by then had retired. He was a professor at Sheffield. And I said [laughs] to George, "I'm going to sue them." [laughs] He said, "do nothing." He said, "just leave things as they are." And I did nothing. And for years I did nothing and then I met up with this guy, Hanuš Šnábl, who was our school reporter, who was my – who by now was working in Bush House in the

Czech section, so, you know. I said, “you know, Hanuš, it happened to me and I was told not to talk to anybody.” He said, “very simple. Somebody in Prague didn't like you.” All they had to do is spread a word and that's what happened, okay. So, I let it go at that. But many years later again, I get this printout about being followed, about telephone calls, and the name of the guy who actually denounced me then and there and it was one of the engineers that I had been friendly with. [01:38:10] And I re-met him years later in Prague and I said, “Hansa, how could you do that?” And he said, “we were called in to report on you. We had to say something, you know, we had to say something, and so that's what I said.”

*But were – you were not aware when you went to Prague there were – of any dangers?*

Oh, absolutely no. No, no, I was very pally with these two – in fact, my cousin, Helen, and I – the four of us used to go out afterwards, because we – I was there for – on behalf of the London Chamber of Commerce who for the first time were allowed to have businesses in Prague exhibiting of their products. And for the first time the Americans allowed computers to be shown and for that they had to build special air-conditioned rooms because in those days they were huge machines. And the entire Eastern European engineers, you know, people were fascinated by this and there were huge people coming to exhibitions and I was there as the interpreter for the organiser who was called – he was the brother of Misha Black. Misha Black was a designer, and this was his brother. I can't remember his Christian name. And I was his personal interpreter for those exhibitions and I've got – I mean I knew – I met the English ambassadors, I've got photographs of me standing there, you know, looking very serious, interpreting. And all that had been – was being reported, you know, about me.

*And you said your uncle by then was not in prison any more.*

No, he was released and he then got a job for Reuters and he was left alone after that. Well, when the Russians reinvaded, you know –

*After the Czech –*

That's right. [01:40:05] I gather my aunt and anybody carrying a red book had to go and report. Evidently, my aunt said to him, if you come back with that red book, I'll divorce you this time. You know, he – 'cos he still – he was still a believer, if you like, my Uncle Frank who was a communist.

*But was he imprisoned also because he was Jewish? Was he –*

No, no, because he spent his life in England, you know. Yeah.

*No. So it wasn't part of the Slánský trials or –*

No, no. The – he had been imprisoned in Germany for being a communist, for spreading communist material. But the relatives, our grandparents were killed, yes.

*So your – which grandparents? Your father's –*

My – the Kosiner. The Kosiner grandparents.

*Your mother's?*

That's right. The Fleischmanns, there were some but I didn't know them, they were – because Grandfather had a number of brothers but some had gone to America, some had gone- the Zifs, my stepmother's family, had gone to Rhodesia, some of them, and then they eventually went back to Canada. But we do know from the lady who was in New York, she said to my son when she saw him, she said, a lot of your relations died in camps that we knew nothing about.

*And your grandfather, do you know what happened to him? Your grandfather.*

Yes, I have the list of when they were taken away in the Final Solution. They were taken away in '42 and to- they were taken to Marienbad- not to Marienbad, to, oh –

*Terezín? Terezín?*

Yeah, Terezín, but only for a short time and the immediate Łódź and there for a month. [01:42:01] And my cousins, they were taken to Novi Trostenets [ph]. They weren't even taken to Terezín. And again, a month. And those were the closest relations that we know about. Yeah.

*Okay, just to come back now to your – to the post-war years. So, you trained as a nurse and started working, basically.*

Yeah. I worked in the local day nurseries. That was the norm. You got passed around, you know. Yeah.

*And then you were naturalised and were you happy about it, to become British?*

Yes, I mean it made no great impact. It meant that we had a British passport, so we didn't to report to the police or whatever it was and just became ordinary – we were probably very proud to become citizens, you know. But somehow, I still kept my Czech cultural, you know, sort of music, if you like.

*And then you were introduced to your husband?*

And then I met George, who I at first, thought he was too old [laughs] and then in the meantime I was – sort of had another English local boyfriend, who also married a Czech girl eventually. And then finally gave in, yes, and we got married and married for nearly forty years, yes.

*And tell us a bit about his background. Who was he?*

He was a founder of an architectural – he came from a very poor family actually, himself, and had to go to work at fourteen – his parents couldn't afford a school uniform – and went to work for a land surveyor. But he was a very gifted mathematician and a musician. I mean he was

playing the piano by the time he was seven. And also mentally, he had – and he then was able to go to the local tech at night where again he became an outstanding pupil. And there are records of this. And he worked for a land surveyor who told him that he should be an architect because he was – he kept copies of these drawings of the buildings and he didn't know what an architect was. [01:44:06] And it was explained to him and he said, well, his parents said there was no way to do that, you had to go to an architect's office and you had to pay them, you know, to be taught. So, eventually he got a job as a junior draughtsman in the county hall and very quickly realised unless he got to university, there was, you know, he couldn't do anything. But as a junior draughtsman he sent his drawings to a firm in Bolton who were looking for junior draughtsmen, a firm called Bradshaw Gass & Hope and they employed him. And then he realised that unless he went to the university, he couldn't get any further. And so he finally gave up his job, he was the first student to be given a grant by Preston Council [coughs] and he borrowed money from a friend who lent him some money, to attend Manchester University. And he was – because of his knowledge of building he was put in straight into the third year. He won the – what are they called, the big medal at the university, became a brilliant student and in his final year entered an international competition for Houses of Parliament in Rhodesia. And his professor told him, don't bother, you know, and when you finish university, I'll give you a job. And he won the third prize and the third prize was £250 and this was in 1937, which was enough for him to set up his own office in his parents' front room, so he said. [01:46:10] But by that time – sorry – he'd already latched on to modern architecture because Bradshaw Gass & Hope were very standard but he worked on some outstanding buildings there. He did – they did a lot of town halls actually. And he had learnt about Gropius and the Bauhaus and he always felt that architects' offices were very- just architects with a capital A and he was determined to start an office which included all the professions. So, when he finally started his own office, he got a few local jobs for houses and then – this is during – we're now during the war – and he then invited a couple of other architects to join the firm and they changed the name to Grenfell Baines & Hargreaves. And then he – and during the war he had – did a lot of work in Coventry which was very badly bombed. But he also introduced a different system – he was a socialist – of sharing the income. Oh, there's a whole history to this firm, which [laughs] is made, which would make another book. But there is another book. And at the end of the war, he thought he would like to have an accountant and an engineer in the firm. Now, he was a

member of the RIBA but they looked very – they frowned on this idea very much to have other professions involved in an architects' firm. [01:48:00] And at that time the architects couldn't build. You know, you weren't allowed to do that. Nevertheless, in the early '60s, he by now had quantity surveyors, engineers, all working together and he decided to change the name of the firm and they were horrified. He said, well, we have some very bright people working in the firm, I'm not going to live forever and I don't believe in the firm having the name of one person when we have so many other people working within it. And they changed it to a firm called Building Design Partnership. It's now known as BDP. And any arc – is now worldwide, you know, any architect knows who BDP are, probably the second biggest firm in – going now. I mean we know there's Norman Foster, we know – and Norman Foster was actually a student in the Manchester office for a very short time. I mean they worked on places like the Opera House, the Albert Hall. They were responsible for the complete renovation of the Albert Hall- lots of buildings in London. You could get – you could find out on – if you put BDP on your thing, you'll find out all about them. So, he was the founder of that firm and he retired and he was due to – when he was in his sixties. Yeah, he was also an external examiner in a number of architectural schools and when he was due to retire he was an examiner in Sheffield and they were asking his advice about appointing a new architect and he gave the name and then suddenly he got a letter from the vice chancellor saying, look, how about you coming in as professor of architecture? [01:50:00] And although he'd – he was always interested in education, he said, I'm sixty-five, you know, I'm about to retire. And they said, how about three years? So he agreed and we partially moved to Sheffield. I mean we stayed in Preston, we used to go back, but got an apartment in Sheffield. And he became professor of architecture but having got into that, he said he nearly sacked the entire final year because they were being taught stuff by teachers who were doing the same thing over and over again. I mean he had a bit of a revolution there, you know. But he started a new system. He also started inviting other architects to come and do master classes and eventually he became an emeritus of the university and it became a very highly desired university for young architects to go to, and still has a very good reputation. I mean of course but he died twenty years ago, did George. And that's a very brief history of BDP. And so through that again we were lucky to meet – oh, I met so many, you know, other visiting architects and –

*So was it interesting for you as well?*

Oh, very much. And then of course the firm grew and they had a – for a while they had an office in Paris. One of the architects actually live – moved there. They have about I think five offices in this country and they've got them in China, in India.

*So it grew.*

It grew. And they took on – in Holland they took on architects from those firms and incorporated them, you know.

*So once you married, where did you – did you – you stayed in Preston?*

Oh, we – yes. He had got a – 1836, they've got an old house which my son has bought two years back because just the upkeep of it, you know, is almost – simply because I kept it 'cos we're always having Czechs, visitors, people coming and going and the family, although I sort of have cut down to living in about three rooms in this place, George has complete redone the heating system because it was just heating up all the – eating up all the heating – my son. [01:52:27] And my health hasn't been brilliant. I had back problems which have been sorted but not quite. And, you know, I can't – and I have got a pacemaker. As you can hear me, I'm hoarse. And I'm still very much in – very active in a sense. And then of course ten years ago. these talks started and I'm busy with that now, you know.

*But are you still in the same place where you lived in?*

I'm still in – we're still in the same place where I got married to, yes.

*So, is it a modernist house?*

Well, it's a – well, George said he ruined it by pulling out some of it but it's still got the original staircase. It's got two other apartments in it which are occupied, because it was so big. Well, the story goes, before I married, evidently a lady – we're only the third family in it

– a lady came to the house and said to my husband, “oh, I’ve come to see what you’ve done with this house, you know.” And he said, “oh, he said, there are eleven people living in the entire house.” Oh, she said, “when I was a girl there were fourteen.” And he said, “oh, you must have been a very big family.” “Oh”, she said, “there were eight of us and the rest were servants.” And, we have a history of that and we know the names of the servants. And there were eleven coal fireplaces and they had somebody who just looked after those, you know, a boy. And the kitchen was in the basement, and the dining room which is now my bedroom, and there was a lift that, you know, that food would go up. [01:54:06] And my so-called – my kitchen was the housekeeper’s room, our present dining room was known as the morning room because – and the sitting room faces west, and what is now a bit of an extension was the- not the garden, it was a sort of a garden room, you know. So the whole place was redone. But the family loved the house, so George finally bought it and I, legally I have to pay him rent. And I don’t think they’ll – whether the great-grandchildren will get rid of it, I don’t know but until now, every Christmas, you know, there are seventeen there for – and for this year, Christmas lunch is being spread out because the great-grandchildren want to stay at home, you know, they want Father Christmas to be there. So that’s a quick story of my activities.

*And were your parents – they also stayed in Preston?*

Yes, they all stayed in Preston.

