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## Interview Transcript Title Page

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| <b>Interviewee Surname:</b> | Newman                     |
| <b>Forename:</b>            | Bridget                    |
| <b>Interviewee Sex:</b>     | Female                     |
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| <b>Name of Interviewer:</b>    | Dr. Bea Lewkowicz  |
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## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV283  
**NAME:** Bridget Newman  
**DATE:** 25 October 2023  
**LOCATION:** London  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

*Today's the 25th of October 2023. We're conducting an interview with Mrs Bridget Newman and my name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London. Can you please tell me your name?*

Bridget Newman.

*And where and when you born, please?*

I was born in Berlin, on the 31st of May 1932.

*Bridget, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for the Refugee Voices Archive.*

A pleasure.

*Can you please tell me something about your family background?*

Sorry, exactly what?

*About your family background. Just tell me about your parents, your grandparents.*

I – well, I – my grandmother actually lived with us from the time I was two years old. So, she was another mother. And then I had my mother and my father. My father wasn't with me in Berlin very often because he was mostly in London. And so, I had my mother and my grandmother and my nanny to look after me. And then I went to school for three months, and I learned a bit of reading and writing and arithmetic, and songs. And that's about all. I was not at school for very much of the time. Do you want more background, other background? Or shall I go on from school?

*No, well me the names of your mother and your grandmother. What were they called?*

Well, my grandmother was Martha Silberstein. [00:02:02] And my mother was Ellen Silberstein, born Silberstein, married to Wiener. My father was Jacques Wiener.

*And do you know, how did your parents meet?*

Yes. Well, my – it's a long story [laughs].

*Go on, we have time.*

My mother did a little course, also teaching English to foreigners. And in order to get students, she put an advertisement in the local rag in Berlin. I don't know the name. But it had a little bit, when I came out in print, it sounded a little bit odd, as if she were doing something else, in fact. And my – they lived, however, in the Kurfürstendamm, which was quite a posh area. And my father happened to read this rag and this advertisement. And there was this seventeen-year-old girl, I don't know, doing something odd in the Kurfürstendamm. So, he decided to phone and ask whether he could come and visit, because he wanted to learn English. His English, of course, was much better than my mother's, because he'd spent a lot of time in this country already. And anyway, they met and apparently it was more or less love at first sight. They went for a long, long walk and – instead of having English lessons, and they decided to meet again. And then they had some party somewhere, about six months later. [00:04:06] And it must have been Christmas, because my father proposed to my

mother under the Christmas tree, which is one of the reasons, not for religious – was one of the reasons we – when it was apt – we used to have a Christmas tree, not during the time we were in Berlin. And that's how they met. My grandparents went through – they lived in the Kurfürstendamm. But my grandfather actually died at an early age, fifty-seven. He had pleurisy from smoking too much. And at that time, there was no cure. So, my grandmother came to live with my parents. Things went terribly rosy then. Just before my grandfather died, I think it was about twenty – 1926 and there was this gold crash. And he lost an awful lot of money and my father, much to the embarrassed of my mother, I think, had to bail him out.

*What was his profession, your grandfather?*

My grandfather, I don't know if he was in textile or not. His brother was, I'm not sure if he was, something like that.

*And had they come – were they born in Berlin or had they come from elsewhere?*

No, no.

*Your grandparents.*

My grandparents came from Breslau. They came from Breslau to Berlin. [00:06:00] And my father was born in Vienna, but he never liked the slow working of Viennese life. This – he used to say, “*komm' ich nicht heute, komm' ich morgen*” [if I don't come today, then I will come tomorrow]. So, he came to Berlin to work and he found this shipping company, Hecht-Pfeiffer, led by Mr Levy, who made him a junior partner of the firm. Am I getting the telling right? Well...

*Hecht-Pfeiffer was the company?*

Hecht-Pfeiffer.

*So, he –*

That was a big, quite a big shipping company.

*So, did he leave Vienna as an adult? When did he come to Berlin?*

Well, no, I'm not quite sure. I know he bummed around quite a bit [laughs]. He was in the Sudan. We have him on horseback somewhere in the Sudan when he was in the army, something. He was also a prisoner of war afterwards in Italy.

*First World War?*

First World War. He found a dancing school and he landed up at Ullstein, the publishing firm of magazines and whatnot. You know, they had the advertising slogan, '*Kauf, Brigitte, Brigitte, kauf Ullstein-Schnitte.*' [Buy "Brigitte" (women's magazine), Ullstein (publishing house) cutting patterns]. Hence actually my name.

*From that? Brigitte, Brigitte* [both laugh].

[00:08:00] So they had my brother first. He was born on the 10th of December 1925 and he just made the nine months [laughs]. It was the easiest conception, immediate.

*So, they got married in 1925?*

Yes.

*In Berlin?*

In Berlin. And soon after brother, they got – had another baby girl who unfortunately, died at the age of two, because she was fed too well and was too big. And she didn't survive, which was apparently a common cold. But she had a bad cold, it went on the chest, she died because antibiotics and all that stuff wasn't known then. So, they waited quite a little while. My

mother was absolutely horrified when she found she was pregnant again. And then even more horrified when she found she had a girl. She really didn't want me at all. For at least twenty minutes the doctor said, 'If you don't want her, I'll have her.' And that made her change her mind. Well, she'd lost a baby girl, she didn't want another. But anyway, we got on famously all her life. So, and with my father when he was about too. And once we were, of course, in England I saw – well, I saw my father all the time.

**[00:10:04]** *Yeah. So, at the time he was – you said he spent half a year in England?*

Yes.

*And how did he establish his first time here in England? Why did he come to England? For the business?*

Well, he had his half business, he had a bit of business, luckily. Otherwise, he couldn't have afforded to get me on the Kindertransport.

*Yes. So, he had the business already? When? When did he start coming to England?*

In 1921.

*Okay, so that – and the business was in London?*

Business was in London, yes. And –

*So, what's the British – did he have a British partner here?*

A British what?

*A partner, a business partner?*

No, no.

*It was his company?*

He just had a much smaller business set-up in London Wall. Of course, London Wall got bombed twice and we lost all our papers and every – and he lost all his stock. He had our private papers, you know, their wedding certificates and all that sort of thing. And it all got burned.

*And stock of what? What was his stock?*

All and sundry [ph]. He invented that was – he found certain wires along a rail track, of which he formed hair curlers. And he dealt with people like Woolworths, he dealt a lot with Woolworths for that sort of thing. And he made these little packets of sequins, which were very fashionable, but very rare to come in those days, and things like that. And he had quite a large concern with stockings. [00:12:00] All sorts of things. Later on, he travelled to Italy and he brought back knitwear and...

*So, he was import, export?*

Import, export too.

*Later on?*

Yes.

*But at the beginning, it was shipping?*

Yes.

*From when he – from Berlin?*



Yeah. Well, he did import. I think Hecht-Pfeiffer also did import, export. But I don't know exactly what he dealt with.

*Okay. And tell us a little bit about your parents, what sort of friends did they have? What sort of circles did they move in?*

Well, we had very few friends. We were out in Surbiton.

*No, in Berlin. We're still talking about Berlin.*

Oh, in Berlin?

*Yeah.*

Berlin, I don't really know. I think they had a large circle of friends in Berlin. It was a small place and everybody seemed to know everybody, maybe a little bit in compartments. I mean, actually, it happened that Peter's family did know of our family. Mainly because his father and my aunt, my mother's eldest sister, they were in – they did medicine together. She started doing medicine, he went on to become a doctor. But she did something else later. So, they knew of each other. And well, while they lived in the Kurfürstendamm, of course, they must have lived near each other. They didn't know then. Maybe for a little while, while his father was still sort of interested in my aunt. So, I think he must have been in their flat at least once or twice.

*Where was that flat? In Kurfürstendamm?*

In Kurfürstendamm. [00:14:00] I don't know the rest. It's funny, we are in fact related in an odd way, sort of distant cousins. I mean, Peter and I are related, distant cousins.

*And Bridget, what are your first memories? Do you have any memories of growing up in Berlin, of being in Berlin?*

Oh...

*What do you remember?*

Lots of little, really little memories. First of all, I had a nanny, and I was with her most of the time, because that's what one did. And the nanny got one ready, looked all pretty and then presented me to my mother at lunchtime. And my mother would then – play with me or take me out to the centre, whatever [laughs], you know, for a little while. And then she would have me back again, I mean, the nanny. So, but I do remember the house on Berlin Drive [ph]. I remember the salon where I met my mother.

*Tell me, what was the address where you grew up?*

That was Winkler Straße Neun.

*Winkler Straße Neun?*

*Neun*, yes. I still remember Dahlem, I was born there. But we left for Winkler Straße we when I was two. So, I don't remember anything before. I only remember little things. I remember getting a beautiful pram for my birthday. And I remember that it also had a doll in it. And I lifted the doll up by its head and my mother said to me, 'You must never do that to a baby.' [Laughs] [00:16:00] So I was – I was also very interested in that. I must have been about three or four. And I remember a big – we had a big conservatory and in it there was a huge cage of birds, of budgerigars. And my father when he came down, they made a lot of noise, these birds, my father used to bang on the cage and used to say, 'Shut up you rascals.' [Laughs] For moments they were quiet.

*Inside the house?*

Yes, a big conservatory. And I also actually remember once it was the birth of a baby bird. My father showed me that, it was very interesting. Lots of things, my father took me down the *Hasensprung*, if that means – I don't know if that means anything to you. No. It was a

little passageway, I will say, from my road into the main street of Koenigstraße [Koenigsallee], I think it was. And he used to sing a song about the stars in the heavens and...

*Do you remember the song?*

What?

*The song, do you remember that song?*

Well, yes, it was – the first line was “*Weißt Du wie viel Sterne stehen an dem großen Himmelszelt*” [Do you know how many stars there on the firmament] and I don’t know remember much more. And he was just, you know, “*im Grunewald, im Grunewald gibts Holzauktion*” [there is a wood auction in the Grunewald] [laughs].

*Im Grunewald gibt’s?*

*Holzauktion* [00:18:00] We used to go for walks there on a Sunday, all of us. I can’t remember my brother being there at all. He went to boarding school at the age of ten, so I was then three. So, I wouldn’t remember.

*Where was he sent to? Which boarding school?*

Yes, Bickley Hall in Kent.

*So, he was sent to England in...?*

At the age of ten.

*‘35, more or less?*

Yes, that’s right.

*Why did your parents send him to England? Did they feel this was...?*

No, that had nothing to do politically.

*Okay.*

It had to do with him, he was rather naughty. And my mother found that she really couldn't cope with him at the moment. And my father thought that a good English education, a gentleman's education, it could be had in England. So, he sent him to this rather posh boarding school.

*So not for political reasons?*

I remember visiting my brother once at this school. We had a friend who lived here who organised getting us a car, and this car was something else. Every few miles you had to, I forgotten the word. What is it? Is it ranking? Hanking?

