

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Kory
Forename:	Agnes
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	13 December 1944
Interviewee POB:	Budapest, Hungary

Date of Interview:	19 November 2015
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV158
NAME: Agnes Kory
DATE: 19 November, 2015
LOCATION: North London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

This interview is with Agnes Kory in her home in North London, on the 19th of November 2015. Agnes Kory, thank you very much for kindly agreeing to be interviewed by the AJR for Refugee Voices 2. I'd like to start off please by asking a little bit about your family, the background and where and when you were born.

Well I was born in Budapest, on the 13th of December, 1944, which was not the best time to be born. In fact, in her diary or memoirs, my mother did mention that they wanted me very badly for eight years but I just waited for a time to be born when the parents are really tested. And that was December, 1944.

And can you tell us please, when your parents were born, and what they did? ...In terms of work.

Yes, my father was born in April 1910, in Szombathely, which is at the western border of Hungary, just very close to Austria. And he was working in the building industry, as a supplier of material. But he was always an employee. And...and my mother was born in Budapest in December 1912. She was two years younger than my father, and eventually she was a piano teacher. I'd just like to add that my mother's father, my maternal grandfather, was a carpenter – dealt with wood. And, my father somehow got there because of purchasing

wood. And my mother was my grandfather's secretary. That was before she was a piano teacher. And this was where they met. So shall I say this all again?

No. And what were your first childhood memories in Hungary?

What are the first childhood memories now? What do I remember now? Well, I remember my kindergarten years, from about age three. The first kindergarten I attended was a Jewish kindergarten. And I think it was at the age of three; I'm pretty certain. Afterwards I attended some others. I'm not quite sure why. I don't remember. I'm not sure if the Jewish kindergarten stopped - ceased to function.

Was this in Budapest?

Yes, in Budapest, and I remember the name of the street: Delibab Utca, or Delibab Street. That's where the Jewish kindergarten was, and my mother did the music there.

[0:04:03]

Was this a predominantly Jewish area of Budapest?

Not particularly. So I guess, people came from various parts of Budapest. But also there was an orphanage in the same building or in the building next to it. Again this is a little bit hazy now, but they were very close, or in the same building. And it wasn't that close to our home. I mean people normally went to kindergarten nearer, but it wasn't that far either. I would say about twenty minutes' walk.

And did you go to a Jewish school or a state school?

No. No. Even this Jewish kindergarten ...functioned for me, only for a year or two, when I was three and four. And I recall going to another kindergarten later. Let's just say, I can't remember the reason. But I do know that the one I went afterwards, was much closer to our home. And again, I only went there for a year or two. I guess. And then came school, at the age of six. In Budapest you started school and you still start school at the age of six. But I do

remember my kindergarten, yes, in the Delibab Street very clearly. I remember the musical games we played, and there were some shows which my mother put on. Or rather the kindergarten put on shows and the musical numbers were arranged by my mother. And I even remember some of the numbers now. Some of the songs - now. So it did make a deep impression. Interestingly, my memory is selective, because about five or six years ago, perhaps even eight years ago, I went to a concert in Budapest given by the Radio Orchestra and conducted by a wonderful conductor called János Kovács. And I went backstage... to thank him and his wife who was the solo singer at that concert – Mária Sudlik And there was another lady there, and said, “Kory, Agnes!” That’s me, Agnes Kory. “Don’t you remember me?” “No.” “But you went to the Delibab kindergarten?” “Yes.” “I was one of the teachers!” Well, I didn’t remember but it was an extraordinary meeting here, because by then I was well over sixty. And she said I looked the same...[laughing] as when I was three. So, I didn’t remember her, but I still remember the songs. So, selective memory.

Do you have any less pleasant memories of your childhood?

Well...

[00:07:29]

Anything that stands out in particular?

Nothing comes to mind now. That’s not to say that I had- Nothing what would be important to anybody else...

To what extent – AK (interrupting): But let me think... Or, how did the Communist regime impact on your family?