*So they never – after the war they didn’t want to move elsewhere in England?*

I think my father would have liked to have gone home, gone back but the house in Proseč that my grandfather built had been taken over by the communists, that’d be – so that had gone and the apartment in Prague had gone. And my mother def – we definitely did not want to return. There was nothing to return to. He tried to get a job with UNRWA but that was stopped very quickly I think by the- sorry, I remember the occasion because when the meeting with Stalin and Roosevelt and – when Stalin decided which part of Europe they wanted and they stopped, you know, and Vienna was divided into four places. [01:56:06] And what was the gift that was coming from the West? All the food, it was being sent there. The Russians stopped it. Oh, sorry, my memory is now – there was a name for it. Anyway, that’s what my father



wanted, to work for UNRWA. Anyway, he couldn't. His health really wasn't up to it. And so, we just stayed in England. Yeah. And he –

*In Preston?*

Where he eventually died, yeah. And then I married and, you know, and then my sister married an architect from the firm.

*And where did she live?*

Well, she – they went all over. They stayed in Preston for a while then they went to Cumbernauld, the new town, then they went to Canada, then America, then back to England and eventually they decided to settle in America. And Gropius had an office in Boston and this is when my husband – when George actually met him for the first time because he was doing a big lecture tour in America, a two-months lecture tour, and he met Gropius in his office and they had a – the secretary said she'll give him thirty minutes and they spent three hours together talking about what George had done with his firm. And then he actually did a two-months lecture tour around Russia as well which was very interesting because he went right out to near Afghanistan, he went to Akademgorodok [part of the Sovetsky District of the city of Novosibirsk, Russia], he wrote from every place he went to and I have a whole collection of letters. He gave lectures to architects, some of whom didn't believe how socialist his firm was, because the firm was still sharing its income. [01:58:02] This was one of the things he started, about the money that was paid to salaries and it was to be – it was a shared – not profit but shared income. And it was done on how they decided how much you earn was – he had the three Rs, oh, gosh- there were three sayings. Responsibility, recognition – responsibility, recognition and reward, and that's how the salaries were fixed, on just what you were capable of. And until a few years ago when it had to be turned into a limited society due to tax reasons, that's how the firm shared its money out. It was –

*So, what's – what is the most famous building your husband did or what he was most proud of?*

Well, he actually, he himself finally wasn't the architect who has the famous buildings. He's the one who brought in the bright young people and this is why he wanted to change the name of the firm, so that each building was designed by so-and-so and if you – when – you need to look at the – we have a monthly magazine that comes out where if you look at the firm, if you look at the – you will see the names of the people who design the building. He started the beginning, he, you know. But- and he used to go around the desks and look what people – and he could always spot mistakes [laughs] and they knew him, you know, because he had a good eye. And he also was very forward-thinking, like this sharing business. [02:00:00] Now, all the firms have all the professions in them. You know, this is nothing new anymore. But he's the one who was the founder of the whole thing.

*I wonder whether he ever – because I know that Gropius came build one private house in London.*

Yes, yes, that's right.

*I wonder whether he ever – is because it's linked to our archive.*

And there was another Jewish architect, he was very – well, two, very friendly, Samuely, who actually when the Festival of Britain was on, the Skylon, if you remember what – no, you won't remember the Skylon. It was a structure that seemed to just hang in the air and it was Felix Samuely, who was the godfather of my son actually, who we knew, who was a member of this firm who designed that. And there was another German architect- oh, God, this is terrible, 'cos he'd be – because of – for the Festival of Britain, George did a building of the power and production together with this German architect and again you'd be able to find the name of it. Ash – my memory's terrible.

*Okay, don't worry.*

My memory's – this is why I was bad at school. I've always had a bad memory for certain things. And of course, there's this famous- not Gropius, Goldfinger.

*The Goldfinger, yeah.*

Goldfinger was a – who George knew actually. We knew Goldfinger, yeah, who was a famous architect. Not James Bond.

Ernesto Goldfinger. [Ernö]

*Ernesto.*

Ernest Gold – yes, Goldfinger, that's right, who we knew.

*Of course there's a building in a few –*

Oh, yes, there's a few, a few buildings about him, that's right.

*'Cos the Gropius Building, that private one, commission, one of our Kinder went to stay there when he arrived from Vienna, 'cos it was commissioned by an American actress called Constance Cummings. [02:02:01]*

Yes, yes, she was an actress, wasn't she? Yes.

*Yes, and that was a private commission, I think it's Cheyne Walk.*

Cheyne Walk.

*In Kensington.*

Cheyne Walk, yes.

*So I don't know whether your husband saw that building, but yeah.*

Yes, that's right. You're right. Yeah. Cheyne Walk. I'm trying – it'll come to me, the name of the German architect he worked with because – but Felix Samuely was lovely and his wife, they were great friends of ours. And then I think people will be surprised how many Jewish – how many clever Jewish people there are in the world and your normal Englishman in the street don't know about. The actors, the, you know, the entertainers, yeah. I mean Maureen Lipman who I met, you know, in Manchester, yeah.

*But you, did you have- what sort of identity did you want to give to your children? Did you –*

No, we didn't – I think mainly because of George who also was, although he was a Methodist and he was brought up very strictly, [coughs] which put him off completely, because he was a very good pianist and his parents actually sent him for piano lessons and then he started playing jazz when he was twelve and his parents said, music of the devil, stopped his piano lessons, you know. And he started again when we were married, he – and we had a grand piano at home. He really was a very good pianist. And actually, my daughter went to music school, my grandson is a guitarist, he has a group but he also teaches. My son was always involved with – in getting kids back – he had a business where they got kids back to school. They were all involved in some sort of teaching and helping, this thing. My daughter, well, she's a great- oh, quilter, you know, she is into – she's involved with the, you know, with – in that organisation. [02:04:13] But also they knew – she knew other people in Huddersfield who helped her set up the Jewish Centre in the university which I know.

*Holocaust Centre North?*

That's – yes. And how she got to know them, that was odd. We were at the Holocaust Day in January before Covid, 27, in the Queen Elizabeth Centre and Jane was there with me and there was a couple sitting behind us, discovered that they came from Huddersfield and it was – and she's died since then. She was the lady who started the Holocaust Centre there. And that's how Jane got to know her and kept in touch. But Jane now lives in Halifax, you know. So – but there's never been a sort of a Jewish connection there. It was just that we –

*You never – so you didn't do anything religious in your –*

No, no, because we were, as I said, we – now, of course, you know, I'm sort of involved with it but we were never brought up with it. And funnily enough, my son said to me the other day he's started researching into Jewish religion. I said, do you mean 2000 years ago? He said, no, just 200 years ago what was going on with Britain, you know, how terrible they were in, you know, how the British were dreadful in Palestine. I mean he's suddenly, you know, yeah, and he's in his sixties. But he thinks one of our grandsons is getting interested in – the one who's just come back from Japan, you know, would like to find out more. And he's studying art actually and I think I will try and send him here to, you know, to come and find out a bit more about it. [02:06:07]

*So tell us, so when – what happened first, the Esther Rantzen or your involvement – how did it all happen?*

Well, I – Esther Rantzen really kicked off the whole thing with Nicholas Winton, yeah. And even then, it wasn't so much of my Jewish history, it was more – I mean we were all being asked to talk about our past and that's what has brought it on more and more. I think –

*Just take us back. So, Esther Rantzen called you.*

Yeah.

*You say, okay, I'm coming to the studio. And then what happened?*

Well, and then I find myself sitting next to this man, who we now know had been told that he was – well, if you read his daughter's book, he was told that he was coming – he's been asked to go to the studio to make sure that because they've going to be using his scrapbook, that everything was correct. And his wife, Greta, said it's going to be very boring, I'm stopping at home, I'll watch you on the screen. And he walks down, you know, and he's – but he's already been found by Vesely, and Rudi – and he brought Rudi Vesely with him but Rudi Vesely was told to sit behind him and he did. And we were told that this man was coming and we were not to talk to him. And it wasn't until Esther Rantzen opens the book and – we knew who he

was but we had never met him and Vera Gissing who was sitting there, who had been told who he was, you know, Esther Rantzen then turns and she's acting for the screen, she hadn't met him but she is now, 'you're the man who saved my life.' And I was – and he had not seen my label before because the film doesn't show it but he then gets hold of the other thing and he's really looking at them, because he hadn't seen – he hadn't met – seen – we hadn't met him before, you know. **[02:08:08]** So that really was the first time. And then we get taken off to this, what was known as the green room. A whole crowd of – no, not – it wasn't the crowd, there were only seven of us at the time. We were taken off there and given some warm- white wine and he was so tired and exhausted, he was whisked away quite quickly. But Vera Gissing then discovers she only lived about twenty minutes away from him in this next village, and became sort of a secretary to him because she then from that day, and from the second meeting, he had so many phone calls, visitors, suddenly hundreds of people find out there's the man who saved their lives, starts getting in touch. He was inundated. And she became – she started answering letters for him. She started visiting him and then Han – Tanya and Hanuš Šnábl, who became great friends, in fact, I think he helped to pay for a gardener that used to look after Nicky's garden. And we started visiting him. He started having birthday parties. He was very sociable, you know. But he didn't really like talking about the past. He said the past – he always used to say history's taught you nothing, you've got to look at the future. And I always remember one speech he gives in Prague and I've got it on film. In fact, I've got the stick with me, I could show it to you if you had a – there's no time, you know, on your project that – where he gives a speech where he says, you know, there isn't time for a long speech but I think my solution is going to be if people will- oh, God, the word's gone out of my head now – compromise. **[02:10:13]** He said compromise will be the answer. He says, it's not a good word, people don't think it's a good thing, but that's the only way for the future, is to compromise. And if you look at today's situations, you know, and they don't want to. But finally, is it going to be a solution of today? Compromise? Of the dreadful things that have happened? I mean you don't compromise about the Holocaust, do you? So that was Nicholas. And –

*Forward looking, yeah.*

Yeah, always forward looking, yes.

*But Milena, so when you were in that audience room, so did the name – by that time did you know that it was him responsible for your train? When was it you first found –*

Well, we knew – we didn't know before then. We only knew when Elizabeth Maxwell, she was the first person to organise a conference, 'Looking to the future', I think it was called.

*It was at Oxford, wasn't it?*

That's right, yes. And I came to that but I wasn't there for very long. I can hardly remember it. The only thing I remember is that Robert Maxwell turned up and I remember his huge figure, but no details. Then we were told that Elizabeth Maxwell had got hold of the book and had written to every address in the book but only about 200 addresses replied. And this is how – and then Esther Rantzen was married to- oh, he died after- he was also a television producer. [02:12:00] And in his office was Vera's book, 'Pearls of Childhood', unknown to Esther Rantzen – I mean they had – husband and wife, he had this story of – and in Vera's book, she still didn't know about Nicholas Winton until she rewrote an – the first opening chapter explaining about how – that we met him. But when she wrote 'Pearls of Childhood' she didn't know about him. And it was sitting in this guy's office, who wanted to make a programme about it. And there's Esther Rantzen finding out about Nicholas Winton, getting hold of the scrapbook, and she got it from Elizabeth Maxwell. How she – she would only tell you how she found out about it. I can't remember how that – mind you, her daughter might know. I've got her daughter's –

*'Cos Elizabeth in the film, in the recent film, it seemed like he found – Nicky Winton found Maxwell.*

That's right.