*Cranking.*

Cranking, cranking the car. Eventually we got there and my brother was absolutely horrified, because everybody else was in their Rolls Royces and their whatever names of cars, Jaguar. [00:20:02] And he was a bit ashamed of us. Anyway, it was a good journey, we laughed a lot [laughs].

*Was he happy there? Did he want to go?*

In Ber...?

*In England.*

I think he was, yes. Later on, he wasn't happy because he went to a college called Denson [ph], which was somewhere in the north. And apparently, he wrote letters back to my parents saying, 'I'm sorry my writing is so bad, I had to do this standing up.'

*But at the beginning, he was happy?*

He was happy. And I think he was largely happy there.

*Yeah. So, you grew up as a sort of single child almost, in Berlin?*

In Berlin, yes, yes. Yes, played dominoes with my grandmother and my grandmother was very Victorian. And I remember I tried to cheat and she said to me, 'If you cheat, I won't play with you.' And I started fiddling around with some things of my brother's which were on a desk, using as a – to play around. And I picked up some, I don't know, whatever it was, a rubber, a pencil or something. And she said to me, 'Do these belong to you?' And I said, 'Well, no.' She said, 'Put them down, they're not yours.' I'll never forget this [laughs]. I also remember, one winter, I got a lovely toboggan. And I also had a friend who was very sporty, she could dance on the ice and go down slopes on toboggans like a trooper. [00:22:06] Couldn't have been much older than me. But I was – I had to follow her. And once we went up to, I think it was a hotel at the top, but it had a lovely slope going towards the station. And I also remember two posts in front of me. So, I went up on this toboggan and she'd got through, she got through the two posts beautifully. But I, being me, clumsy, I went straight into the post and I cracked my chin really hard. I couldn't speak for a long time- I could hardly eat. I remember my grandmother feeding me on soft boiled eggs and soup and all that sort of thing for a long time. In fact, my grandmother was very much a nurse for me as well. Here later on, I remember waking her up one night. She had to share a room with me and said, 'you know, I think I've broken my jaw.' And she said, 'No, you haven't. You've got mumps just like Princess Margaret.' [Laughs] She was right, I did have mumps. We had a doctor. Doctors were quite expensive in those days and we didn't have much money. To call the doctor meant spending five shillings, which –

*This was in England?*

This was in England. Sorry, I should go on, in Germany, I don't know.

[00:24:02] *What was the name of your friend, do you remember, with the toboggan?*

No, I don't remember. She wasn't Jewish. I don't remember.

*Speaking of Jewish, so were you aware of being Jewish? How religious was your household?*

Not – I wouldn't say not. My father, as I said, keeping the main festivals. My mother and grandmother were not interested. I remember on a seder evening, my grandmother started eating a vegetable before the blessing had been said. My father said, 'Put that down.'

[Laughs] She always made mistakes like that. Neither of them were very interested, but kept their festivals for my father's sake.

*Did you ever go to synagogue in Berlin?*

Yes.

*Which one?*

I think it was the – oh, what was it called? Peter will know. Orangen –

*Oranienburger Straße?*

Oranienburger Straße. How do you know?

*Famous synagogue, big synagogue.*

Yes.

*Do you remember it?*

Big synagogue. I remember a lot of black and white, people were dressed properly in black and white. My father was in a dinner jacket. What I wore, I can't remember.

*Formal? Very formal?*

Oh, yes. I also remember being put – stand up on a chair, on a red plush chair at seder, and I was taught the *ma nishtana* very early. And I could say one or two lines. And I learned more later, but when I was little, that was... And I was allowed to put my little finger into a cup of wine and suck it, things like that. [00:26:08] We had a – I know we had a menorah. But as I say, my parents were very fond of Christmas trees. For them, it had no religious significance at all. They just happened to have got engaged under one. So, they went downstairs, in Berlin they went downstairs, to the gardeners couple's flat, which was in the basement. We had a very big house in Berlin. I remember my nursery very well.

*Tell us about it.*

Well, in fact, I found a little essay I had written at school here about the nursery. Yes, I remember it. You know, I can even recall it now. It's funny.

*Go on.*

Yes, well, for me, it was a big-ish room. I can't tell you now, how big it was. But I know at one end, I had a big cupboard that went from floor to ceiling, a cupboard full of toys, of stuffed toys. And particularly toys that I couldn't wind up but could be wound up for me. And they would mov, they would dance, they would tilt their heads, whatever. I loved that sort of toy. I wasn't really into dolls. And in any case the room, my nanny slept with me. So, she had her bed on one side of the wall and I had a cot on the other. And in the middle of the room was a big table. [00:28:00] And on the floor was a big stuffed dog. He was a kind of terrier, but I know he stood above this high and he was black and brown. I remember it well. The whole room was painted in a kind of a shade of yellow. It was always very sunny. It had a balcony, which was like a balcony, it sort of had walls and it was lined with some canvas,

which I know was brown and a bit frayed. I still remember that, I don't know why. Yes, they were blue curtains in the window. It was a very pretty room, I liked – it was one of my best rooms.

*You liked it?*

Mm.

*What was the name of your nanny? Do you remember her name?*

Detta.

*Detta?*

That wasn't her name. That was the translation from nanny. I never called her anything else. I've got no idea. All I know is when I said goodbye to her, she said, 'Why don't you stay here and be with our lovely Hitler [ph]?' And I didn't know why. So, I'm afraid she had to go [laughs].

*Yeah.*

Well, there is a lot of story, with the house. An officer came one day. My mother was no longer in Berlin, nor was my father, nor was my brother. I was – in July, do you want to hear that story or not yet?

**[00:30:01]** *Not quite yet. Thank you for asking. We're going to get there. Is there just anything else before? Anything else you need to add about your school for example?*

Well, yes. The school –

*Tell me, what was the name of the school?*



Well, I think it was a Goldschmidt Schule.

*Tell us.*

And I had a teacher there called Feiner, Frau Feiner.

*Feiner?*

Feiner. And she taught us her name by saying, shall I say it in German?

*Yes, German.*

*Kuchen ist fein, aber ich bin noch feiner.*

*Translate it, please. Translate it.*

Cake is nice, cake is fine- I'd better say- but I'm Feiner. Yes, she taught us songs like, '*Die Sonne scheint ins Fenster rein. Guten Morgan, Guten Morgen liebe Kinderlein.*' [The sun is shining through the window. Good morning, dear children – rhymes in German] [Laughs] Little songs. I learned the *Sütterlinschrift*.

*Sütterlin.*

I can't translate any.

*No.*

It's a special –

*Yeah, it's a German –*

Special script.

*Alphabet, yes.*

Yes, which I'm afraid I've forgotten now. And...

*Anything Jewish? Because this was a Jewish school, whether...*

Maybe, but I can't remember anything definite. We learnt some music, but I think the whole atmosphere was Jewish, but I don't know.

*Were you aware of any danger of anything happening in Germany? You were very young.*

[00:32:00] Well, first, I didn't know about danger, but it's all a bit of a nuisance because every few days, I was told I had to meet somebody who was actually, you'll hear that story.

*I'm going to ask you not to – keep your head – thank you.*

Sorry. She had come over to find some way of getting me out of Berlin. And every few days, I had to go with her to some embassy or some organisation, or this or that or the other. And I always had to go out of school in school hours. So, I had three months' schooling, but not – rather interrupted.

*So that was somebody sent by your parents?*

Yes.

*So, let's go back a little bit. When did your parents leave Berlin? Or you said you were there by yourself, how did that happen?*

Well, my father was here on business. I mean, he was, you know, he was always going to come back. But there was something called *Juden*, sorry, *Judentaxe* [ph], a Jewish tax which all Jews had to pay. And my father was asked to come back and pay it. But he wouldn't, of

course. He didn't know what was going on from here. My mother went to visit him in July '38. Now comes the story that she went to the airport and presented her passport, which was Austrian. She was actually German, but because he had married an Austrian, she had an Austrian passport. [00:34:00] And because children in those days didn't have their own passport, I was on her passport. I'll say this because it's part of the story. So, my mother went to the airport, presented her passport, which was taken away from her, saying it was the 'Anschluss'. Her passport was no longer valid.

*Ah, because it was still Austrian and not German?*

Exactly. So, she had no passport and certainly I had no passport.

*So, was she not allowed to fly back?*

She was allowed to fly to London. I don't know how she – well, she was allowed to fly, because actually, the Gestapo official pushed her onto the plane. She was lucky. How she actually got off the plane into London not having any papers, I don't know. But my father was there to meet her and maybe this lady as well. So, I don't know, it's conjecture.

*So, when did she leave Berlin?*

July, I don't know the date.

*But in July?*

July '38.

*So, she never came back to...?*

She never came back. Well, she didn't have – she went, I have no idea exactly and we always think about it, how it is that she knew nothing. But she left me with my grandmother and my nanny. I mean, I was in very good care. She didn't leave me. I was well looked after. She was

going to come back in, let's say, three or four weeks, and why not? Indeed. My father was horrified. [00:36:00] And then there was this thing that eventually this lady, who I really disliked, offered to come over, offered to go over to Berlin and see what she could do.

*Was she English?*

She was English. And the –

*Because basically, you were stuck? I mean, you were stuck?*

I was stuck.

*But you were in Berlin, they were here. Your brother was already in England.*

Yes, that's right.

*So, you were in the big house there?*

With my grandmother.

*And the nanny?*

And the nanny.

*And the nanny was still working for you, working for the family?*

Just a minute, yes. One day, the doorbell rang and there was a Nazi officer, a Gestapo. And he came in, he was really rather nice. He had white hair and a big, white moustache and really quite kindly blue eyes. But he – and he apologised, really, really apologised that he would now have to take this house and we would have to go. But we had to go quite quickly. A) I was in a bit of danger, because my father had to come back to pay the Juden tax and they were looking for me. My grandmother then couldn't be with me anymore. She had – they had

to find a safe house. This is with a lady, Mrs Grünbaum. I don't know if any other children ever went to her. But I'm sure she was a very good woman, but I disliked her intensely.

[00:38:03] *This was the lady who came over?*

No, this was a lady who ran the house.

*Okay, in Berlin?*

In Berlin.

*Mrs Grünbaum?*

Yes.

*So, she was taking care of –*

Several children, I don't know how many anymore. But so, I know there were more children.

*So, you were put in that house?*

I was put in.

*Not your grandmother?*

Not – my grandmother had some flat or dwelling place, I don't know, quite near me. But we were only allowed to meet in the wood secretly. And I had to eat potato soup with sausage in it, which is actually, nowadays I love it. In those days I hated it and I didn't eat. And every night, I shared a room with other children and nearly every night they were hammering at the doors of the house, of Gestapo coming in looking for adults. But it was quite scary, because it made a lot of noise and clatter and we were trying to sleep.