Yes...Now that you’re asking less pleasant memories. There were lots of incidents. Interestingly one was, when the Revolution, or Counter-Revolution happened 23rd of October, 1956... For me, the most tragic element of that particular revolution was that it was on a Tuesday, 23rd of October, 1956, and I was supposed to be going for my musicianship class, which I adored. And I always worked very hard, prepared for it, and I was ever so well

prepared for that class as well. And then couldn't go, because nobody could go anywhere because political events took over. And in fact I never saw that musicianship teacher, after that, because like so many people, she left Hungary those two weeks. And she never knew how well prepared I was for that particular class.

Could you just explain where the class was please – which institute?

Well, that particular class was quite a long way from where I lived.

No, but what was the name of it?

The musicianship class? Well that was a music school which I attended. And within the music school, you had to attend musicianship if you wanted to learn an instrument. And by then I learned the cello, and whether I liked it or not I had to attend musicianship classes. Which was really very much in a sense one of the major points of the Kodaly musicianship system. It so happened I loved musicianship, and my musicianship classes were on Tuesday and Friday. But on that Tuesday I couldn't go. And it was quite a long way from where we lived.

Were you afraid? ...Did you not realise the manifestation?

[00:10:10]

Well, all I remember is that I was very upset I couldn't go to musicianship. I wasn't really aware of what was happening at the time, on that day, except that writers and students protested against a lack of freedom. And as we were told it was a very peaceful demonstration to start with, on the 23rd of October. But later it became less peaceful; I do remember that. And it became more like war-like and eventually the Russian tanks came. And I do remember that because we lived quite close where the statue of Stalin was, and that was then taken off by the rioters or revolutionaries. And then this is when the military came. So we all had to go to the basement because there was quite a bit of shooting because I lived close to that part of Budapest.

Could you say where, exactly?

Ja, I mean... The ...the statue was on the Heroes Square and the main road leading to it was the Dozsa György Street. And the street where I lived, we lived, came off that Dozsa György Street, and it was called Peterdy Street. And.... because of that in fact we couldn't have gone anywhere because it was all cordoned off. It was full of people. So basically it was not possible, and public transport there just came to a halt. And I would have had to go by public transport to my musicianship class. So I remember being in the basement for a few days; I'm not sure if it was really necessary or it was just a question of panic. But...So this is the second time I was in basement because I was in basement shortly after I was born because that was during the war and big fights. But this one may have been just caution, hard to tell. I was only ten- or eleven. I was eleven, in fact. Ja. I was eleven.

And how did the Revolution impact on your life after that?

...I don't think there was an awful lot of difference because the political scenario didn't change much, and... I don't recall very much difference. I know that a lot of my friends left, because a lot of people left Hungary so that was an impact which was a cause of unhappiness for me. So it wasn't only the musicianship teacher whom I adored, and I've never seen her. I believe she went to the United States, but she wanted to burn all bridges behind her, so she didn't keep in touch with anybody. And she made it difficult to be found. So that was that. But also several of my friends went not immediately during the Revolution but soon after. One best friend left and went to Israel. I was very upset about that. So that was the impact on me, but otherwise, life continued as before. For me, life continued as before. I imagine it may have been different for other families and other people. But for me the only impact of the Revolution and its aftermath was the loss of many of my friends.

Did your parents ever speak of leaving?

[00:14:39]

No. I remember I wanted to go, although not quite sure why, except that my friends went. And my father was adamant that there was absolutely no point. And he was actually right

because he didn't speak any languages. My mother didn't speak any languages. They only knew Hungarian. And, well I couldn't say that they didn't know anybody as well, because my mother's sister was in America. But I just don't think that my father felt comfortable about leaving when his only language was Hungarian and he didn't really have a profession. He couldn't have... There was no hope for him to find some job. And my mother did teach, but she did teach in Hungarian. And also they were just not very adventurous people. And my father had a pretty hard, tough go during the actual Holocaust in Mauthausen [Austria]. And my mother had a tough go while I was born. So... I think they just wanted to stay where they thought they were relatively safe. And they were safe; I mean nobody was after them after the Revolution. I'm not sure what they felt during the Revolution, but it was only a few days. And afterwards, life for them was the same as ... after the Holocaust. And they felt relatively safe; well, they were safe.