*Or somebody referred her to –*

Yes, in Barbara's book it's never properly explained how Elizabeth Maxwell got hold of it, but I think they were trying to give it to some library and I think that's where Elizabeth Maxwell saw it and said, you can't get rid of this, this is history. And she's the one who started looking into it. She found him, and then Esther Rantzen finds Elizabeth Maxwell and the two get together and the book gets into the hands of Esther Rantzen.

*Because in fact, in the film, and again I don't know whether it's true or not, it actually said, so he has a meeting, Nicky went, and he says, oh, you should get in touch with Wiener Library, where we're sitting right now.*

Yes.

*So I don't know whether that happened or not.*

Well, that could be possible but I can't, I can't say. Yes.

*But do you think when this happened, so when Elizabeth Maxwell found out, then you were invited to the conference, do you think that people were immediately interested in the figure of Nicholas Winton or did it –*

Well – no, no, I think at the time it was as Esther Rantzen said. **[02:14:23]** Thinking back today, it was her greatest evening of all her programmes. But I think what happened, the people that really latched on to it, were the Czechs because it wasn't the – the Kindertransport was Austrian and German, the original Kindertransport came in '38, and nothing had ever been done about it, said about it, ever, because it came by various – it was a chap called Berlin who got killed in an air crash, didn't he, who started the Kindertransport in –

*I think you mean Wilfrid Israel.*

Wilfrid Israel, who lived in Berlin.



*Yeah.*

Yeah, Wilfrid Israel. He started – but nothing’s ever been – has anything ever been done about it? Has there been any stories written about it? I mean I don't know. But I know – I know, you know, who he was, but nothing like Winton. I mean nothing’s been like Win – and then when this came to light, Mináč, the film-maker in Prague, he's the one who quickly latched on to Nicholas Winton, he's the one who started visiting him and making films about him way before anything happened in England. And I can tell you that every Czech even today in this country – and when I'm in Prague and if I tell anybody that I was on a Winton train, they say, “oh, I've got gooseflesh”. Taxi drivers, waiters, anybody in that country knows his name, literally. [02:16:00] And if you saw the letters that I've got – I've given the occasional talk to Czech children but I have a Czech friend in Prague who was responsible with me for putting up that memorial.

*When was that, Milena?*

Zuzana Marešová.

*But when did you put up the memorial?*

It's in '40, in '97. No, 2017.

*2017. And that's a memorial at the Prague –*

To the parents. It's in the railway station. I'll show you. I've got it with me. And that came about – I'm going to have to backtrack again – that 2014, '15, Hugo was visiting Nicky. Saying, you know, Nicky, you're famous, people know about us but the heroes were our parents and we really ought to do something about that. And he said – Nicky said, “about time.” Sorry, I need- [break in recording]  
- [inaudible] in Israel.

*This is Hugo Marom?*

Yeah.

*Who came on one of the – who came on the [overtalking].*

Yeah, that's right, he was with his brother.

*He went to – after the war went back to Prague? He went to Prague?*

He went to Prague and eventually he went to Tel – he went to Israel. And he was a pilot. He joined the air force and he flew planes to Israel and set up a – he built – he set up airports out there.

*Yes. And he – I think he flew the – one of the – Czechoslovakia sold the airplanes to Israel, isn't it?*

That's right.

*And he flew one of them out, I don't know, one or more or –*

He did, and so did Joe Alon, and he rescued Joe – Joe Alon when he returned, he was a *Plaček*, who was originally born in Israel but his parents were – when they were in Palestine they were thrown out and they went to the Czech Republic. **[02:18:01]** Joe was a Winton child who came to England, came to the Czech school, went back to Prague, found no one, and I believe was put up – one or two families. Eventually Hugo found him I believe, quite desperate, and got him to – I know that he was – I think he was adopted by a family in Cumberland for a while. I knew about that much. Anyway, Hugo rescued him, if you like, got him to Israel, and there he became a very successful pilot. But –

*Come back to – yeah.*

Come back?

*The memorial in Prague.*

Hugo now in the late – in the mid-'20s visiting Nicky, talking about it, and Nicky said, it is time there was a memorial. Hugo's back to Tel Aviv, gets in touch with me, saying, do something about a memorial. And we literally had to start from scratch, how do you do something. So first of all, I – oh, yes, I was in Prague and I met up with Zuzana Marešová who was the other person that Hugo was in touch with. So, we had to set up a little committee and we found an accountant and another chap who's actually the chairman of a big Jewish organisation. I'm sorry, I'd have to go back and get names. My names are going. But we formed a committee. How do we find a memorial, who's going to pay for it? So, the Czechs – the Czech- School of Art & Design suggested we had a competition, which we did, and they had a jury and we didn't like – Zuzana and I did not like any of the design. They were huge, massive things, not expressing anything. [02:20:00] And so Zuzana said to me, you know, I remember being at the station and our parents waving goodbye to us and I said, that's the memorial. That's what we've got to do. And I found an artist in England and asked him to do a sketch of a window, of the hands, which he did. We've still got this. And by now – and also, we started writing letters looking for money, giving the idea of what we was going to do. We still hadn't got a proper drawing. And then we were told, you – because it's a public donation you two can't decide on who is going to do it. You've got to give it to- you've got to put it out to tender. So we put it out to tender in the Czech Republic suggesting the design and we had about six entrants but one of them was so desperate to do it, he gave a very little cost and sent a brilliant design showing the hands and said he would come to England to take copies of the hands of the children, you know. So, he finally came to Manchester and took my great-granddaughter's imprints of hands. And then I came to Prague and Zuzana and I, he took the imprints of our hands to represent the parents and made this window. Now, this window had to be put into a door, so the Slovak ambassador in London told me he knew in Slovakia a man who specialised in reproducing and restoring railway doors. [02:22:18] And he introduced us to this man, who at this point was actually restoring a railway carriage of the 1940s and he had a whole museum of old carriages there and we found a carriage which could have been one that we might have travelled in. And this is in a museum in Bratislava actually. And he copied that door and the window was then put into it. But the whole process

of that was a very difficult and technical job because the next question was, where is it going to be put? And I said, well, we think it should be the railway station. And I was told by Czech friends, it will never happen. You'll never get permission to put that in the railway station. You know, let's try such a garden. And I said, well, Nicholas always used to say if it's not impossible, it can be done. And I wrote a letter to the then-manager of the railway station, which was at that point being managed by a Czech organisation but they were having problems and it was in a bad state, the place, the station – asking him if we could do this and telling him what Nicholas Winton used to say. In my return we got a letter saying, 'feel free, do it, find a place, you know.' So, another committee was formed by the railway people.

**[02:24:01]** [Laughs] It was really very complex at the time. And they found this spot which is the main concourse. I don't know whether you've been – you've never seen it – which is the main concourse to all the platforms – sorry, I'm thickening up again – that was allowed. And they were given I think three days because it was a question of digging up floors, rigging electrics in, putting the whole thing together. And they very cleverly lit – I mean it was very clever, they lit it up inside. It was put together and then they decided when it was going to be launched and the day it was – I think it was the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 and it was going to be a big event. We were told to invite all the people who – by now we had collected the money but the majority, the biggest part of the money was given to us by the then-minister of finance which was his own money, he's one of the wealthiest men in the Czech Republic [laughs] and I'm trying desperately – trying this terrible- sorry, his –

*Okay, just don't worry [overtalking].*

Well, it does because he was hated by most people. He was originally Slovak. [Andrej Babiš] He was – he built a huge restaurant called 'The Bird's Nest' [Storks's Nest] near Prague, he was- they said he was using European money. I mean there was a lot of scandal going on at the same time. But he's the guy who gave us half the amount for that, over a million crowns from his own – I mean he owns a lot of agricultural places. **[02:26:10]** A lot of scandal around him, you know. But – and he was also prime minister for a long time. But he gave the money. Anyway, so we then sent out invitations to everyone who donated and these people came from America, they came from all over. Oh, we've got loads of photographs from that of course. He came, he came very quietly by himself. The next day the Czech papers had –

I'm trying to think of its name – so-and-so surrounded by police. It wasn't true. You know, typical journalistic lies, you know, which occur – in fact Trudi and her daughter were having a discussion about this the other night. The people brought flowers. Of course, Hugo came – obviously. All the children, I think there were about twenty of us at the time, quite a few still alive came. And we had a day there and then an – I organised a whole evening in a huge restaurant near the river where everybody gathered as well and it was a huge event.

*And why was it important for you to do this?*

Well, I think because Hugo got in touch with us. We were about the only two he could think of. I think my – the only thing I was able to do, although I was to – I'm probably a good organiser. That's probably my thing, you know, [laughs] being on – I mean I hate committees. [02:28:05] I like to be a committee of one, you know, and that's possibly why I was so keen, you know, to get it – and also I put people in touch with people and I back out as soon as they know each other, I'm away. But if I can see that they're useful to each other, that's what I do and then let them get on with it, you know. So, I think it's because of – we were – the two of us were responsible and we opened it, you know, we had a script that we gave and- as I say, we've got pictures of it. Zuzana and I were there and halfway through, I said, we're not going to talk without – we're halfway through and we unveiled it and everybody was delighted and then we carried on with the chat. And that's what happened. But happened within one year, it got badly vandalised in – we suddenly got a message that somebody had gone with something and had scratched right across the front. And of course, they said there should have been cameras there. However, the man who made the original glass repaired it. They came back and repaired it all. Now, I think there is a camera and we do find from time to time people leave flowers there. And because it's on the main concourse, most people are dashing to catch trains. But I've gone back over the years sometimes and I've gone there and I've stood back to look to see what happens and so – every so often you suddenly get somebody – because there is a plaque on the side which explains what it is – it has our names on. Somebody will stop and somebody usually with children, and they stand and they stay and they read it and then they go and they read it. [02:30:01] So – and as I say, still people are occasionally leaving flowers there and it is to the parents who had the courage to put us on the trains. That's really what the plaque is saying.

*To the parents who survived or who didn't survive?*

Well, no, it's the parents who mostly did not survive, the – that's what it says, the parents who [overtalking].

*So, I'm thinking, your parents obviously survived.*

Yes, we were lucky. Yeah. No, it's for the parents who did not survive. And to all those, you know, our grandparents and, yeah.

*Yeah. But among your – the Kinder, you came with the children, were you the only one whose parents survived? Among the group of friends you had.*

Um...

*Yeah. So, we're talking about the memorial in Prague and that you managed to do it and it was then opened –*

Yeah, we had a very successful unveiling of it, if you like, yes. It was. And everybody's very happy with the design. We think it actually shows exactly what it was, we think, and people who have come back to England, they say, we've been to Prague and, you know, we've seen – 'cos there is another one on the station, on platform one of Anthony Hopkin – of Nicholas Winton and the children, I think he's holding one in his arms and one's got his suitcase, standing there. And that was done by – I'm trying to think of her name, a sculptress. She wasn't English. I can't remember where she's from. Flora somebody.