*And did you manage to – I mean, did your parents basically leave the whole house just behind with all their belongings?*

Everything, everything.

*They didn't – nothing was taken?*

Nothing was taken.

*Your father had not taken anything beforehand?*

Nothing, nothing. My grandmother somehow got a skiff [ph] and managed to ram in a lot of furniture and china and I don't know what. And then my father said, 'You didn't bring my first edition books.' He didn't have those.

*What did – did you manage to take something from your...?*

[00:40:00] Teddy bear. I had one of these little cases, you see, full of – well, I mean, my story then goes on. I don't know.

*Yeah.*

Yes? My – this lady that I didn't like who my parents, who my parents had sent over, she had found a place for me on a train bearing orphaned children to London. [Phone rings]

*Yes.*

And we had a day and everything. And on the day, I woke up, itching all over. What was the matter? I had chickenpox. Now, with any illness or disease, I would not have been allowed on the train. So, they clothed me with I don't know how many layers of clothing, to cover all the spots [laughs]. And also, to take more clothes out, because I only had this small suitcase

and ten-shilling note, and a big notice on my chest, saying, 'Both parents dead.' I would not have been allowed on the train otherwise, because it was for orphans.

*So, this was a special Kindertransport for orphans?*

Yeah.

*And it was one of the early ones?*

It must have been, I think, yes, because it went – they went on 'till '39.

*Yes. And you were – this was mid-December?*

This was mid-December, yes.

*You said four –*

14<sup>th</sup> of December.

*So, the train left on the 14th?*

Yes.

*So, it means for Kristallnacht, the November Pogrom, you were still in Berlin?*

Yes, and I don't remember any of that. I don't know anything of that. I mean, yes, of course I know. [00:42:00] But that was later, much later.

*Yes, but you don't have any memories?*

No memories. I had a very shielded childhood altogether. I mean, even here I didn't know of anything 'till much later.

*So, when did you say goodbye to that nanny?*

I did say goodbye to that, nanny. Well, as I say, she then put on her uniform and she cried. We both cried. I know we both cried bitterly. And she said, 'Why don't you stay here with our lovely Hitler?' Well, I had no answer for that. But she had, as I say, she had to go. I mean, we went on very friendly terms with her. She had been with me for four years, but...

*Oh, she had left before? She already left by the time it came to the Kindertransport?*

Yes, well, yes, because I was at a safe house from July. Well, until the middle of December.

*Right, so from July?*

Yes.

'38?

Yes, so she must have left a little while before. Anyway, I just remember that I got this teddy bear and shoved to this house, this safe house.

*Where was that safe house? Where it was?*

I'm not sure, but somewhere in Berlin and somewhere near the school I went to.

*Near the Goldschmidt Schule?*

Yeah, because I went to school, of course, while I was at that house.

*Okay, and how many children were staying with you?*

I have no idea. [00:44:00] But I mean, I don't think [inaudible] nearly eight, nine.



*And were the other children orphans? Or who were the other children?*

I don't know.

*No, okay.*

I have no idea.

*But the actual – to get you on the transport was organised by the lady who came from Britain?*

Yes.

*And what was her name, do you remember?*

Celia Wilson. Does that have to be printed? I don't know. I don't think she's got any relations, but she may or may not want to. I've never been in touch with her again.

*Okay. Anyway, but she came and she helped you to get on this...?*

Yeah, well, of course – yes. But I had to call her Auntie and she insisted that I wear white gloves.

*And did she travel with you?*

No, no, no. No, no, nobody was allowed to travel with me. I mean, I had to say goodbye to my grandmother and this lady on the platform. And my grandmother arranged for a little eleven-year-old to look after me.

*Because how old were you?*

Six, six-and-a-bit.

*So very young?*

Well, my birthday is in May and this was December. Yes, I was very young. I have a grandson now who's six and I think to myself, it really is very young [laughs].

*And you had chickenpox?*

And I had chickenpox. And I remember being on that ship and I itched, I couldn't scratch. I couldn't get anywhere. Are you interested now in my journey?

*Yes, please.*

Well, there isn't that much to tell of the actual journey to Hook of Holland. And then –

*Sorry, which station in Berlin? Where did you take off? Where was that, do you remember?*

One of them, I think there are three. I don't know which one.

*And your grandmother?*

[00:46:01] But it was full of Gestapo. I have no idea.

*And your grandmother came?*

To say goodbye and she promised she'd be with me soon.

*And were you scared? Do you remember how you were feeling? I mean, as a six-year-old.*

I didn't think I was happy; I think I cried a lot. And as I say, I had this little girl and she gave me a silver bracelet, which she said I should wear in her memory, which I did afterwards for

many years. I didn't know what happened to her, I have no idea. But I mentioned all the children who came with me probably found places, yeah.

*Do you remember her name?*

No, unfortunately not. I have no idea.

*What, it was a...?*

She was very sweet. I know she was a sweet.

*An eleven-year-old who...?*

She was about eleven. Big girl.

*To take care of you?*

Yes.

*Yeah, so you spent the journey together?*

Yes. Later than that, I don't know what happened. We reached the Hook von [ph] Holland. And there we went on to this boat, but it was at night. And we were herded from the train onto the boat into a huge space. And there was something on the floor. I don't know, something soft, softish, and we were told to get into line. And then we all had to lie down as we were and told to go to sleep. Well, I think we did, we were very tired. [00:48:00] I seem to remember just laying down, but itching. [Laughs] And then I don't know if it's true but I remember hearing frogs croak and chains rattle. Whether there were any frogs in Harwich, I didn't know. Chains is quite possible. And then I was shoved up the gangway, up to the top to leave the ship. And there at the top of the stairs or the gangway were my parents, and we cried and my mother cried. And I said to her, 'Why are you crying?' She said, 'Because I'm so happy.'

*So, you were one of the only children who was – who had parents waiting there?*

Yes. Well, the others later went to Liverpool Street.

*So, you were picked up in Harwich?*

Yes.

*And do you remember anything on the boat or on the – before when you crossed into Holland, of the journey?*

No, I mean, the crossing of the actual journey to Holland, I don't remember. Not at all. I know, I think we had some iron rations with us and we ate. I can't even remember getting any food.

*But you said you were wearing not only the number, but it said, 'No parents, parents not alive anymore'?*

Yes.

*I have never heard of that.*

Oh yes, I think other children too, the orphans.

**[00:50:03]** *Maybe there were, you know, the first children to be taken out.*

Yes, so anyway.

*So, your parents were waiting there for you?*

Yes.

*So, was it a relief for you to see them?*

Yes, it was wonderful. My parents at the time were staying, I think it was called the Cumberland Hotel in Marble Arch, where they had a little suite, very small. And I remember my mother had a little ring, you know, a little gas ring on which she'd got a Schnitzel ready for me. And I can still smell, sometimes smell the Schnitzel being fried and prepared for me. It was the first decent food I'd had for a long time, with other potato soup and sausage.

*She made it in the hotel?*

Mm.

*But just to come back, you said your – this girl gave you something. What did she give you, a...?*

A silver – little silver bracelet.

*A bracelet?*

A bit like yours, narrower.

*And you still have it?*

No, no, it probably got too small for me. No, I think it broke and I lost it. I haven't, but I still remember it. I haven't got it.

*That was a nice thing to do.*

Oh, very nice.

*Yeah.*

Very nice.

*Do you sometimes wonder what happened to all the other children who came with you?*

To be truthful, no, because I didn't know anybody. [00:52:00] I have no faith [ph]. You understand what I mean? You might wonder about somebody who you'd seen, but I – no, I don't remember.

*You didn't know any of them?*

I didn't know anybody, I don't remember.

*Were there any other children with you from that home? From –*

Not as far as I know.

*No.*

No, not as far as I know.

*Okay, so, Bridget –*

And of course, the other children must have had some reason for being in the safe home as well, I imagine. Perhaps they didn't have parents, I don't know.

*Okay. What are your first memories then of arriving in England? The first days, what do you remember?*

I didn't know, Schnitzel was the first memory [both laugh]. I think we moved to, where did we move to? We moved to South Kensington, where we had a flat and I remember being in that flat and I went to a little church school, where they thought it was a good idea to teach

me; was a great big ball of plasticine and sitting me in a corner. They took that much notice of me. So that wasn't very good. And then my – this friend, this other friend, not a lady friend, a man friend who had come to England before my parents, he was – he knew of – sorry, he know of a – wait a minute, Kensing – he knew of a house going in Kingston.

**[00:54:13]** He thought it'd better to go out of London, maybe a little. So, we went to this house in Kingston and I went to an elementary school near our house. The house was very pleasant. It was near the river, we went rowing there, my mother liked rowing. And the school was very pleasant. It had quite a big class, but there was a Miss Stanton there, my teacher who actually took an interest in me. And she helped me an awful lot with English and everything I did. And I also remember being really put on a pedestal nearly, because it was Empire Day on May the eighth was Empire Day. And we had been told before, if we could wear something red, white and blue. As luck would have it, I had a red dress with a square neckline, which was in blue. And the hem was in blue and I had white spots on it. I had a red and white, blue dress. So, I wore that and she said this was a prettiest dress, and I was sort of paraded around the class.

*Did your father manage to bring some assets out, so that you had something –*

No.

*To live in? Did you have any...?*

He – what he had here as part of his business, we had. **[00:56:00]** He could bring nothing out from Berlin.

*No, so he had something?*

He had something, he had something. But not very much, because he still had my brother at Bickley Hall and he had to support two sisters in America, so.

*What happened to his family that...?*

And one sister, well, I think I think, thinking back, I don't know that but thinking back, I think he had the lovely decision to make, whether to get his sister out of concentration camp or get me to England. I think the cost was the same, but he didn't have enough for two. So, my father never spoke of these things, never ever.

*Why- did he have to pay for you? What do you mean by that? Did he have to – who did he have to pay? The lady who he sent, you mean?*

No, I think the organisations. Or either the organisation, or that we were allowed, not so much organisation, but that we were allowed to come to England.

*Yes, a guarantor.*

There was a – I think that was in tune of about 10,000 pounds, which in that time was a lot of money. So, as I say, he hadn't enough money for both.

*Did you know his family in Vienna? Were they ever...?*

No.

*Did you ever go to Vienna as a child?*

No, never. In fact, he and his family – can I rub my eyes? I have a hair in my eye? Can I see-

*Yes, of course.*

[00:58:00] No, my – his parents never even came to their wedding, because he's married a German girl. It was a bit like that. His family, I think, was strictly Orthodox Jewish and I never saw them.

*So, they didn't approve of his choice?*



No. And I think he made a lovely choice, but there we are [laughs].

*So, he didn't have any relatives in England, your father?*

No, no.

*No, they didn't come to England?*

No.

*Two came to – went to America?*

Pardon?