*Flor Kent, wasn't it? Yeah.*

God, yes, that's her. Yes, Flor Kent, yes. And then of course, we had the duplicate that was done seventy years later where about thirty of us met and I had a letter to say that they're going to run a second train as its memorial, would I like to take part? [02:32:01] And I said

yes, and my son came with us as well. And some of us – I've got them on here – met us – met the rest in London. Nicky waited for us in London. And in spite of – instead of the wooden seats this was a luxurious steam train. It came from Hungary actually. They use it there for pleasure trips. There were two chefs on board. There was an orchestra, a mini orchestra that was playing stuff that had been written, you know, during the war, especially in Terezín. A doctor and nurses, in case, you know, we needed any help. And we stopped off in Frankfurt and in Cologne I think, two places en route. Both times we were housed in very nice hotels. We were really looked after, you know.

*Who organised this?*

Yes, interesting. In Prague there was a young doctor who was a grandson actually of our Czech teacher and he came across – and a patient – a man came to him and said, look, my son is ill – this man said, he's got leukaemia or something and he needs an operation. Do you think you could help? Anyway, they operated and the child was fine and it was discovered that – the man then discovered that the guy's grandfather taught in Prague and he wanted to do something as a thank you. And he worked for the Czech railways, quite high up, and it was his idea. He said, look, I'd like to organise a replay of this. So of course it – this was before we knew about it, to get permission to find steam trains that would run across Europe because, you know, this one stopped in the Czech Republic or somewhere. [02:34:05] So they had to find all the – they had to find times when these trains could actually do it so that they weren't in the way of any other railways. I've got all the story, how it happened.

*So, this was fifteen years ago?*

Well, it was before – let me think. God, it was –

*You said '70<sup>th</sup> anniversary?*

That's right. So, it was in the '70s, yeah.

*This year is the eighty-fifth, so fifteen years ago.*

Yeah, that's right. And we got I think thirty volunteers. I mean it was all paid for. We were looked after in Prague. There was an event the night before where they got a choir together. You know, there was a little opera called 'Brundibár' which was written in, er, in the – in–

*Terezín?*

Terezín. And my cousin who survived three camps – I don't think the name will mean anything to you – she became a very famous harpsichord – Zuzana Růžicková, she was called. And she was one of the people who sang in the choir of Brundibár. She was the – she died just a few years ago. So we had that. And then we had – we had to be at the station at seven o'clock in the morning and the prime minister turned up, the then-prime minister, all the newspapers, and each carriage actually had our names. We knew exactly where we were, where we were sitting. And there was a competition for students to write about this and three teen students won it and the prize was the trip with us. And I know that my son sat with one of them, you know, and was chatting away to her as we were travelling. [02:36:00] And it was wonderful. I mean the food was, you know, they made apple strudel, we had lovely food. And at one point, two ladies were sitting next to each other and one had come from Israel and one had come from America, both talking about – one said I was nine, the other one said I was four. The one who was four said, "my mother put me on someone's knee and asked her to sing me my favourite nursery rhyme, which she sang." The woman sitting next to her said, "someone put a four-year-old child on my knee and asked me to sing her favourite nursery rhyme." Seventy years. And one had been in Israel, one in America, and they met on that train.

*And what was it like to come in and then see Nicholas Winton there on the station?*

Oh, well, when we got to Liverpool Street Station, Nicholas Winton was there and his son. Barbara had travelled with us. His son was there. And he said, I hope it won't be another seventy years before we [laughs] do this reunion. It was actually his hundredth birthday I think, something like that. And then we had huge buses organised for the survivors – I mean I could find pictures on there – who took us to the Czech embassy and we had an evening there



and there was a – I'd organised a birthday cake for him. This is where my organisational powers came in, you know [laughs]. In fact, we had another reunion where I organised a chocolate train, you know, to be there, used as a birthday cake. And that's where – and he was there the last time. But when we got to Liverpool Street Station there were hundreds of cameramen. I mean I've got a picture of all these cameramen waiting to watch us set off the train. [02:38:01] There were – and a very famous correspondent – and I can't remember his name now – travelled with us for two days. He was often on the news. I mean it was quite a newsworthy event that was shown at that time.

*Why do you think the story attracts so much attention, then and now? Also. now with the new film called 'One Life'.*

Well, I think it brings back what a person can do. It brings back what is needed. And it shows that if someone thinks, you know, this story, save one child, save the world, basically, and you've seen the film when he was told that he couldn't do it, he couldn't see any reason why he couldn't unless there was a reason why he couldn't. I think that it would be almost impossible to do this today. Well, Alf Dubs tried very hard with Mrs May to get permission for 5000 unaccompanied children into this country which at first, she agreed to and then she stepped back. And I think permission was given for 500. And he's been fighting all his life, you know, for – he's a sort of Nicholas Winton, if you like. But it was just to get them here, just to get the children here. And now there's going to be another great need for orphans, whether they'll be Palestinian orphans or Jewish orphans. And if it's going to come to a problem of trying to get them here but I suspect Israel will look after its own one, you know. So- we need as many Nicholas Wintons as we can possibly find. [02:40:02] And I suppose with the rest of us, again if you see the film that was made by Mináč all those years ago, where he talks to the adults as to what they've done, some of them – yeah, one went out and went into the jungle and got orphans from there. Those who lived in Israel, they all – they are all working in hospitals, doing work helping people. I suppose all of us in our own way try to do something to help others who, you know, who couldn't. Yeah.

*But in fact, it wasn't just Nicholas Winton. He did it together with –*

No. I think that that's a – he's always said – I mean that was – oh, and that he wasn't alone. And we know there is a team of people who worked with him, Doreen Warriner who I think is seen in the film, and she was an extraordinary woman, who was that one. And again, in Prague at the Hotel Alcron where she used to stay, there's a – I was in Prague a few years back, just before Covid. There's a plaque in her name which should be hanging outside the Alcron and in fact they did it at the time but because it was all in such a hurry, it fell down and it broke and they promised to get it repaired. Well, I have been tracking it down. I now find that the Alcron has been sold to another owner who knows nothing about this. And the next time I'm back in Prague – but Herbert Warriner – I don't know whether you – have you interviewed him?

*No.*

Oh, right. Well, he's written a book about his aunt, Doreen Warriner. And I think he's sort of looking into that as well because there should be a memory plaque because she did a lot. I mean she introduced Nicholas Winton to the whole tragedy really.

*And there was Trevor Chadwick.*

That's right. And Trevor Chadwick, who first of all, came to collect two children, saw what was going on, went back and stayed, and he was responsible for putting them on the train. [02:42:09] You know, Nicholas would phone and say, put five children on the train, put twenty children on the train, and he would do that. He had a very sad life finally.

*Why?*

Well, I think he – I think he married about three times but I think he drank. You know, I think he – it wasn't – yeah, he died in Canada, I think. Yeah. And then there was a man called Barazetti who we don't know very much about. But there was a team. And Beatrice Wellington, that was another – she was an MP and when Nicholas writes about her, he said she kept interfering in and forgetting her handbag everywhere and he was quite entertaining about her. But she was involved in getting the children out.

*So in the – at the time when you met Nicholas Winton until he died, you had a relationship with him?*

Oh, yes.

*You knew him well.*

Yes, yes.

*So just tell us maybe what is your main memories of Nicholas Winton.*

Well, he was a very warm personality. He came to stay with me. Because he was a Rotarian and one year there was an international conference in Blackpool and where he was actually being given the highest award that Rotary do, so he came to stay with me. He was a very fast driver and there was one incident where he was ninety-four, I had a message from Prague from a friend who knew Nicholas very well, that some young airmen were flying over in a four-seater Cessna – and, well, that's like a plane with four chairs in it – you probably know what a Cessna is – would he like a flight? [02:44:00] And by now he was sort in a wheelchair more or less and Barbara said, 'well, I'll see what he thinks' [coughs]. So, he said, oh, yes, he'd very much like to fly. So, I went down to Maidenhead where he lived and we drove to this little airport and Barbara looked at the plane and said, [laughs] I'm not getting in that [coughs]. So I climbed in the back and I'm not very good at heights and he got in the front with the pilot. And once we took off – every plane has dual controls and I saw the pilot point to the ones in front of Nicholas and he nodded his head, gets hold of the controls and for half an hour I'm being piloted by a 104-year-old pilot, you know [laughs]. Anyway, the real pilot landed the plane. And we've got a little movie of this actually. And he got out and said, well, just like riding a bicycle. You never forget. You know. And another time I mean he was at a dinner with me in the Czech Republic, some – and the maid – the lady came round with the coffee and said, oh – and said, Nicholas, how would you like your coffee? In a cup [laughs] was his answer, you know. And he could – he quoted Shakespeare, he – and he also did embroidery and I – I'm very lucky, I have one of his at home that he did. He wasn't

at all mechanical. He loved opera, he loved classical music, and he had friends I believe who used to take him up to London to the opera house, yes.

*But in the film, in – Anthony Hopkins portrays him quite emotional.*

Yes, I think he wasn't as emotional as he was portrayed, although I did twice see him – I know when Esther Rantzen – that evening, there were – once or twice he sort of just wipes his eyes, and he did on that original evening. [02:46:14] And then one event, excuse me, don't film it- yes, again – and again I could have shown you on my stick. He's on a stage with – there were about 2000 children in this huge place and a choir sings a very lovely song and each time I hear it I sort of, you know, I can feel it. And he's sitting there and he's wiping his eyes. But that's the – certainly at his birthday parties or any other events, I have never seen him emotional. There are other people who might have seen him more often. I think there's a Ruth that used to visit him, with someone that lives near there. They may have seen him. But we, as far as we knew him, and I think Barbara writes in her book, he was not- he was not an emotional father. He said he was, you know, quite matter of fact. And he said it was the mother that sort of did all the – any – if there was any hugging to be done. Hugging was not his thing at all. I mean, you know, one met him and gave him a kiss on either cheek. I remember my children – no, no, grandchildren, I took them to visit him and they were small boys at the time and a bit overawed by him. And he's thinking, now, what can I give them as a present? And he went off and came back with a belt, a leather belt. He said, there you are, he said it's probably too big for you. You know, but they've got this leather belt. And also, he liked making bonfires in the garden. He was a very keen gardener so – and I have a feeling at one point he took the boys out, you know, to light a bonfire. But when I used to go down occasionally on my own, I'd stop off at Euston and pick up his fav – some of his favourite food was rice pudding and cauliflower cheese and I'd take that. [02:48:11] And he had a very nice carer who would come and visit him and I saw her – she was actually at the premiere which was very nice. And we'd heat up this. And he used to, once Greta died, he sort of got himself in the kitchen and he would heat up his own food and look after himself quite a lot because everybody else lived quite a long way away from him. Sorry. So, he was always very friendly, yeah.

*So do you think the reason why for all these years this was unknown, was that it just wasn't a big deal for him or why do you think –*

He was- how should I put it. He wasn't looking to be talked about. When he was, and when he had to do, then he went along. I think he got used to it in a sense because he was invited to Israel, he was invited to America, certainly he was very welcome in Prague. Now, I remember one visit – that was the last one – in Bratislava, when the Queen came. Now, the Queen had never been to Slovakia before. She had never visited those countries. And Joe Schlesinger, Vera Gissing, Alf Dubs and I had been invited to attend this and we first had a meeting at the Slovak – the British embassy, with the British ambassador and Nicky was there and the next day the Queen was coming. And I know his- the British ambassador's wife said she had quite a job trying to sort out this dinner we were all going to go to, with the Slovak chefs knowing what the Queen likes and what the Slovak food could be like, you know, dumplings and sauerkraut and all that, sort of to try and put together a menu.

[02:50:17] So we then – the following day we went to this castle that's just outside Bratislava and there was a children's choir there and the Queen came and that's when we met her. And I thought how really smart she looked. She had a lovely grey hat and Slovaks' uniform have feathers in their hats and she had something similar. She – it was really – it was a very clever piece of design. And evidently, they were taking her off – she'd never been in a funicular before. They were taking her off into the mountains, you know, to have a ride. And then that evening there was an official dinner to which we had been asked and she was at the top table and she wasn't particularly fond of classical music. I mean she liked musicals but there was a Czech orchestra, there was a Slovak orchestra there, playing some very nice stuff. She gave a lovely speech and I have a copy of this speech actually. And then on the way out – oh, before that when the reception was there, I noticed a lady standing in the corner and she had a very interesting evening dress on, sort of a one-arm thing. And I went up to her and I said, you're English, aren't you? You're on your own. She said yes, I am the Queen's dresser. She's just written a book.

*Yeah, I know who you mean. I don't know her name.*

That's who she was, yeah. 'Cos she was there to look after her, you know. So we were – I've got a picture of her as well. [02:52:02] We were chatting away and then the Queen and the Duke came and as we were in – went into the dining room, we were all introduced to them and [clears throat] – and on the way out she passed Nicholas's table and she tapped him on the shoulder and said, I'll see you on the plane tomorrow. Because they actually flew him back on her plane. He wasn't really well at the time. And then the last time I saw him, when President Zeman invited him to the castle and I think he was 105 then. We didn't know whether he'd make it. And they organised – I was there, Vera must have been there, certainly Zuzana. And they had found pictures of us as children and we were sitting in this huge reception hall with us and our picture next to us. And the other person that was getting a medal was Winton's grandson. I think he was called Nicholas. He wasn't called Nicholas Winton. Nicholas – but he was Nicholas Winton's grandson. And the two of them were getting medals. And Barbara Winton was there. And Nicky, he was fine and he was in a wheelchair and the president gave a speech and then he gave the microphone to Nicky, who started talking and he started rambling on a bit. Barbara had to sort of stop him, you know. And that's really the last time he was in Prague. And he was given this medal of – it was the highest medal you can get in the Czech Republic. And I remember visiting him back at his home one day and again I've got this picture and he was showing him his medals and he put it on, on his – he had – he was in his pyjamas and he put it on over his pyjama. [02:54:03] He said, I don't know why I've got this for, you know.

*So he was quite modest?*

Yeah, very. And he had a great sense of humour as well, yes. He was, he was – he really was a modest person and he always kept saying, I don't like talking about the past, I think we need to think about the future. And this is where he gave this talk, when there were these 2000 children who had all got their mobiles with their lights out and they were all – it was lovely, all waving their lights. And he was saying, this is not the time to make a long speech. My children have told me I must not, although I like speaking. This is what he said. But I have two things I need to say about trying to do something every day, something positive every day, and trying to learn how to compromise. He said every husband and wife have to learn how to compromise and although it's not a word that's popular, this is something that you

need to think about in the future. And he was saying that all those years ago. I think that sums him up properly, probably.

*And Milena, just to talk briefly about your own role as a Holocaust educator talking to schools, so you started doing that –*

Well, it all began – I wish I could remember how it first began but I think it was after that I put some pictures together and I was asked to go and talk. First of all, it wasn't a school, it was a women's – WI, Women's Institute and that's really what started it. I kept being asked to go to them. And then I think the schools started with the Holocaust Educational Trust and I started getting requests, the word started going around and also schools began – the sixth form schools began to do Holocaust studies. [02:56:05] There are still some who don't but many now do and I started getting asked to children as young as ten and eleven, which slightly bothered me. You know, Year 9. And I said to every teacher, before I come to your school you've got to tell the children something. I can't just turn up and tell them, you know, I was put on a train. You have to prepare them. And then I discovered that the Educational Trust do send out people who talk to young children who- so everywhere I went they already knew what was to come, and they'd already done drawings. And what was also interesting, that the younger children came prepared with loads of questions which they didn't worry about. I mean they were shouting them out. Now, when I was talking to teenagers they came in very quietly. I have to admit, they all listened and I did notice. They really did. There was no fidgeting. But they were very hesitant at asking questions afterwards. The teachers told me they'd talked about it in class but they didn't like standing up in front of each other. Yeah. Just a very few, but mostly. And then it just spread. It was school after school and I said that the final year, just before Covid, I had visited eighty schools, you know, almost two a week and all over the place.

*And what – in these talks, what is your main message? What's the main message you give?*

Oh, I think the main message was that if you can just imagine where you are, if you can do something, you do something about it. Also, about bullying, you know, I think there's a message there for children, you know, if they're different, if there's a Jewish child at school

and they have no idea what that means, what he is, to learn something about what a Jew is really. [02:58:07] It's really what is an example, what is it about altruism I suppose, doing something for someone else without expecting to – expecting anything in return.

*And how did you find it for yourself, talking about your past? Did you find it difficult at the beginning or did it change while you were doing it?*

At first I did. And then almost – it got a bit automatic after a while. And then when it stopped during Covid I thought to myself, I'm, you know, I'm just churning out the same thing and I'm almost making – not making things up but I need to have a real think through. And I sort of went a bit into a history, not of the Holocaust, of what happened about the occupation and about *Anschluss* and all that and put together another PowerPoint finally because at one point I used slides then I found that they were more interested in pictures than in listening to you then I did it without, which worked fine. But I felt myself I've got to do something else to keep me going, in a sense. So, I now in a sense start with 1933 because again, whether they're junior schools, whether they're senior schools, unless they're having Holocaust education, they have no idea what *Anschluss* was, they have no idea what was going on in central Europe, they don't know anything that happened in Palestine, in Israel. So, I sort of kick off with Hitler becoming chancellor and I say, and you know, the first concentration camp was in '34, it was Dachau and it wasn't for Jews, it was for communists, it was for social democrats and then he started clamping down on the Jews. [03:00:21] And some of the people in Dachau were sent there for a while, they got out again and then he saw – he already planned he was going to conquer the rest of Europe and there is a map which you can see. And then of course he invaded Austria where he was welcomed by many Austrians. There were many ethnic Germans living in Austria. And the Night of the Broken Glass came, which we're – which is any day now – in fact it's on the 9<sup>th</sup> [November]. And I'm surprised we're having this film premiere on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Whether people thought about it or not, I don't know. And then – and I show – and I tell them about the occupation of the Czech Republic.

*So you give a context?*

That's right, about what happened. The one thing they did – it's just going out of me.



*Austria. Just before [inaudible].*

Not – no, after Austria, the Czech Republic, yeah, that all those people in that area were overnight thrown out of their homes, the Jewish people. And that is where the story comes in, that Prague was surrounded by refugees who had come from that area, who had nowhere to live, who were put up in tents and they show a little bit of that in the film but I don't think it's explained properly that these refugees were Czechs, Czech Jews, who'd been thrown out of their homes, who possibly had relations in Prague, some of them had gone on to Slovakia. [03:02:11] If they had money, they were still able to leave the country. In spite of the film, I think that's – I don't know how you felt, it's not made clear enough but to an English person looking at it for the first time, it probably doesn't matter. It's just part of a – part of the story. I think this is where those of us who know, you know, find it a bit strange. Sorry, I've sort of lost the – lost the plot [laughs].

*Yeah. But Milena, did you find –*

Oh, how I felt when I was doing this – the talk.

*Yeah.*

So I have sort of redone it and I suppose it's because I'm getting older or I don't know what it is, and I'm finding it difficult coming to certain parts, talking about leaving, talking about my grandparents, talking about what happened. And then, you know, you get through it and I go to the rest of the story. And people ask me how can you do it time after time but, well, you do it, you know.

*But you find it's becoming more difficult at certain points?*

Yes, I'm finding it more difficult now, thinking about my cousins, you know, especially with what's happening, you know, in Israel, thinking about – and not long ago when I was in Prague I was in the street where my grandparents used to live when they moved to Prague.

You see, because we never knew what happened to them for many, many years, you know, during the war, even after the war. And if my parents might have known but they didn't tell us. [03:04:02] Yeah, so I mean you never – I, you know, you never get over it obviously.

*So that brings me to the next question. What impact do you think did your experience have on your life?*

It's a very difficult question, is that, what impact. It's – I could only say it's always there at the back of my mind, you know, what happened. And my children know about it. We don't constantly talk about it, you know, but – and as they're English, oddly enough, my sister actually had a *bat mitzvah* in her sixties. She's – I think I- She certainly realised she was Jewish because she has a son who's- who is- not a Baptist minister- oh, God. He's a minister but a Christian minister but not Protestant, not Methodist. And she herself had permission to do weddings. She can do that, she can do. But they have *Hanukkah*, they've done away with Christmas, they don't go to the synagogue but she does have the festivals and she does now count herself, 'I am Jewish'. You know, absolutely. She, as I say, she had a *bat mitzvah*. And she wrote this wonderful book of poems, two of which I use when I give my talk because they're about the label and what the label means to her and what the label basically means to us. It's the label that saved our lives, you know. [03:06:00] So I don't know whether that partially answers your question.

*Yeah. So, she considers herself now Jewish.*

Oh, absolutely.

*What about you, Milena? What do you consider yourself now?*

Well, I know I am but I have – but we still do Christmas because I have an English family. Whether eventually as the children get older or the grandsons get older, because my two children are Jewish because I am but George has married a Catholic girl, Jane married a Methodist and as the family goes on, they're not. But looking at my son, [laughs] he looks very Jewish actually, funnily enough, yes. But he is taking an interest in his past. I suppose

they weren't brought up to do it. Perhaps I should have done it but I think I've been more concentrating on the past, of what's happened on the Holocaust, without involving the family. Although my son has given a few talks at schools as well, you know, on what I've told him, what I've told.

*But you said you didn't talk about it too much or you had [overtalking] children.*

Well...

*With your husband, did you talk about it at all?*

George – my husband – well, he knew about it. We didn't – no, we never discussed it. And again, while he was alive, I think his – the main thing that went on in the life was his work, was the firm. And I was involved with quite a lot of things. I was involved with the Liverpool Phil, with bringing Czech students over, with demonstrating cookery- with all kinds of non-Jewish events, if you like, until the talks started and then I slowly – well, the Phil, I was always involved with, that wasn't a problem. [03:08:12] But I sort of – physically in any case it got too much to go around doing cookery demonstrations and I started really concentrating on doing the talks.

*So, the cookery demonstrations was on this-*

With the Remoska.