*Two sisters went to America?*

Two sisters went to America. I was just thinking, in fact I was looking at photographs. He had four sisters, and I can't remember what happened to one of them. Two went to America, one was killed in a concentration camp. I don't know what happened to the other one. I imagine she might have been killed as well. It was – my mother had a sister, and they went, she and her family went to Palestine as it was then.

*And what happened to the grandmother? To your grandmother?*

My grandmother? Oh, she'd been living with us. She's always lived with us.

*When did she come to England?*

Fourteen days later on the, may I say it, on Christmas Day.

*And how did they manage? How did she manage? Did she have...?*

She had a passport. In those days, you could apparently still travel. In fact, as I understand it now, the Germans were quite happy for any Jews who actually left.

*But did she have a domestic visa or how did she come? How did they manage to get the visa for her?*

[01:00:02] It was just I think she could just come to join the family. She's always, as I say, she lived with us from when I was two years old. She just came and –

*So, in fact, it couldn't travel with her because you didn't have a passport? So, you –*

I didn't have a passport.

*So, you had to go to Kindertransport?*

Yes.

*Then you didn't need the passport?*

Yes, exactly.

*If you had a passport –*

If I had a – and because I was orphaned. Two reasons, I didn't have a passport and I was orphaned- in inverted commas [laughs].

*It would have been very difficult for you to leave otherwise, yeah.*

Well, I didn't think would have – I think sooner or later, because of my father coming back, I mean, they rounded them all up, and sooner or later I would have been put in a concentration camp, so.

*So, your grandmother came two weeks after you?*

Yes.

*Do you remember her arriving?*

I do, it was a big celebration. I can't remember anything in detail.

*So, she joined you in the hotel? Or were you already by then in the flat?*

No, we were already in the flat, I think. I think she was already in the flat and we weren't in a hotel, because my brother would have come over, back from school for the holidays as well.

*So, was your brother by then sort of bilingual?*

Yes, I would think so.

*And what about you? Did you have any English?*

Nothing. I – see, this church school, while I was busy playing with his stupid plasticine, they didn't teach me any English at all. Not a word. **[01:02:00]** And my father spoke both languages. I mean, he spoke four languages. But he said that we should continue then speaking German, because German was not the people and the more languages one knew, the better. And he was – he loved languages. So, at home we tended to speak German, not on the streets or out anywhere, shops. But I learned English I think probably very slowly. I don't – I wasn't very clever. And that school, when I went to Surbiton High School, I really knew nothing. It was only then when I had the accident, when I was ten, I had an accident on the bicycle. And I had concussion and my brain was beaten about a bit [laughs], because I suddenly woke up. But for the first two years, I was bullied and completely nondescript.

*Bullied in which way? What happened?*

Oh, the girls bullied me. I think mainly because I was German. But some also, because I was Jewish. And teachers apparently thought it was good for one's character. And for years later, I had scripture lessons at school. But I had correspondence lessons from a synagogue for many years, 'till I was bat mitzvah.

[01:04:00] *From which synagogue?*

Upper Berkeley Street.

*West London Synagogue?*

West London Synagogue, yes, with Dr. Reinhard, which later on I was his secretary. Yes, but then he had – my father took him, sorry, my father took me to see him. I think when I was seven or eight, as he arranged that I should have lessons sent- mail, by mail. Later, they organised a car to pick up various Jewish children in the district and take us to cheder classes at the synagogue.

*So, your parents joined this, the Liberal Synagogue?*

No, my parents didn't like the Liberal Synagogue.

*No, they didn't?*

My father just about managed to walk me down the aisle at the LJS.

*But they still got involved for this, for the lessons? Or they agreed –*

Oh, for the lessons, yes. My father, well, my father all together wanted me to know Jews and Jewish. I mean, as a child my first book was a Bible written by a rabbi prince for children, which was the first book I read, so.

*Did they mix with other refugees then in Surbiton? Were there any other – or Kingston?*

Hardly at all. We did – my mother did have a friend, one friend, who was a mother of a friend of mine. But no, otherwise, we didn't have very good experiences.

**[01:06:04]** *Your parents as well? How...?*

Yeah, my mother was friends with a lady who was the mother of a friend of mine at school. And they used to be quite often in each other's houses. And one time apparently, at teatime at a lady's house, my mother was talking about things Jewish. And this woman said to her, 'Such a pity that Hitler didn't get all of them.' So, my mother got out and said to her, 'Do you know that I'm Jewish? Goodbye.' And then that friend at school never spoke to me again. I'd known her for eight years. So, things like that.

*So, it wasn't easy to be a German ref – Jewish refugee.*

No, both things were bad [laughs].

*No other Jewish children in your school?*

Later on, when I had been there for- I think about four years- I did. A girl by the name of Ursula Aronofsky [ph] joined and we became good friends. But her family went to America afterwards and we lost touch. But with her around, I never bothered again. I had another friend who was not Jewish, but who – she was a year older. But somehow, we got friends, I can't remember how. And it was only later really, when I was married, that I broke up with her. **[01:08:03]** She wasn't married and she'd had some bad luck with friends. And she was, I'm afraid, very jealous of me. And so, you know, Peter said, 'Why? You don't need to be friends with someone like that.'

*Do you think it would have been easier for your parents to be in an area where there are more refugees living, like...?*

Yes, possibly. But this particular – again this man friend I mentioned before, he then got a flat in a house, in a big Queen Anne house. I've got actually a photograph somewhere, which was rented out to three families, on the condition that they kept the place in perfect order. But one paid a pittance in the way of rent. It's a, what's it called? A P rent [ph] or something, well, some special name. I think for one, two, three, seven rooms all together, I think one paid something like five pounds. So, my parents thought it was a good idea. They didn't have that much money and it was a very nice flat, with very large rooms, a big veranda, big garden. Although it actually ended up at the railway at the bottom of the garden, much to the delight later on of my sons. They said, 'Trains, trains.'

*But they liked it, your parents, they liked it?*

It was beautiful. Yes, they liked it.

*What about internment? Was your father interned?*

[01:10:00] Yes, he was interned for six months on the Isle of Man. And he – my mother then had to run his office, his business. And there was apparently a very nice man who gave large orders the warehouse, for stockings and that sort of thing. And they managed. So, he then became head of the group or something and he, in inverted commas, quite enjoyed it. They played a lot of bridge, which he liked.

*In internment?*

In internment.

*Yeah, which camp? Do you know where he was exactly?*

The Isle of Man, I don't know, I don't know, more than that. And he came – could come out because he had a sleeping ulcer and he thought his ulcer was coming alive. And a doctor there, thankfully, also thought he had a failed ulcer and he really ought to be released. So, he was.

*And did he talk about it? About – was he upset that he had to be – that he was interned?*

Oh, well, yes, of course. Of course, he was away from the family. But my father was the sort of person who could make himself comfortable anywhere. [01:12:00] I remember once we all went on holiday in like – by car. And for some reason, we didn't book properly, but we didn't have any accommodation one night. And my father was the only one who was really comfortable in that car. How he made it, I don't know. But he slept all night. None of us slept. We had my grandmother there, my fa – and me, my mother, none of us slept. But he did. He was fine, he was like that. So, I'm sure at internment camp he made himself, as I say, he became head of things. So, he had quite a position.

*Head of the camp, you think? Because the head of –*

Well, of their – of his group, I don't know. I don't want to make it bigger than it was [laughs]. But I do know he became a sort of head.

*Because the, you know, the refugees administered themselves in a way?*

Yes, that's right. Yeah.

*So yeah.*

So anyway, and he got quite a lot more religious there.

*Really?*

Yes.

*That's interesting.*

He came back. He still went – well, my mother was very much against Shabbat, etc., etc. But he prayed every Friday night. And of course, he went to all of the – he went to synagogue and all the holy days and all the other – Pesach.

*Which synagogue? Where did he go?*

He went to the one in Bayswater. I don't remember if it's the United Synagogue.

*Yeah, Petersburgh Place?*

[01:14:00] Petersburgh Place. I used to go with him there sometimes. I remember the rabbi always pronouncing a prayer, saying, 'May the supreme King of Kings [imitating his accent, sounding like Kink of Kinks].' And I'm afraid I howled with laughter, very naughty.

*Who was that rabbi? A refugee rabbi?*

Yes.

Who was it?

Selvin Goldberg.

*Simon?*

Selberg, Selberg [ph] Goldberg.

*Selberg Goldberg?*

Yeah, I think his son, David Goldberg, became a rabbi –

*Of the Liberal Synagogue?*



Of the Liberal Synagogue.

*Ah, that was his father?*

I think it was.

*What was his first name?*

Selberg.

*Selberg?*

Yeah.

*Goldberg, okay.*

And –

*So that's where your father went?*

Yeah.

*What – it was quite far from Surbiton, yeah.*

From Surbiton, yes, oh, yes, miles. He did have a – one of the people working in his office would chauffeur his car. So maybe he was by car, I don't know if he went by train. So...

*Yes, we were talking about your father going to Petersburgh Place.*

Yes, that's right.

*To the synagogue.*

Yes.

*And did you go with him ever?*

I would so – lots of times, except I had one experience and then I left. At least, I didn't have an experience but, you know, of course, women sat in the gallery. And one service, I can't remember when – which, where we were and why. But I remember this quite tall lady who had – wore an up straight hat, a huge hat. And she had a fox cape collar around her neck. [01:16:00] You know, one of these, they used to have whole foxes stuffed, which they'd put around their neck. And coming into the gallery, they just had a curtain on big metal hoops. And she came in sweeping this curtain, woosh, in the middle of a quiet period. And I was so disgusted. In any case, I'd been pretty disgusted with the conversations that used to go around upstairs anyway, about change of coupons. And you could get coupons for coffee, or you could get coupons for this or the other. But this was the last straw, this woman – I've got a fly here. This woman who could disturb a congregation like that and stand sort of in a rather insolent manner and then took her seat. I said to my father, 'This is not on.' And it's so – I think it must have more or less coincided with the time when I got this – a letter from a Rabbi Kassel, who was Reinhart's second in command, that he was sending these cars [ph] around and would I like to join? And so, I did, and I stayed in that synagogue for several years. They had a junior membership. And then they had the Berkeley Reunion Group, which was another club, which was great fun. And I think I might have had a job in between. [01:18:00] But then Rabbi Reinhart's secretary left, and he was looking for someone else. And Mr Kassel wondered if – asked me whether I would like to be his secretary. And I said, 'I don't think so. I think he can be quite tough and maybe shout. And I'm not – I don't like that. I'm very shy, I can't do it.' He said to me, Kassel said to me, 'Bridget, his bark is louder than his bite and he never bites.' So, I became a secretary. And he was very sweet to me, because he was very pedantic and I'm not, not at all and I wasn't then. You know, he really wanted a stamp the centimetre down and a centimetre in, that sort of thing. Anyway, I worked on the synagogue review, and all sorts of things. But he was kind. I remember one incident, he had one, what's that word? Not patient [laughs], one congregant who was really rather a nuisance. She needed to talk to him nearly every day and he really didn't want to. However, he was out that

morning and I was busily typing. This woman comes in, she needs to talk to Rabbi Reinhart. I said, 'Rabbi Reinhart is out, awfully sorry. I'll make an appointment for you. When would you like to come?' 'No, I must see him today.' I said, 'I'm sorry, he's out.' [01:20:00] Make a long story short, she sat and sat, and asked – talked to me and I had a lot of work to do. And I said, 'I'm sorry, Mrs whatever it was, 'I'm afraid you'll have to leave now. Please go.' So, she went and I was terrified. What had I done? I had actually sent somebody out. It's none of my business to do that. And Rabbi Reinhart comes in and I said, 'Something terrible's happened.' He said, 'What?', I said, 'I did so-and-so. I'm awfully sorry, but I had all this work to do, I just couldn't manage.' 'Oh', he said, 'You're wonderful. What a good job you did there. I'm so glad I don't have to see her.' He was like that; we had a good relationship.