*Remoska?*

Yeah, with the Remoska, which was another part of my life that I was quite involved quite a lot. And in fact –

*Just explain what a Remoska is.*

Well, this is a special electric pan which cooks with the lid. It's very basic. You can't make it hotter or colder. You switch it on, you put the stuff in cold, it bakes. The only thing – it fries but you have to leave the lid on. Earlier this year I was actually invited to go to the opening of a new factory that they've just built. They've changed the design of the pot but not the design of the actual working. And the amazing thing about it is that it cooks practically anything with half the amount of power. Where your oven takes up 1200 watts, this thing takes up 450, and it does the same thing. So the people that were mainly intrigued were the WI, you know. And Lakeland, which is the shop that sells the Remoska, had us in there demonstrating it. But what people don't realise though, when you're watching cookery demonstrations, a half-an-hour cookery demonstration takes a day and a half preparation because here's one I made before, this is what goes into it, here are all the items, and you need at least three people, you know, behind you to carry on because you've got to keep on talking. [03:10:05] That's the other thing that's very clever about these chefs, that they can keep on chatting while they're chopping up the onion and one had to learn to do this. And it was successful. It was fine. We had some, you know, great times going around different stores. We've been to Windsor, all over places, in the shops. But setting up – and they used to invite these WIs and they're bringing it with you in the car. And then the worst thing is washing up everything when you go home, you know. It was quite an exercise, yes. And half of it was voluntary, yes. And writing – one of the nice things to happen, I had a message from the Czech Republic from a publisher lady who said she wanted to write, do a book about me and the Remoska. And we had translated Czech recipes into English but this time I had to translate, or they did, English recipes into Czech. They published a beautiful hardback book and they called it Lady Remoska and it was – it became a bit of a joke in the Czech Republic. I mean I saw it in the shops, with Lady Remoska, with scones and things like that translated into Czech.

*So you were Lady Remoska?*

And I'm Lady – I'm known as Lady Remoska, yes. Yes.

*So it sounds like food played an important part for you, or the Czech food.*

Oh, yes, we, well, mostly it would be English food but you can't make dumplings in it. That's one of the few things. Well, you could if you got the water hot enough but not really because once you take the lid off, you're taking away the source of heat, you see. But otherwise, yeah, I mean fish is fantastic. Fish cooks in ten minutes. [03:12:01]

*So do you use it?*

Oh, all – I have four at home and I use them all the time. In fact, I try to adapt as many recipes as I can because it does save – it saves washing up, you don't have to put the gas on, you don't have to put the oven on. And oh, yes, I can do most things in it.

*So is it like a steam – no, okay.*

No, it's not like a slow cooker.

*Not like a slow cooker?*

No, no. People say, is it just – it's not, because it heats up quite quickly and because the element is in the lid and it's round, the heat comes down the sides and underneath. It's a very clever invention, which was invented in the '50s. Very often because during the communist era a lot of things were limited, people had small kitchens and, you know, I mean they now have three sizes and there used to be a little mini one which they've – sadly they've stopped making. And it was very economical. That was the main thing. And what you can do, I mean we used to have stories of farmers, there was rubbish as this, and then one guy discovered that if he puts his bacon in and his egg in and his something else in, and puts the lids on and goes away, I used to say, go away and have a cigarette, come back and have – there's a cooked breakfast, you know. I used to make a joke about this, a jacket potato, we'd say, put jacket potatoes in, go off and have a gin and tonic, read a book, you know, come back.

*That was your promotion?*

There it is, yes.

*Okay. I'll have to look in to it.*

It is – well, if you look in to it, yes, you can go on Google and you can find it – or go into Amazon and put Remoska and you can find it on there. And then there is a storr in- near London, if you – if there's a Lakeland shop then they sell it. It's the only shop – it's the only store that sells it because it's not easy to sell. And they tried to put it – they gave ex – they gave Lakeland exclusive but they tried to put it into other stores but you'd walk straight past it, you wouldn't know what it is unless you have it explained and the patience, you know, to wait to see the results, then you won't sell it. [03:14:16] But this new factory is actually fantastic. They were making, you know, 500 a week. They're churning out 1000 a day. And there's a new one that's just come out which has three different lids on it. You can either use it as a Remoska lid or you can put it on your electric or gas stove or you can put it in the oven. So it can be used – it's much more solid and [laughs] I'm selling it here, and you can literally use it three ways because it has three different lids and it – you can use in the oven, one you can use on top of the stove, and the Remoska lid which has the electric power. And it's very good. I do, I use them – I use them a lot and my family do as well. They all know it.

*So what is your favourite Czech food, Milena? What – or recipe?*

Well, one thing you – well, you can bake in it, apple strudel. You can make apple strudel in it. Oh, yes, I can do that. Roast duck probably, which – with the whole family. This is our Christmas thing. We don't do turkey, we do duck legs – duck legs and goose. Yeah. You could roast a goose in it if it was a small goose. You can cook – a chicken is fantastic, a roast chicken in a Remoska. That's one of the main things that they try and sell you, you know, roast chicken, chicken legs. I mean if you put a layer of potatoes and onions in and just sit chicken legs on there, switch it on, you've got a dinner, you know, it's done.

*Okay, okay.*

Yeah. I could do you a demonstration [laughs].

*Not now, unless you have one in your bag.*

Not one with me, no, sorry [laughs].

*Well, there was about coming – speaking about your identity, so how would you describe yourself today? [03:16:03] Do you feel British or Czech or –*

Well, no, I – I go back to Prague a lot but I would not go back to live. No, definitely not. I think my whole attitude is probably different. I think Czechs tend to be a bit- not defeatist but- I think the other person – the other garden is a bit greener type of people, I think, although I have some great friends who aren't. And one of my greatest friends actually – and I bring them over regularly every year – is a dance group called 'Cimbalovka' and with them comes a man who has a vineyard, Stan Mádl, and he's from Moravia and he always comes with loads and loads of wine and he leaves me with loads and loads of wine. And they're about to come in two weeks' time [coughs] and this troupe come and we get a lot of Czech expats for this and they sing and dance and they bring a *cimbálovka*, which is like a dulcimer, if you know what a *cimbálovka* is? Yes. So this is the big attraction. So, they sing and dance and I do do the food. I mean I do food for a hundred quite easily. I did a hundred duck legs two years ago which I confit beforehand, something I learnt to do in France. Oh, that's another story, yes, because let me backtrack. We have a daughter who lives in France, who persuaded us one year to buy a property down in the *Midi* which we had for thirty years, which we also let basically but used to go down regularly and with my past cookery history with a Remoska and speaking French, and another little career. [03:18:00] Okay, I have to – another story, a separate story altogether, okay. One day I was reading a magazine and I saw a French cookery holiday that you could go out on, a French cookery holiday. And I sort of said to my husband, that'd be nice. Well, he said, well, go, you know. So off I trotted with twenty other ladies to Deauville, where we were having a week's cookery holiday, cookery demonstrations, with an English guide who was our interpreter. But I by then was speaking fluent French and as soon as she started doing her interpreting for the chef, I realised very quickly that she wasn't a cook, she was interpreting exactly what he was saying, you know. And twenty-four hours later she came to me and she said, I've got to take one of our people to hospital, she's not very well. Do you think you could take over for me and do the translating?

I couldn't wait. And I did, and of course I was chitchatting to him, you see, and commenting and he said to me after, he said, wouldn't you like to do this? I said no, no, this is May's job. We got through the week, that's fine, came back to England and I thought, interesting job, that. And I rang up the firm – it was called Page & Moy – and they said, oh – I said, could I speak to one of the directors? And this woman said, you know, what's it about? I said, well, I've just been on one of the holidays, I'm quite interested in possibly – would you like another interpreter? And she said oh, she said, you've got to write in about this. So I put the phone down. This was January. I thought, well, I'm not – I wasn't looking for work, it just sounded interesting [coughs]. Well, the following June I got a phone call from Page & Moy saying that May was being sent on a three-week tour somewhere and she'd given them my name as a possible replacement. [03:20:02] And for the next three years I was out there twice a year working as an interpreter on cookery courses, learnt how to demonstrate cookery, which takes me back to Remoska. This is before Remoska. Once we got the Remoska and we had to do demonstrations, I had learnt an awful lot about how to demonstrate cookery, so it stood me in very good stead. And that was a big learning curve, you know, going to France, living there and having different groups of ladies. I used to go three weeks at a time. Again, I had this lovely husband who said, you know, go. But I learnt a lot obviously. Yeah.

*Hmm, the demonstrations.*

Yeah. So yeah, so I've still got some paper cuttings somewhere. And then back in Preston, having done these demonstration cookery, I thought it would be nice to have a French cookery demonstration so I got in touch with the chef in Deauville and he said, well, February would be a good time. So, I then got in touch with the electricity board in Preston and said, what do you think about doing a week and you could promote your goods. And Preston had a big concert hall with different rooms in it and they were very happy to say, right, we'll convert one of these rooms into a lecture room. So, it took about six months [coughs] to set up a French cookery week. And the electricity board built a kitchen, you know, we advertised, local shops provided me with free food because I was advertising their food, we wrote leaflets, I found four other friends who were very keen cooks and we had a French cookery week which was followed by Austrian cookery week, which was followed by



a Greek cookery week, a Mediterranean cookery week. After that my husband said it was costing him far too much money to stop doing it [laughs] because I mean we were charging silly prices, you know, for – £7 for a whole day event. [03:22:07] But again it was- and then I organised something like they have in Birmingham these days, you know, these big food fairs in the Guild Hall itself and it was called ‘Hooray for Home Cooking’ and it was to get different firms to come in with their goods. And that was a pre-run to what went on in Birmingham because when Birmingham opened, they actually came after me and they wanted to use the title, ‘Hooray for Home Cooking’, and I wouldn't let it go. And I kept it because when I got the Remoska, my little business was called ‘Hooray for Home Cooking’. And well, I said my business. I was translating and helping Lakeland but under that name.

*Hooray for Home Cooking.*

Hooray. Hooray for Home Cooking, yeah.

*So I'm thinking this must have all helped you to – in the end with your Holocaust education talks.*

Well, yeah, I mean just –

*Because you are relating to people.*

Absolutely, yes. And talking and yes, and linking people and just delving into, you know, if I couldn't find a contact I would just – I have to admit the title helped, naughtily, a lot, you know, because if I wanted to go after a firm, after a food firm to see whether they'd give me free samples I'd say it's Lady Grenfell-Baines, so they'd put me straight through. And the best thing was to get pally with the secretary, not with the boss but with the secretary. And, you know, if you got friendly with her then it was fine. So, you learnt all sorts of tricks, you know, like that.

*And Milena, talking about Holocaust education, do you think – and you've done it now, so for many years – how do you feel today in the light of, I don't know, what's happening maybe today? [03:24:00] Do you feel –*

We have to – I think –

*Has it achieved something?*

I mean they're saying the Holocaust is becoming a part of ancient history but it's not because it's happening all the time in a sense. You know, when you look at Kosovo, you know, look at what happened in what was Yugoslavia, what was in Greece, what goes in Syria. It's there all the time in a different name, in a different guise. And it must not, it must not be forgotten. And you must worry in case people start getting bored. You know, oh, not again sort of business.