*So, this was for the Liberal Synagogue?*

No, the –

*Where did he work?*

Upper Berkeley Street.

*Upper Berkeley Street? The Reformed?*

No, Liberal Synagogue was only when I met Peter.

*Okay, so this is the Reformed Synagogue, Upper Berkeley, yeah?*

Yes, yes. I was with the Reformed Synagogue.

*And Rabbi Reinhart, where was he from? What was his background?*

Well, he was American. [Laughs] He was so American. I always thought that he should have been a businessman rather than a rabbi, but never mind. But he, no, he was – I can't

remember the famous college he studied at in America. And he came over here. I don't actually know when he and Mrs Reinhart, an absolute pest [laughs], came. [01:22:03] Well, it was a synagogue when I came and certainly, for many years after.

*Yeah, but that's after the war?*

Oh, yeah.

*Much –*

Oh, long after.

*Long after the war?*

Yes.

*So, let's just come back to the war time. Were you aware, again, you were still young, what was going on in Europe?*

I was not very aware. In fact, I once had a good slap from my father, because I didn't know, I was about eight, I didn't know who Hitler was. And this was in an exam, for which I should have got a scholarship. And I didn't get the scholarship, because I didn't pass.

*So that was the eleven-plus probably.*

No, it was another exam for scholarships, I don't know.

*You didn't know who Hitler was?*

I didn't know who Hitler was.

*So, the –*

In fact, I think I didn't know a lot about a lot of things.

*But you were quite protected as well?*

I was quite protected. As I say, my father didn't talk about his sister. He didn't talk about the fact that his office was burnt down twice in London Wall, the City. So, I had –

*Because of the Blitz?*

Yes. And so, we had no – they had the papers anymore. No wedding certificates or anything like that, which was almost a bit difficult when I got married.

*Do you remember any of the bombing and anything like that?*

Well, I remember bombing in Surbiton. I was told, I didn't see it, but one children's home got bombed in Surbiton, killing certainly one pupil from our school. [01:24:00] But we also had a bomb very near us on – I lived on the street where they had a church diagonally opposite. And the church was bombed. The church house, not the steeple. Anyway, that was near, that was very near. But people ran out in the streets and they all cried, 'Oh! What a lovely church had got bombed.' A few yards from the church was a big block of flats. Had that steeple really been hit, it would have killed about 100 people. But people thought the church was really important.

*Were anyone – was anyone from that school evacuated? Or was there any talk of being evacuated?*

Not to my knowledge, no.

*And how was your grandmother doing in this situation?*

Well, she died when she was seventy-six. In fact, it was very sad because we had been – my mother had for the first time in years, been to a Yom Kippur service. And when she came home, her mother had had a stroke and she said, she'll never go to a synagogue again. And she didn't. My grandmother, well, she did everything. I mean, she used to be our cook. She cooked beautifully and I used to watch her sometimes, and I learned one or two things.

*What did she cook? What did she cook?*

She cooked everything. When she came, my father had some Austrian recipes, which nowadays would make one sick. [01:26:03] But they were filling and they were good. She made a lot of pastries, which filled with plums or apricots. She made cabbage and also some pasta and I don't know. We had to do a lot of cooking with, well, with golden syrup and with suet for cakes, for example. And we only had dried eggs. So, the cakes were never a great success. Except once we got a parcel from America, where a good – where I think my father's sister had put in a half a pound of butter. We hadn't seen butter for ages. My grandmother was very good about everything, but she could not eat margarine. So, she got all our butter. But this half pound of butter went straight into a cake. It was dampest cake [laughs] and buttery cake we'd ever eaten. It was probably quite horrible, but it tasted delicious. Yes, she was a cook, she was our doctor. Doctors were expensive, as I told you before. So, my grandmother was a doctor right from the beginning. I remember this house in Kingston, we moved into, I got mumps. No, I got –

*Mumps, you said before it was mumps.*

Yes, I think I got mumps later though, I got something else. [01:28:01] Something, a very bad cough. I'll tell you why I know it was a very big cough, because they got hold of my legs and they put my head out of the window, so that I could be... And they put – hung sheets, wet sheets, in the room. This was all from hearsay my grandmother knew. I got well without a doctor.

*And did your mother work? Did she help your father in the business or...?*

Not really. Oh, later on, they travelled a lot together. And my father had some fashion things to import and he used my mother's tastes for many of them. And also, to flatter the suppliers, to get us better prices and that sort of thing. She helped him, but she didn't really help, except for the time when my father was interned. And later on, after he died, she did a bit of work. But she had a major breakdown, a nervous breakdown, so she couldn't really do very much.

*When did she have – when did she have a nervous breakdown?*

What do you mean? The year?

*Yeah.*

Well, my father died, I think it was 1983, or four, I don't... No, wait a minute.

*But I mean, was it after your father passed away or – her nervous breakdown?*

[01:30:00] Yes, yes. She couldn't cope. She had three things thrust at her; she couldn't cope at all. One, a good eye specialist told her she was going blind, she had a detached retina, which nowadays is nothing, but they couldn't do anything in those days. The other thing was that the children of the man who owned the house wanted, in fact, to sell the house. So, she would have had to use – find other accommodation. And there was something else, I can't remember. Yes, it was eyesight and moving, which you know... The nervous breakdown came actually soon after my father died. And then seventeen months later, she committed suicide. So that is that part of the story.

*And do you think it was related to refugee experience as well?*

Well, I don't know how much was. She was always – she said her nerves was the weakest part of her body. So, she had lots of experiences which would have tugged at her nerves. Not least, waiting for me to come over, I suppose. But not – not directly related, shall we say.

[01:32:03] What else?

*What about restitution after the war? Did your parents go back to...?*

Yes. Oh, yes. My parents got quite a lot of restitution. Mainly, because I think I told you, we had a gardeners couple who lived in the basement. And the lady was asked by a court of law to come out and tell them about our property. We had a – as I said, we had a villa. It was quite nice. But what she said was that it was like “*wie bei Kaisers*”. In other words, as being with royalty.

*Palatial.*

Palatial. So, we got quite a nice restitution.

*And the house belonged to you?*

Oh, yes. Yes, that house.

*And did your parents go back to Berlin?*

No.

*Did they go back?*

No.

*Did they ever go back?*

No, no. My brother was the first to go back, I think, on business.

*He did go?*

Yes.



I also went. I – my aunt and uncle who had gone to Palestine, the man could never learn Hebrew and he also had a lot of money stacked in Berlin. So, they went back to Berlin. And my aunt got very much involved in the Jewish community and – what? Sorry, for a moment I've lost track.

*West Berlin. So, I –*

Yeah.

*So, you went to Berlin as well?*

To Berlin, yes.

*Yeah.*

[01:34:00] Well, I went to Berlin, yes. My aunt had had her eighty-fifth birthday and she said everybody would be there, her children and grandchildren, I don't know who. Please, please, would we come, Peter and myself? And I said, 'Well, yes, you asked so nicely, I suppose so.' Because I had vowed, I'd never go back to Berlin. But I went for her eighty-fifth birthday and I went for her ninetieth birthday. And I went for her funeral a year later. So, I was back there three times.

*And what was it like for you to go to Berlin?*

Well, my sister-in-law and I sat on a coach, and we passed the Brandenburg [Gate], you know, tour. And we both shivered at the same time. And it's very strange, because I hadn't been there. I only knew what had been going on, the speeches, etc., much later from reports, from stories. But I had this awful feeling. And of course, at that time the Communists had taken it over and the Com – some official came at first to search the coach. But they had long mirrors on a long handle to search underneath the coach, to see if there were any escapist people.

*Yeah, this was when it was still East Germany?*

Yeah. And an Englishman piped up and said if everything is so wonderful here, because she was talking about all the wonderful things, he said, 'Why do you need to search if anybody would be leaving? Why would they leave?' [01:36:07] He was shut up quickly [laughs].

*And did you go back to your – the villa that you – where you lived?*

We did go back. My brother took me to the villa, which was much changed. It had been turned into several flats. I couldn't go in but just saw it. It looked more or less the same as I'd remembered it. But and we saw the Hasensprung and Teufelssee, where I had skated once, fell on my bottom.

*Teufelssee?*

Teufelssee, does that mean anything to you?

*A little bit, yeah.*

Well, I got a pair of skates on one of my birthdays, before I left Berlin, and I put them on. No point at all- being held, being – not being held. I just sat on my button, so I thought, no more skating [laughs].

*And what was it like for you to go back? What did you feel when you were in Berlin?*

I couldn't believe it, because at that time a lot of it had already been rebuilt and it was stunning. Because I asked Peter, 'What about this?' He said, 'Well, it's all been rebuilt.' And we were all right there. I don't know if I – you know, I remember going into or sitting in a café and wanting a piece of cake. [01:38:08] And we went up to the counter to choose it. And the assistant said, '*die da will Schokoladentorte*' ['This one wants chocolate cake']. I said, 'Oh', I didn't want to point out what '*die da*'... I don't know if they meant anything. But it was also – it was icy cold in Germany in that year. Very, very frozen on the pavements.

And I wore high heels, I was going to my aunt's party and I slipped, and I went bang on my coccyx. [Laughs]. Do you know what? I still remember the pain and I had to grin all through the evening. I don't know how I managed. But everybody, when I fell, everybody in the street crowded around and said, 'can I sit? Can I do this? Can I do that?' I was very surprised. But yeah, it was funny. I know I wore a fur coat on occasion and every – young people came up and stared. It was horrible.

*And what did you – did you feel any resentment towards the Germans? Or did you feel...?*

I've always felt resentment, an unaccountable lot of resentment seeing the way this happened to me. I'm afraid I haven't got a good word to say, except for Frau Merkel [laughs].

**[01:40:05]** I hope you're not – are you German?

*No.*

So, I can say that.