*Yeah, there's a fatigue, a sort of Holocaust education fatigue.*

That's right, yeah, yes. Yeah. But so far, I have to say, each time we do this, each teacher comes back and says this is wonderful, will you come back, and I've been back to the same schools a few times, you know, as the years go on. And the children really listen to you because it's something I think that – it's an item they won't come across in their children's books, in their stories, you know, being put on a train when you're three and when you're four. And I sometimes say to them – occasionally when I've travelled back from Manchester to Preston on a train, if it's a four o'clock train it is absolutely packed and I – and it's not that far where you can't stand the journey. And I have occasionally stood there in the packed train – you can – you're nodding your head, you can – thinking, this happened three, four days, you know, with nothing, yeah. And sometimes I'd love to take the mobiles away from these children. [03:26:06] I'd say, try and do without that for two hours, try and do without your tea for twenty-four hours or whatever. You know, I'd probably get sacked for – these days, you know.

*What do you think – how do you see the future of Holocaust education? Are you – I mean now, for example, second, third generations are going giving talks.*

Well, we're, as you know, they are asking for young ambassadors to come forward to learn. And schools now are taking pupils to Auschwitz. They are doing visits far more and more. And I think from what I see from the AJR, they are getting youth to take this up. And you know Trudi. And do you know her daughter?

*Yeah.*

Well, did you happen to see? 'Cos I watch Count – Lockdown University. You know it?

*Yeah.*

Yeah. Well, I was watching the two of them the other day and I was thinking what a bright girl the daughter is and there must be more of them. I talked at Lancaster University who have a Jewish section. Strangely enough, the Lancashire University, Central University, there's only one professor I know who is Jewish, who I happen to know, and he's a friend of mine who gave – because I'm an honorary fellow there – but as far as we know there are no Jewish students there in the entire university. I've talked in Cambridge, and of course, I know Oxford, they, you know, they have, Huddersfield, there must be – Leeds, I haven't been to Leeds but I know there's a big Jewish community in Leeds. [03:28:01] I'm not – Leicester I think has a big Jewish community but they have a – they have their own people there in Leicester. But then –

*Do you feel it makes a difference being up north or –*

I'm sure it does make a difference. I think – also I'm – I wonder about these counties like Devon, or you'll see, you're going to Cornwall, but those outlying places, do they have any idea to, Northumberland, Scotland. I've been to Edinburgh, I've been to Glasgow. And of course, Glasgow has a Jewish – I've got a book, they have a big Jewish community in Glasgow, yeah.

*In terms of – do you sometimes think what would have happened if without Hitler, if you hadn't had to leave Czechoslovakia?*

Well, I mean if nothing had happened, I mean Czechoslovakia was a very democratic country, in fact the most in central Europe. People don't realise how many – how much was invented in our country. And it would have – I mean there was always a slight problem between the Slovaks and the Czechs. I doubt whether they would have done what they have done since. I don't think they would have divided somehow because they had the Hungarians on their tails as well, the Hungarians and the Romanians, and they had the Ukrainians. I- learning about what was happening in those days, there was always a worry from those outlying countries. And certainly in the Czech Republic, in the Sudetenland, there were a lot of ethnic Germans who didn't like being classed as Czechs. But I think, you know, Masaryk and Beneš [coughs] – I mean it was a very progressive, cultured country. **[03:30:04]** And hopefully now, having just heard the new Czech's president, very good speech. It will reinvent – not reinvent itself – reborn itself or revert itself to carry on being a big democratic country. I mean after that first reunion that we had, I then organised another three and I wrote to Havel and wrote to the then-Slovak president and have – and both of them wrote to us and I gave the original letters to Llanwrtyd Wells, you know, congratulating us on the schools and being very glad that we as past pupils are still meeting, meeting each other.

*Because I'm thinking what's interesting, of course, the school and also the Nicholas Winton transport is a Czechoslovak story as well.*

Yes, that's right, yes.

*But of course then in the wartime the experience was very different in Czech Republic and in Slovakia.*

No, no. Well, yes, but in the school, in the Eng –

*No, that's what I'm saying, not –*

It was a Czechoslovak school, that's – yeah.

*Exactly, yeah, but –*

And we had Slovak teachers. But whether there was any underlying problems, because there was always, you know, even when Czechoslovakia was Czechoslovakia, the Slovaks were always counted as second-class citizens. I mean there were composers, writers, people who were basically not known about. So, in the Czech school, I know our art master was Slovak. I can't remember of the teachers who else were. I think all the – and everything was taught in Czech, not in Slovak. But one could understand each other's language. Now, I believe these days some of the children in the Czech Republic say they can't understand Slovak, you know, it's a bit of a rumour that this – but no, and two of my great friends in Preston are Slovak and there are two schools going on in Manchester. [03:32:12] In fact, there are six Czech schools in this country now and Slovak one. These are Saturday schools. And there's a very successful one in Manchester and there's one in Edinburgh and the new consul is a young Czech girl. We have a great consul in Manchester who's sadly moving on.

*Because you're also very involved with the British Czechoslovak – what it's called?*

Oh, yes.

*British Czechoslovak Society, or what's it called?*

Well, there's – no, there's a Czech school, there's a Czech society. There isn't a Czechoslovak society. The BCSA.

*Yeah, BCSA, British –*

Czech and Slovak Association.

*Association, that's what I mean, yeah.*

That's right, yes. And –

*You are very involved with them?*

Yes, Zuzana Slobodová is one of the people – she's Slovak – who's part of it. And they publish – do you get 'The Review'?

*I got one actually, yeah.*

There's a Review. And we have one teacher actually in- well, he's retired, in Lytham which is near Preston, who was a headmaster of a very well-known boys' school, who actually in my time got the Czech ambassadors to come up and talk to the pupils, who also established a competition for Czech students over there and the winner – every three years the winner would get two weeks' holiday in England. And one of the girls who won the competition became a student at the University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland, got a first, won all the races over there, is now back in the Czech Republic, has been racing, you know, ski racing as a sportswoman and has now – has just opened a sports shop in Trutnov, which is not far from the mountains. [03:34:23] And it's someone I've been sponsoring, sponsoring for years as a student over there. I also sponsored a singer who got a scholarship for the Royal College of Music and although he got the scholarship, he needed help with living accommodations so three of us sponsored him for three years. And his uncle was of – he's just retired – was a famous opera singer in the Prague Opera House. And Vojtěch was hoping to do the same thing but it was discovered that he had a spinal problem which prevented him from long hours of singing. But he's now actually – I'm still in touch – because he's now recording manager for one of the big Czech orchestras and we are still in touch. But he was someone else that we helped to sponsor. So I suppose these were different ways of who we were helping, yeah.

*And you stay involved.*

Yeah, yeah. And I occasionally get calls and cards from past Czech students who have been over on cookery courses that we've looked after and they'll write and send me a postcard.

*So do you still consider yourself Czech or Czechoslovak or...*

Oh, no, no, I do consider myself as British which I suppose I have to really in a sense. But except in my soul, in my classical soul, you know, mainly because of literature and music probably, not the politics. [03:36:05] Hmm, yeah.

*And Milena, we're coming to the end slowly now. The film with Anthony Hopkins, 'One Life', is now about to be released in UK in January. You've seen it, you've been to the premiere. Maybe just share some thoughts with us, or what do you feel like at this – the Winton – do you think it's going to be very popular now?*

I think it's a film – yeah, I think it's a film that should be shown in schools. I think it's a film that definitely will be very useful as an educational film because as the years go by, all this will be history, you know, the Holocaust will be history. And I think these are events that really must not be forgotten and that young people realise that this really happened, this isn't a film, this is reality. And I think it needs to be used as part of the education of today's oncoming generation.

*Well, it will certainly receive a lot of- I guess- publicity.*

Yeah. And it will be interesting. It would be good to know the reactions, it will be good to ask to the – for the schools to ask their students to write their thoughts, to record how they feel about it, and whether it will affect anybody's behaviour.

*Okay, thank you, Milena. Is there anything else I haven't asked you, something you'd like to add? We have discussed quite a few things.*

Gosh. Right, I probably when I get home tonight, I'll remember everything I forgot to tell you. [03:38:00] But I think I'll be very grateful for what you're doing.

*Anything else?*

I – no, I think mainly it's the education that's needed in today's schools. I think even your average English person is still fairly ignorant as to what really happened. You see, England's never been occupied, not since 1066. They don't know what it's like to be told, you can't go to the park. We've just been to Russell Square, you know. You can't go to the cinema, you can't ride a bicycle, you can't own a radio, you can't. And they've never experienced that in this country. And the worry is with some of the demonstrations that have been going on recently and partly – it sounds daft – this health and safety business, you can't put your arm around a child when it falls down in the schoolyard. And that is ridic – but you can't. This is one of the rules and you can't – and to me this is the start of a 'you can't' era. So, it's – I feel there are times when you should – there should not be a 'you can't'. I don't know whether I'm putting that rather badly but it's this stop, stop, stop.

*You think it should be more positive what you can do?*

Yeah, absolutely.

*Have you got a message for anyone who might watch this interview in the future, based on your experiences? [03:40:00]*

I think the only message is the one that we were given, try and do something good every day.

*There was something actually I wanted to ask you. What happened to your – the foster parents? Did you stay in touch with them or –*

Oh, very much so. They had the one – they just had one daughter, Mary, and Mary married but she went to live in the south of England so we totally lost touch with her. And I often wondered what she thought. She was sixteen when we arrived and she never kept in touch with us. But certainly with the Radcliffes, I mean they came to our weddings, you know, they were very much part of our family. And also, their friends that we knew, and in the street



where we lived, for instance, you know, when thinking back, this was a perfect example of someone doing something for someone. Daddy Radcliffe – we had an old lady next door and she was known as the auntie next door. She was no relation. And he used to go in there and light her fire every day. And auntie next door used to keep budgies but not in a cage. She used to keep hundreds of budgies that used to fly – can you imagine, all around the sort of – the house was like ours, you know, sitting room, back room. So, there was auntie next door. And then there was another down the road, there was a boy called Arthur I remember. If you want a few memories, I remember Alexandra Street, we'd play a game called Kick Can with the children outside. You would kick a can and run as far as you could and hide and then you had to, you know, to get back you had to run and then stand still if the person was chasing you turned around to look at you. It was an old-fashioned game. They don't play it like that anymore. Hopscotch, you know, pavement, pantomimes. [03:42:02] I do remember my first Gilbert and Sullivan which was, Ko-Ko, the, oh, goodness me. Mikado. 'The Mikado'. And 'The Mikado' was a film made in 1939, it was an American film and I remember it and strangely enough, many, many years later I was in Brighton and in Brighton there was a house which was the museum to Gilbert and Sullivan. And we went to have a look inside and they had a tape, a recording of that 1939 Mikado. And I remember the songs from 'The Mikado'. Gilbert and Sullivan are not that popular these days.