*Yes, you can. And do you feel still – still feel that today?*

Yes. The only thing is I love their food and the shops like Lidl and Aldi- have a lot of German food. And my present carer, she goes to those shops and gets things.

*What do you feel? Resentment?*

Yes. More than resentment, more than resentment.

*What do you feel? What do you feel?*

Actually, a deep hatred really. You know, I don't know why. As I said, because comparatively little happened to me, very little. My best friend, she died now, but my best friend was in concentration camp and her stories were quite different. Have you read or do you know Daniel Finkelstein?

*Yeah.*

Well, his parents were our best friends.

*Ahh.*

So, you know, there are other stories.

*Mirjam and Ludwik?*

Yes. You knew them?

*Yeah.*

Did you?

*Yeah.*

How? From the synagogue?

*No, I interviewed them both and –*

Oh, did you?

*Yeah, yeah. [01:42:00] I'm mentioned his book, because he used his father's interview which I conducted, you know. Said it was very helpful for him, which is wonderful.*

Oh, right, I don't know that.

I have – I can't make up my mind. I haven't bought the book. I know the story.

*Yeah.*

I had – you know, we had a lot of friends. I remember one friend of ours who said, I always – I sometimes also say, ‘Talk about Holocaust and Holocaust, sometime along the line one needs to forget it a bit.’ And this friend of ours said, ‘You should never forget, never ever.’ So- you know, but I haven’t had those experiences, so why I feel so strongly I have no idea. And I’m really not exaggerating.

*Do you sometimes feel – do you sometimes think about what would have happened to your life without Hitler?*

Yes, I do sometimes. It would have been very different. I mean, Peter’s family were very rich, but we would have been quite rich too. And I think, yes, I think life would have been very different. I wonder if we still would have met. I mean. as I say, our families knew each other a little bit but.... I mean, yes, I suppose different in many ways. **[01:44:00]** I don’t suppose we would have left Berlin, there wouldn’t have been any reason.

*Just – sorry to interrupt you, but because you mentioned the Finkelsteins.*

*Yeah.*

*So, were you related? Because your maiden name is Wiener.*

No, everybody always seems to think so.

*But it –*

It’s no relation.

It didn’t occur to me before, but now –

None at all, none at all. Not only were we not – I mean, have the same name, but some people even thought, we looked a bit similar. They always thought at least we were sisters.

*Who? Mirjam and you?*

Yes.

*I see.*

Very funny. They always used to say –

*She was Mirjam Wiener and you were –*

Well, Bridget Wiener, yeah.

*Yeah.*

And we went to religion class together. We were at bat mitzvah together.

*Oh, in the...? At Upper Berkeley?*

Up at – yeah, yeah. So –

*Interesting.*

Not only that, but when I was about twenty-four, I used to go out a lot and came home late, and my mother always used to stay up for me. And my father one day said, ‘Your mother can’t sleep because you come home so late. And honestly, if you can’t come home a bit earlier, look for some accommodation. Move out, she can’t stand that.’ So, I spoke to Mirjam one day and said this and this had happened. She said, ‘Well, I’ll tell you what, I’ve got an attic, my house has an attic and it needs painting. But I wonder if my father would let you stay there.’ She lived in Golders Green and I lived in Surbiton at the time. And she asked her

father and he said, apparently said yes. [01:46:00] And we set to painting this place and getting it ready. It has a little ring on which I could cook, and it was in Golders Green. It was not far from Marble Arch where there were clubs, dancing and outings, etc., etc. I was absolutely delighted. I stayed there for six months, first having established a rent.

*So, you moved out?*

I moved out.

*And moved in with the Wieners?*

And moved in with the Wieners, having established a rent of one pound a week roughly. My – her father looked at me, ‘Are you sure you can afford that?’ I had a good job. Yeah, I could afford that. And my mother later on said I was more often in their house than I was when I had actually been living there. But I only lived there anyway for six months, then I moved back home. I was twenty-four, yes. I lived there then until I was thirty-two.

*So, who were –*

And they never asked again where I was or when I’d come home, or even bothered to stay up at night.

*They were happy to have you back?*

Happy to have me back.

*So, when you moved in with the Wieners, it was her – Mirjam, her father?*

Yes.

*And her two sisters?*

*And her two sisters and her stepmother. Or at least nowadays, we would say Dr Wiener's partner. So, it was very nice. Her sisters were lovely and they had parties and...*

**[01:48:00]** *And you said you went to a youth group at Upper Berkeley Street?*

Yes.

*What was it called, your youth group?*

Well, the first one was called Junior Membership. I think that went up to the age of twenty, I would think. And then the Berkeley Reunion Group was the next step up.

*And were there many other refugees there in that group? Or was it a sort of mixed English refugees?*

I think it was mixed. There were quite a lot of refugees there and Hugo Gryn was – well, he was very young in those days and not yet ordained, I think. So, he often came and there were a lot of – yes. It was great fun.

*So, tell us a little bit about your – you finished school, you went to then – you went to study?*

I went to the polytechnic. I had a lovely time there and learned absolutely nothing.

*What was your plan? What did you want to do after school?*

I wanted to study languages. I was, if I may say, I was very good at languages, even Latin and I really wanted to. And my father said, 'You don't study languages, you just pick them up.' Anyway, I think on the whole that time, me going to university would have been too expensive, I think. But anyway, I went to a poly – I was in the polytechnic for two years, learning all about Indians and Chinese and other Europeans. **[01:50:06]** But economics, I don't think I ever learned to spell the word. I knew something about somebody had written that money is what money does, which I appreciated. Particularly when it went to spending.



But otherwise, really nothing. One lecturer, sorry, one lecturer on economic history wanted to be a Labour MP. So, he went off to do his speaking elsewhere, gave us a long reading list, which I never got through. I don't – I think he gave one lecture on the manorial system. And the next one was on the Industrial Revolution. What happened in between? I have no idea.

*Okay, Bridget, I think we're going to have a little break now.*

Yes, by all means.

*Yeah, so we're talking about the post-war period.*

Yes.

*And you going to polytechnic to study economics.*

That's right.

*And what did you do then after you studied?*

I went to a secretarial college in Bond Street called whatever. I used to know the name, I've forgotten it, there's only one. And I did a secretarial course there and then I started work. I went to British Home Stores first and then the British Metal Corporation.

*Metal?*

Metal Corporation in the city. [01:52:02] And then one or two unimportant things. Then Reuters and again, something stupid. And I landed up on the Jewish Refugees Committee, because I really wanted to do psychology or psychiatry, or something. And a friend of mine said, 'See how you get on with people.' And I started with the Jewish Refugees Committee. Well, I liked the work there very much, but I decided I don't want to be a psychologist [laughs].

*What did you do at the Jewish Refugees Committee?*

I helped in various ways on a secretarial basis. But then, I asked the head of the committee, a Mrs Epstein, I don't know if that name is familiar at all? But I could do something practical. And she said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, we have a man in hospital at the moment and he's lost...' Sorry, should I drink something? I'm getting hoarse.

*Yes, please. The Refugees Committee.*

Yes, and I was to visit that man in hospital. Anyway, he had both his legs amputated. And I used to have to consult with his son what to do with him. He had the – I don't know, he sort of vaguely fell in love with me. It was a bit difficult. His wife was in Israel, but they made me still go to his consultant and get another accommodation for him and carers. [01:54:11] And the last thing I heard was that he went to Israel, he joined with his wife. But it was a terrible job actually, to keep apart and together at the same side. And I nearly got a nervous breakdown, in fact.

*You?*

Mm. So, my parents said, 'We're taking you off to a little cruise', which was –

*Why? Why did you get a nervous breakdown? Why?*

I felt the work very difficult. And even nowadays, sometimes when people talk to me about that they're going to do some good, I tell you, 'Are you trained for it?' Because I felt at the time, I had no training. Just because I said I wanted to do some practical work, to put me into a job which I think I should have had a lot of training for.

*It wasn't –*

This man was in no condition to be just visited by somebody. He had a lot of hang-ups. He wasn't an easy man anyway, as it happened. So, this is why I found it very difficult. Do you understand that?

*I do, I do. But I mean, at that point, the Refugees Committee, they were probably dealing with older refugees, people who needed help.*

[01:56:02] Well, as I say, they had various people all volunteering to interview refugees. At the time I was there, both the Egyptians and the Hungarian refugees were in a mess. I happened to be on the Hungarian side. But I once heard a well-to-do, quite well-known lady who shall be nameless, say to a refugee who had said that she had no money, she said, 'What? No money?' I was disgusted.

*So, this must have been after 1956, when the Egyptians and the Hungarian...?*

It was about '66, '67, I think. Yes, yeah.

*So, you were helping with the...?*

I was about twenty –

*So, was it the Central British Fund, in fact?*

It was in fact, the Central British Fund, yes.

*And they were trying to help the...? And did you meet some of the Hungarian and Egyptian Jews who came in the...?*

Oh, yes. In fact, one of the Egyptian Jews became a very good friend of ours. She's in Israel now and I'm very worried about her. So, she's got a grandson of grown-up age. But yet.

*Because it's interesting, because the Hungarian Jews, of course, who came, they were also survivors.*

Yes.

*Hungarian survivors who then came as refugees.*

Well, one of the ladies who were on the switchboard became a very good friend, she and her husband. Her husband played violin and they're ever so – I got to know them quite well.

[01:58:00] But you know, one thing or another, we lost touch.

*And did you feel – because you had just come. I mean, this was '56, '57, so not that long after your own emigration. Do you feel...?*

Yeah, well, quite a bit. I was already twenty-seven then.

*Okay.*

It was about twenty years after, twenty-one years.

*Yes. But did you feel that your own experience equipped you for this? Or quite the contrary, that you would slightly retraumatised by working with people who had come as refugees?*

No, I think I felt more equipped all together. But as I say, not with that man. He was a mental, medical – and a medical case and I wasn't equipped. I mean, this friend we have now who came over with her mother and sister, they were very pragmatic and very ready to go and settle and do things. Although they had some money, you know. Some of – I know some of the refugees just sort of said, what we could have had. What's this? What does that do?

*It's just a – yeah, I understand. So, and so after that, your parents took you on a cruise. Did you go back to the Refugees Committee or you left?*

No, no, I left. I had a friend at the Refugees Committee who knew people on the Citrus Marketing Board of Israel. And I don't know, a Mr Moshe [ph] Levine was a European manager. I don't know if you would have known him? No. But the Citrus Marketing Board might mean something, if you remember Jaffa oranges. [02:00:05] Well, it was – he redistributed the oranges throughout Europe. So that was a very interesting job and I had that, for at least two years? My boss kindly arranged a trip around Israel for me as well, which was nice. But well, it was financial. I met a lot of business people whilst we were there.

*Did you have any interest? Were you ever thinking of going to Israel or leaving England?*

Would I leave? Well, I actually went to Israel for three weeks, I fell in love with Israel. I wanted to emigrate to Israel. And I had in fact, already arranged quite a lot when I met Peter. And when I met Peter, it was all shelved [laughs].

*And how did you meet Peter?*

I met Peter, it was in inverted commas an arranged marriage. Klaus' wife – I'll start again. One evening, I went to the cinema with my parents. And afterwards in the foyer, I suddenly saw somebody I vaguely remembered. And he also came up to me and said, 'Bridget?' I said, 'Yeah.' 'Oh, hello, blah, blah, blah.' He was married already. 'Are you married?' 'No.' 'Oh, oh, well, it's nice to have met you. Goodbye.' [02:02:00] And I suddenly get telephone con – you know, had a phone call and that Peter, who was also a Peter, invited me for dinner. Well, at that time I'd also just had a foot operation. So, I said, 'I can't walk very much. I can't get there at the moment.' 'Never mind, I'll call you again.' He called again, this time it worked and I got to him. I went, saw the dining room, six places set, one empty one. And through the door comes somebody I had seen at the Berkeley Reunion Group in the corridor to a council room. Really white hair, briefcase in hand, nose in air, looking thoroughly unpleasant. He comes in. Oh, well, that dinner was a great success. We argued about everything. If he said blue, I said green, etc. That Peter was a cousin of Klaus' wife. So, they had somehow got together and said, 'It's high time that Peter married' and why not to see about this Bridget? So, Peter that evening of the dinner, asked my Peter to take me home. I lived about ten minutes away at the time. So, Peter took me home and when he stopped, he

got out a visiting card. And he said, 'Look, I've got about six numbers on the visiting card. You can phone me anytime you like.' [02:04:04] I ran up the stairs to my house, got in and slammed the door. My mother said, 'What on earth is the matter?' I said, 'I've met the most ghastly man who has the most ghastly manners and the sooner I was in Israel, the better.'

[Laughs]

*Yes?*

Three weeks later, this Peter phoned me, 'Would you like to come out for a little snacky lunch? And there was a very nice coffee place.' And I've mentioned I like coffee and cake for lunch, so that's what it was. We enjoyed, we talked, and we found each other not as bad as we first thought. Well, I think the rest is history. We had an arranged marriage.

*So, you changed your mind?*

No, never.

*You?*

What?

*You changed your mind?*

Oh, I changed my mind then, oh, yes, yes. Yes, nearly sixty years later I've changed my mind. We should be having our sixtieth wedding anniversary in February.

*Congratulations.*

Well, all be well.

*Yeah. And so, then you – then it was clear that you wouldn't go to Israel?*

Yes, yeah. And that was it.

*And what was Peter doing at the time, when you met him?*

He's an accountant and that, he was working. He'd only recently, I think, set up business on his own. And it was all a little bit on a shoestring to start with [laughs].

**[02:06:03]** *And where...?*

And I worked as well, I had various secretarial jobs. And then in '81 I decided really that I – what I'd like to do is to teach English to foreigners. And this is what I started doing in a very small way, which got a bit bigger. I got some committee rooms at church and sort of set up school, CET.

*An English school?*

English school.

*What was it called?*

CET.

*And where was it?*

Up in Finchley Central, St Philip's. They had a couple of rooms there, and a couple of rooms and a toilet. [Laughs] Very important.

*And that's where you started?*

That's where we started. That's where I ended up to. Well, I did that for about twelve years and then all of a sudden, I couldn't drive anymore. One of the muscles of both my shoulders

seemed to give way. And I did private lessons mostly here, conversation lessons and private lessons, which went very well.

*And where did you settle with Peter? Where did you settle?*

Oh, well, we lived in Canfield Gardens for one – was it a year, year-and-a-half? Something like that. But during which time we had a car accident and I got a whiplash injury.

**[02:08:07]** And I couldn't do very much for a little while. My left arm was half paralysed. I got back again as the nerve loosened, but I couldn't do much work. But then, I think we stayed at .... Gardens, no, we were at Canfield Gardens I think only a year. Because we were hunting, we had been house hunting and we found something, I think they found something while I wasn't well. So yes, I had to organise one or two things from a settee. As a friend of mine said, 'I always seem to find you in a horizontal position.' [Laughs]

*And where was that? In Finchley? Where did you move to?*

That was in Canfield Gardens.

*Canfield Gardens?*

Yeah.

*But you moved to where?*

Moved here.

*Right, you came to –*

Yes. We've been here more or less ever since.

*So, Temple Fortune, Hampstead Garden Suburb.*



Hampstead Garden Suburb, yeah.

*And you had children?*

Children here, two boys. I had lots of parties here. This is a very nice house; it was always expandable. We could fit any number of people in here. Not really, but one could, you know what I mean? Children's parties, growing up parties, every kind of party. So –

**[02:10:02]** *And what sort of identity did you want to give to your children?*

You mean about being Jewish?

*Jewish, English or what?*

I don't think we bothered, really. We took them to synagogue occasionally, they usually hid in the garage, because they didn't want to go. They are not very keen on anything – authorised religion. They said, 'No, no.' And in fact, they both married out.

*And you joined the Liberal Synagogue?*

Yes. Our marriage, where I married Peter.

*You married in the Liberal Synagogue?*

Yes, we did.

*And was that familiar for you? I mean, similar to the Reformed –*

Fairly similar. Yes, I think so. The Upper Berkeley Street is much grander in a way and in many ways, I felt very much at home there. At least until they got rid of Rabbi Reinhart. And Rabbi Kassel went to Bulawayo [Zimbabwe] because the council was against Reinhart. And then Rabbi Reinhart did something which I thought was terrible. It was stupid, of course, of

me. He bought a huge house in Knightsbridge for 108,000 pounds. We found out everything and I thought it was criminal. [02:12:04] He spent all that money when at the time, there was a big Oxfam- what would we call this?

*Collection?*

Collections and demonstrations and you have it, but Oxfam. And he had spent all this money. He also declined to come to our wedding. Peter didn't like Reinhart and Reinhart I think, thought that we should have got married in this house, which was actually then a synagogue. But anyways.

*So which years? When – you said you worked for Rabbi Reinhart, when was that? Before?*

Oh, I worked for – oh, yes. Well, just before, just a minute. We got married in '64. No, it was – no, of course, I was teaching up 'till then. So, it was quite a lot before. I'll tell you when it was, I went to Israel in '59, so it was in that year. So '58, '59 I worked for him. Because I got married '64, so it was before that.

*And you're still members of the Liberal Synagogue?*

Yes, sort of. We pay. No, but now instead of television, we can watch the services.

*At home?*

At home. That's good. [02:14:00] Well, we started being a little bit afraid, there was a real scare some years ago about synagogues being bombed. And so, Peter and I decided not to go and we didn't go any more then. And I missed – I couldn't go very easily. And we started watching and involving ourselves on television. Yeah.

*And Bridget, how do you think your experiences impacted your later life? Your experience of coming, being left in Berlin and coming on the Kindertransport?*

I'm sorry, I don't think I can answer that, because I really don't know how I feel. Do you mean now? Or do you mean at the time?

*I mean whether you think it had an effect on your choices, on your –*

I'll tell you something, I felt terribly guilty for years. I felt guilty that I was alive. I was guilty that the Jewish Kindertransport people still sent people over to Surbiton to see how I was, and they didn't quite realise that I was in fact with my parents. And I felt both guilty and annoyed at times.

*So, they kept in touch with you, the committee?*

They did, they did. I think for quite a number of years they sent somebody around to see how I was. But I had – we always had the impression that they thought as I was being boarded out, you know. [02:16:04] I used to tell them, 'I'm with my parents, I'm okay.' So, I don't feel like that anymore now.

*Yeah. Any other effect or impact? Do you think it influenced you?*

I don't think so. I – as I said before, I was very shielded. Most of the horrors I didn't hear about 'till much later. So, I was shocked but... Nor did I know anybody personally, who was left behind and I only knew two survivors of – a chap called Aronsfeld [ph], which was Peter's friend, and my friends, the Finkelsteins. So, and they did not speak much of their experiences either.

*At the time?*

No. They intimated some things, but not – it was not a subject of conversation.

*No. Did you speak about your childhood in Berlin? Did you speak to your children about your history?*

Very little, very little. They didn't particularly want to know. [02:18:00] As my younger son said, 'Mum, that's history.' I said, 'Well, yes, it is but...' [laughs]. But he did actually, my younger son said his daughter was having lessons about the Holocaust, and would I please give her a little story, which is the little story that I just gave you.

*So, you wrote down your...?*

I wrote it down, yes. So...

*And I mean, you married a fellow refugee.*

Yes.

*Do you think that is a coincidence? Or was it important for you to marry somebody...?*

It was important for me to marry a Jew. I don't think the rest came into it. But see, I wanted an intelligent Jew, nothing else mattered. Years ago, my grandmother and I went on holiday in France, and it happened it happened that there were two Scottish boys there. And one boy and I fell in love, and he actually asked me to marry him. And I told my grandmother and she said to me, 'Do you think your father and mother would approve of you marrying a non-Jew?' I thought not, so I called it off [laughs]. Waited a long time before I got married after that. I have Peter now, so that's nothing important.

*And where do you feel you belong today? How would you...?*

[02:20:00] In this chair [laughs]. I don't go far from it. No, that's not quite true but...

*How would you describe yourself in terms of your identity today?*

I've never thought of it. I don't think of my identity. I mean, I'm a wife and I'm a grandmother. I mean, I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I'm a grandmother. I regret that I can't do with my grandchildren, as I might have done otherwise. Especially with a little one. There's a

– I’ve got many years difference between David’s children, who are in their twenties, and the younger boy’s children, who are – the boy is six and the girl is nine. There’s a huge difference. And with the little ones particularly, you know, I can’t get on the floor and play or anything like that. I can’t even hug them properly. So, I’m sorry about that. The other day, everybody was shocked. I said, you know, ‘It’s quite ridiculous. A grandmother can’t tell her grandchildren sometimes, something to their benefit. How they look, what they should do.’ It was something like that. I mean, it’s no skin off my nose if they don’t do it. I do it for their good. I’m not jealous of how they look or this. So, if I say that somebody is too fat, they can say to me, ‘So are you, Grandmother.’ But why should you be? I’ve had my life. [02:22:02] If you are – if you wear, I don’t know, a décolleté up to here and skirts up to here, yes, people will look at you. And may not even look at you in a very nice way. And certainly not suitable for an interview.

*What about German citizenship? Is that something that your children applied for?*

Yes, all of them, to my horror.

*So, what do you think about that?*

Horrible, horrible. I understand the usefulness. But I don’t know, I can’t remember, but once upon a time one had a passport. And yes, one would queue, took one’s turn to show their passport and board the plane or whatever. What’s so terrible about it now? No, they can’t wait that long. I don’t understand. But anyway, Peter’s also got one, he’ll tell you later. But he’s also –

*What do you think? You wouldn’t apply for a German passport?*

No, no, I wouldn’t. Peter has – well, he hasn’t got a passport. I’m not sure, he gets some money from them, I mean, as I got years ago.