*But do you think the daughter resented that she had to move out to – you said the daughter had to move out.*

As far as we know, Mary, she went to live with her grandmother. They used to see her regularly. I mean I think she would come home on Sundays. But she was already working. Now, whether she was working in a mill, because this was very – it was a mill town – Mary, or – and I don't know who she married. We know nothing about the wedding or about – again, we were small children and she was already sixteen, so, you know, another four years, she may have got married by then and I – we would have been away from them. But we were always in touch with the Radcliffes. Oh, yes. They were very much part of our lives.

*Okay. Lady Grenfell-Baines, thank you so much for giving us this interview.*

Thank you.

*And we're going to now look at your photographs.*

Right. [03:44:00] How do you want to do this?

*Just one second.*

[Pause] Sorry. My gosh, it's four o'clock.

*[Pause] Yes, please. Can you tell us what you're wearing on your neck, please?*

Oh, this is the label that was given to me when we were getting on the train that evening and it says British Committee – you can see the word British has been spelt wrongly – child transport, Fleischmann, Milena, going to London. And my number was 641. And on the back it has the stamp of Harwich when we actually landed. Port officer, that's right. And then we also had to carry this with us. It says, this document requires no visa. And on the back it has the German stamp that it was valid until the 15<sup>th</sup> of August and we actually arrived on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of – we actually arrived on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August there.

*The German stamp, it's a visa that allows you to travel through Germany? [03:46:00]*

Well, this was it. This was it. We didn't – there was no visa. This counted as a visa. And it did say, this document of identity is issued with the approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to young persons to be admitted to the United Kingdom for educational purposes under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for Children. And then here, leave the land granted at Harwich this day on condition that the holder does not enter any employment paid or unpaid while in the United Kingdom – well, I was nine years old [laughs] so I suppose that cleared me – immigration officer, 2<sup>nd</sup> of August. And then the badge actually matches the badge that's on here. And yeah, that's me, that's my photograph, my picture. Yeah. And the address and my birth date. British Committee for Children in Prague which is what Nicholas Winton basically invented because there was no British – there was no

committee for children until he started one. So, this was a sort of an unofficial stamp that he invented, the one at the bottom.

*The British Committee for Children in Prague.*

That's right, yeah. Yes. And then – shall I go on with the autograph book?

*One second. I just want to take a picture. If you turn it around, please. Yeah. Thank you. One second. [Pause] One moment. [03:48:05] Okay. And now if you take that off, please. Thank you. Can I just move this for a second? [Pause]*

*Okay, okay. Milena, please tell us what you're holding in your hand.*

Well, in my hand I'm holding the autograph book which my grandfather gave me when we boarded the – before we boarded the train on the night I was leaving. And his message – and I'm going to read it in Czech – is "*Milenko, buď pamětlivá toho, aby jsi byla věrná dcera národa, z kterého jsi vyšla a věrná tvých milých rodičů jako i dědečka, který tě má tak moc rád. Praha, 31. července 1939, v 9 hodin večer*" - which basically says, 'be faithful to the country that you are leaving, to your parents and to your grandfather who loves you very much. Prague, 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1939, nine o'clock in the evening.' And then it so happens that on the same page I've got Nicky Winton and Anthony Hopkins and the then-president, President Zeman, when they opened the book, that's where they signed it. **[03:50:14]**

*They signed it? Show it to us!*

Oh, yes, yes. That's Zeman, that's Nicky, Anthony Hopkins.

*So Anthony Hopkins just recently, I assume?*

Yes, that was – that's right because he wanted to see it. By chance, Isobel Baillie, who was a very famous soprano who I was sorry but she also signed it on this page, because I gave them the book, and at one time I tried to cover it but I thought, well, you know, I might as well

leave it there. And gosh, one of the prime ministers – I'm trying to think who that was – David – both of – which prime minister?

*Cameron?*

That's him, yeah. And it was a reception at Number Ten for some event, so he did that, yes. And then well, I've got hundreds. I'll find you Hugo Marom's. This was done on D-Day actually by Hanuš Šnábl, one of the people who was one Esther Rantzen's programme, yeah. I have to go leafing through it.

*Hugo, let's read Hugo's, yes, please, that would be lovely because I knew him.*

This was the school nurse: 'The future lies before you like a path of driven snow. Be careful how you tread it, dear, for every mark will show. 'All good wishes. You see, all these good thoughts that, er, I don't know if I can find Hugo's. It's somewhere here. [03:52:02] Oh, that was the maths master: 'Sit in the corner and if you are good, they might find you.' That's it. And Dr Fried who was the Czech teacher in Prague who taught English, and the first time he signed it was in 19 – it says '41 here. It must have been later than that. In memory of your stay in the Czechoslovak school in Great Britain, your teacher of English, Dr Fried. And then in 1985 'after forty years of my greeting, I think you have grown into a marvellous woman [laughs]. Your former teacher, Dr Fried' [laughs]. 'Cos they were all sure that I'd be absolute rubbish at school. They were all – this is the – these are the Russian – I don't know whether you read Russian – these are the – this was the Russian delegation that came – I have no idea what it says – came to the school, yeah. Jan Masaryk, the son of the president, Mil – to my – dedicated to me. And Ernest Bevin. You remember that name?

*Yeah.*

'In 1940, in all things be kind to one another, love one another. Alderman Meeks, the mayor of Ashton-under-Lyne', and that was in 1940. That was soon after, you know, we came. That was my aunt and uncle that did not survive. Líza Fuchsová, the pianist. William Jowitt. Barbara Ayrton-Gould, the chairman of the Labour party, 1939. And William Jowitt, attorney

general in 1929. And he was the – for the socialist government in England and they were all friends of Daddy Radcliffe, who was the secretary of the Labour party in Preston. [03:54:09] That was his inscription, ‘to give is to receive ever Milena, always in our memories’. And that was soon after we arrived, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 10<sup>th</sup> 1939, Roland Radcliffe. That was my mother, ‘Milenko, remember me often, think of me often’. And my grandmother, ‘be good, healthy and look after Evička, you know. And please write soon to – and she puts the address in Prague’. But they were moved from this address I know.

*She didn't survive? She didn't survive? Didn't survive?*

No, this was Kosinerová, yeah. These were two of the students from school, that I was at school with, lovely paintings, yeah. [Inaudible] Kraus. I’m trying to – that – this was Joe Alon Plaček, that was his drawing. I don't know whether or not that he was – he was – ‘Josef Plaček, in 1944, best wishes’. That was our Slovak arts master and this is his saying –

*Just hold it a little bit, that we can see it for the camera.*

Sorry. Yeah. And there's a – there's a poem there, ‘and there will come the day when the dead will rise and a hundred times return, the evil that you did to us’, you know, basically. He was called Kraus, Klaus, and he was Slovak. I remember him. And these are six Czech airmen who were in Squadron 311 who came to the school to do their *maturita*, high school, 'cos these were all young lads. [03:56:09] And I have a book at home that a photographer compiled of every airman that was in the squadron, yeah, there. They may well have been – I’m trying to find Hugo’s poem. Ah, here we are. Right, ‘friendship is a pleasant thing, a thing we can’t deny, for once it’s deep down in our hearts then there we let it lie. If there had been friendship then, we would now all be free, so let at least our – underlined – our friendship last and let everyone see that all the friendship in the world is not enough for me’. And then underneath he wrote back, ‘even with forty years gone by, you see, in memory, Hugo’. And he wrote again, this was 1985 when I last saw him, that’s – and the original was in '44. He told me he always fancied me but I don't – I don't believe him because he fancied somebody else. I mean they were at – there were all these things at school, all these teenage love affairs. That’s Beneš, that’s President Beneš.

*Let's see. Turn it around first for the camera. When he came to the school?*

No, I must have – he must have – that could have been in Manchester 'cos he used to come there. He never visited the school as far as I remember but his wife – his wife gave us a – gave the school a radio. And then I'll show you my classmates.

*Yeah, one question. So, your grandpa gave this to you. Did he – were you already on the train when he gave it to you? [03:58:01] How did he give it to you? Before you left?*

No, it was the night we were going on the train.

*Okay, so it was the night before?*

Well, that night. It was that night we were getting on the train, before I got on the train. And these are some of the school friends and, you know, we're looking at 1943, mostly '43, and then further on when we – when I moved to – oh, it says, 'twenty days I've had this diary and each day you keep on bothering me, am I going to write something [laughs] in it'. It's just a silly inscription. But they were all – this was in Hinton Hall. Goodness me, these were all '43. Wilfred Pickles, that won't mean anything to you. He was a famous broadcaster and he was Yorkshire and he was the first person on BBC Radio who they allowed to broadcast with a Yorkshire accent, because they all had to have received speech. And he used to run a- quiz show and it was 'Have a Go, Joe'. And for some reason, and I had – and I have a letter at home that had been written to him about a little Czech girl who would be good on a programme. I've got it. I sang on the Children's Hour because I could sing, to sing Czech songs. And it was written to Wilfred Pickles. And the woman who accompanied us on the piano was Violet Carson who played- oh, Neighbours? Not Neighbours. What's the- what's the Lancashire one? Not Neighbours. Oh, Coronation Street. She played Enid – the first woman with a hairnet. Oh, you won't –

*Was it Ena Sharples?*

She played Ena Sharples, that's right, and Violet Car – and she was a pianist and she accompanied me that The Children's Hour – I think I brought the cutting with me – when I sang these Czech songs. [04:00:07] And that's this Czech teacher who wrote that I sang like a bird and he wished my grammar was just as good [laughs].

*Beautiful.*

Yeah. And my uncle who wrote he was sure that I'll lose this book one day, and I've never lost it. Well, I thought at one point I had actually but it was found at the bottom –

*You kept it.*

It was found at the bottom of a cupboard, yes. Yeah.

*Are you glad you kept it all these years?*

That's him there. That's him. 'As sure as I am that one day you will lose this book, I am sure that you yourself will never be lost. And if I wasn't so certain of this, I don't know how I could wish that this journey is just a great adventure. Prague, 1939.' Yeah.

*Okay. Thank you. Thank you so much for reading from your autograph book.*

That – this document represents the permit instead of a visa which allowed us to travel from Prague to the English- to England. The reverse side of the document are the stamps in Harwich and also the German section that says that it has to be used by the 15<sup>th</sup> of August and it so happens we arrived in Harwich on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. At the railway station before we got on the train, this was the label that was hung around my neck giving the – my name and the number.

[04:02:00] These are samples of the lists that Nicholas Winton had in his scrapbook describing the names of the children, the ages, the names of the English families with – that were willing to foster them and also where the funding is coming from.

*Yes, please.*

Nicholas Winton came to visit me when he came to a conference to the north of England and this was a very happy photograph taken in my sitting room.

*Yes, please.*

In 2017 we unveiled a memorial to the parents on Prague Railway Station depicting the hands of the children waving goodbye to their parents.

*[Yes, please.]*

When Nicholas died at the age of 106, within one month the Prague Post printed a stamp and a very special memorial envelope. The stamps were sold out completely within one week.

I talk to many children at school and I receive many letters from them and this is a sample from one little girl who was obviously very interested in my talk.

*Thank you so much for the interview and sharing your story.*

Oh, okay, thanks.

And your photographs.

**[04:03:54]**

[End of transcript]