*Restitution?*

Yes, it wasn't very much. But then, as I say, I didn't have much schooling. Peter missed a lot. He left when he was nine and you know, he had to change schools and so on, and came over here. And then he didn't speak a word of English. At least, I'm sorry, I don't want to interfere.

*No, we'll talk to Peter. But what about, have you ever been invited by the City of Berlin, back to Berlin?*

By who?

*By the City of Berlin? Have you ever been invited?*

[02:24:00] No, actually, I haven't. But I think I wouldn't go, I'm not interested. I mean, I told you, I've been to Berlin. Went for my aunt's sake. But no, I wouldn't go. I literally really don't want to know anything about the Germans, except their food [laughs]. I can't get rid of that taste. Mind you, I have hardly any smell or taste anyway. But I still like what I can taste.

*But you at some point joined the AJR, or your parents joined the AJR?*

I think my parents did, because we have had it for years. I can't quite remember. I wasn't – we might have done, I don't know.

*Are you surprised that the AJR is still around after so many years?*

I'll tell you what I'm surprised about, and this is the letters that appear in the AJR by people who literally still worry about the coffee houses of Berlin or Vienna. I really can't understand this. I mean, they've also had lives. They must have done something in eighty years. So, I don't understand this looking backwards.

*You think their nostalgia?*

Yes, this nostalgia.

*You can't understand it?*

No, I can't, I really can't.

*You don't feel a sense of nostalgia?*

No, not at all. For the Dorice restaurant on Finchley Road, I might –

**[02:26:01]** *Okay, tell us about the Dorice. Tell us, what do you remember of the Dorice?*

I don't remember much. They had excellent coffee and cake. And there was an awful lot of *Kaffeeklatsch*, [chit chat while drinking coffee] but [laughs] I don't remember.

*Did you go there a little bit?*

Yes, because we lived just around the corner. Canfield Gardens.

*Oh, you were very close.*

Very close to Swiss Cottage. So yes, we went there often.

*What did you eat there? Do you remember any of the food?*

Only cake and coffee. We lived on cake and coffee when we went out.

*I – we – I interviewed Doris Balacs, you know, the owner.*

Doris? No, I even didn't know the owner.

*Yeah, I interviewed her about twenty-two years ago.*

Really?

*Yeah, yes.*

Was her restaurant famous or something?

*The Dorice? Well, for the refugees it was quite famous.*

No, I mean, for food, I mean.

*Yes.*

Gulasch –

*I mean, according to her, she said Beuschel was one of her things. You know what Beuschel is? It's an Austrian dish.*

Yes.

*It's lungs [laughs]. I don't know what it is.*

It's what?

*Beuschel, I think it's lungs, as far as I know. Anyway, she was talking about all kinds of things.*

Lungenhaschee? [meat sauce made of minced lungs]

*Pardon?*

It's a Lungenhaschee. It's a lung mince. A minced lung.



*Yeah.*

My father used to like that with fried egg, so it must have been that.

*Probably, and all kinds of other food. What about the Cosmo? Did you ever go to the Cosmo?*

Also, yes, I think so. I think we preferred the other.

*Dorice? So, you feel a bit nostalgic for that?*

I can get over it. Not really, not really. I remembered it but not more than that.

*Yeah, that's interesting that some people feel nostalgic and some not.*

[02:28:08] I mean, people like the Finkelsteins, they were always forward looking. I can't remember them ever saying anything, you know, 'If only', or – never. So...

*So, you think one shouldn't go – or worry about the past too much?*

One should remember. I think now, one should remember the Holocaust. I can't say we shouldn't worry about it. It would be terrible thing to say. But one's own past, once one's here and safe, probably working, having a roof over your head, having family, no. What right have you to think about the past?

*But sometimes it comes back when people get older. You know, the memories come back stronger.*

As you see, as you see [laughs]. I don't think so. Well, I'm sorry, I'll tell you, I'm sorry for them if they feel they have to harp back to the past. Then the present can't be very – if they have to harp back to the past, the present can't be very pleasant. That's – well, I'm sorry but –

*And what do you think about now? You know, there are lots of – many second and third generations who become now members of the AJR, you know. [02:30:04] That's a new phenomenon.*

Really?

*Yeah.*

That's interesting.

*They're looking for some common history or, yeah, most members are now second and third generation.*

I think there are quite a lot of young people who are in fact interested in what happened. And they also know that their parents or grandparents didn't speak much about it. Many, many people just couldn't, or wouldn't talk about it at all. And they are curious, yes. If young people aren't curious, then who?

*Yeah, yeah. And you said your parents also didn't speak so much about it?*

Not to me, not to me.

*But to other people they did?*

No, I think only amongst themselves. What my – my parents didn't have so many things in- in Surbiton, and the few they had were in fact, not Jewish. So, I don't think they cared for... I can only remember two friends, three friends they had, and the people who lived above us. But I don't think they ever talked to the Blacks. They played bridge with them, they were friends with them, but I doubt they talked. It is not something that most people actually want to spend an evening listening to, you must admit.

*And do you think the relationship between the English Jews and the refugees, the German Jewish refugees was difficult?*

It was a little bit. We had very good friends, actually. [02:32:06] They were very good friends. But one was a – the man was a refugee and his wife was very upper-class English. And I noticed that sometimes she would sort of look at me when I said, I don't know, whatever, what happened perhaps. 'Fancy that, did you? Oh.' You know, a little bit – it's funny how a lion sort of sits down and gnaws its bone. It's very interesting, amazing. And I think this is the general view, I think.

*Okay, Bridget, is there anything else you'd like to add which I haven't asked you about?*

And antisemitism is very rife.

*Yeah. How do you feel now with the current events happening in the Middle East? Does it affect you?*

Yes, very much. I didn't think it would affect me as much as – what's happened in Israel. I sat in front of television, I put on the radio, I – it's awful, awful.

*How do you feel?*

I think it's awful, but I can't understand Netanyahu. It's not for me to understand. One day we will maybe, unless he gets lynched

*Yeah.*

So, I don't know.

*Are you worried about antisemitism today?*

[02:34:00] Yes, yes. I would only talk to Jewish people or tell Christians immediately that I'm Jewish. We had one or two experiences of antisemitism. I don't want to repeat it.

*Recently or...?*

Oh, a few years back. No, not recently. We didn't talk to any non-Jews. Well, that's not quite true. I mean, my carer's non-Jewish, [inaudible] is non-Jewish and the butcher is non-Jewish.

*Yeah, what experience did you have? Or you don't want to...?*

Well, nothing except that they heard that we were Jewish and all of a sudden, they were always busy. You know, having met regularly, they were always busy. So, after the third telephone call of, 'Yes, Bridget, I'm sorry, we can't.' Since it was immediately after the evening when we talked about something Jewish, I can't remember what. I think they'd found out that we were Jewish.

*They didn't know before?*

They probably didn't know before. As I say, nowadays, I would always make quite sure that people do know. I mean, the first thing I said with the lot of carers I had, especially some from Somalia, I said, 'Do these people know that I'm Jewish? Because otherwise I don't want them.' I don't mind if they're Somali, I would mind if they're antisemitic. And that goes for this agency, the present agency I have too. I mean, they also knew immediately that we were Jewish. No, I just don't let myself get into it anymore.

[02:36:00] *Yeah. And do you still feel that you're a refugee? Do you still – would you still call yourself a refugee?*

In some ways, in some ways, yes. Because we're Jewish, we are in any way a little apart. But we've had different experiences, we can speak different languages. You know, people sort of ask me, 'Where do you come from?' I tend to say from Finchley, but that's besides the point. Well, my mother, she really spoke – finish.

*No, no, go on.*

She really spoke with an accent, like that [imitating her mother's German accent]. And she was asked where she came from.

*What did she say?*

And she said, 'From Surbiton.'

[Both laugh] *Does it bother you that people ask you, where are you – where do you come from?*

Vaguely, but I have a cover of various languages. I mean, I can make myself understood in four languages. So, I have a little bit of a, you know, a communal accent, if you like.

*Could we just wait to...?*

I think we've probably finished; I can't speak anymore.

*One second. Yes. Is there anything else, Bridget, I haven't asked you you'd like to add, which we haven't discussed?*

I think you've turned me inside out [laughs].

*So final question to you.*

Yes.

*Have you got a message for anyone who might watch this interview in the future, based on your experiences?*

[02:38:05] I need notice of that question.

*Hm?*

I need notice of that question.

*I'll give you time to think.*

Let it never happen again. And always look forward, but don't forget.

*And then I have to ask you, not to forget what? One's family? One's history? One's...?*

One's history, I think. I hope no one forgets their family.

*Okay, well, Bridget, thank you so much for sharing your story with AJR Refugee Voices.*

Thank you. Thank you for spending all this time. Frank, are you very bored?

[Long pause]

[02:40:31] *Yes, please, Bridget, what do we see on this photograph?*

This photograph, you see my grandparents. Those are the parents of my mother and they're on holiday sometime, I imagine, in the 1930s.

*And what are their names?*

Their name is Siegfried Silberstein and Martha Silberstein.

*Thank you. Yes, Bridget.*

So those are my grandparents again, or my – the parents of my father. I'm afraid I don't know their names, it's Herr and Frau Wiener. And probably taken at the turn of the century.

*And you said they didn't approve of the marriage, so they didn't come?*

Did I say that?

*Yeah.*

They didn't approve of my parents' marriage, so they didn't attend.

*And did you know them at all?*

No, I didn't.

*Thank you. Yes, Bridget.*

That picture is of my brother and myself somewhere in Berlin. He must have been back from holiday, my brother, Stefan.

**[02:42:01]** *Which year roughly, would you say?*

I would think perhaps the beginning of '38, or whenever there's a holiday. Could be the Easter holiday maybe, '38.

*Okay, thank you.*

Well, this is me as a child, probably nine or ten years old.

*Where?*

It's in Surbiton, Surrey, where I spent nearly all my life.

*And you're reading a book.*

I'm reading a book.

*Any idea what you're reading?*

No, I don't know.

*Thank you.*

These are my parents, Jacques and Ellen Wiener in our garden in Surbiton, in about 1950.

This is my grandmother, Martha Silberstein, in about 1933 or four.

*Yes, please, Bridget.*

Well, that's my wedding photograph of my father on the far left with my mother, and my sister-in-law in front of him. And then it's us and my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law's on the right and my sister-in-law. And who are the others? I'm not sure. Who did I say they were? Oh, my mother-in-law's there and my father-in-law.

*Okay. Thank you so much. When was this picture taken?*

That was taken in 1964.

*Thank you so much for sharing your story and your photos with us again.*

My pleasure.

**[02:44:07]**



[End of transcript]