I'd like to come back to your later experiences, and how you came to Britain. But could we turn now to your parents' experiences during the war? And lead on to the letter that your mother wrote for you?

Yes, well, my knowledge of what happened to them is verbal reports and constant reminders while I was growing up. I mean, the impact of the Holocaust...

So they spoke a lot about it?

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. I mean, they were damaged for life. And physically as well, they were damaged, both of them. My father- My father was taken first to forced labour, which was pretty normal for all Jewish- able bodied Jewish people. And when the final crunch came he was taken to Mauthausen to be killed and it so happens he wasn't killed. And in the summer of 1945 he was liberated, and returned to Hungary. My mother, who was a piano teacher, she was hiding under false papers when the peak of the Holocaust reached Hungary. The – the peak, the worst part, reached on 15th of October, 1944. But already- well, that was the worst part. But in fact, I'm jumping. The worst part came when the Germans physically occupied Hungary, and that was 19th of March, 1944. The Jewish laws existed before. The Jewish laws started to come thick and fast in 1938. Well, the first Jewish law came in 1920 but that had no impact on my parents. That 1920 Jewish law was the Numerus Clausus which restricted the

number of Jewish students who could study at universities. That had no impact on my parents because they were children. But then, Jewish laws came in 1938, more serious Jewish- There was in 1939 even more serious Jewish laws which restricted Jewish presence in all public sphere of Hungarian life. However, there were no murders. And Jewish peoples' lives were not threatened. But- And they could still work, up to a point. They were just restricted. However, in March, 1944 when the Germans came in the restrictions became stricter, and then the Jews were banned even more from public life than before. Not just restricted, but banned. And then finally, when the Hungarian Arrow Cross came to power on the 15th of October, 1944, then all hell broke loose. And then it was just murder; murder anybody you can find. The Holocaust people, I mean the Arrow Cross- the Arrow Cross people – just murdered any Jew they could just get hand on. And they were - very, very diligently - were hunting all the Jews. And they were more enthusiastic, these Arrow Cross people, were more diligent than the Germans. They just couldn't wait for the Jews to be killed.

Was this a Hungarian group?

[00:20:48]

Oh, the Arrow Cross was the- That was the name of the party, Arrow Cross. In Hungarian, 'Nyilas Párt'. And 'Nyilas' is 'arrow cross', and it was led by a man called Szálasi. I like to think that they were small in number, although probably they were larger in number than they should have been. But they were horrendous. They were horrendous. They were just murderous thugs; that's what they were. And their only agenda was: to kill the Jews. There was no other political motivation. Like these days we see horrible things... and this some political motivation which one could object and one objects to. But there is some sort of political motivation. With the Arrow Cross, there was no political motivation. Presumably wanted to be the rulers and that you could call as a political motivation. But for all intents and purposes, because luckily they only lasted for about three, four months. The nightmare rule only lasted for that long. And for all intents and purposes, the sole motivation was 'Kill the Jews'. So that's when I my mother had to go to complete hiding, and with a false name. And I was born with a false name. I wasn't born like 'Agnes Kory', and my mother didn't exist at that point under her own name.

What name did she use?

Well the name she used was - in the Hungarian 'Sarkany, Julia', or, 'Julia Sarkany', because she had these false papers which identified her as 'Julia Sarkany, unmarried'. Now in fact, Julia Sarkany was the maiden name of the lady who was the...well, perhaps housekeeper. In all blocks of flats in Budapest had...

Was it a caretaker?

Ja! A caretaker. And it was a couple who were the caretaker, Mr Gross and Mrs Gross. In spite of the name, they were not Jewish. I think Mr Gross might have originated from somewhere in Slovakia. Anyway, he was a non-Jewish Gross. And his wife's maiden's name was 'Julia Sarkany'. And she actually gave her papers to my mother. And, that's...and according to that paper, she was unmarried. Well, she was unmarried before she became Mrs Gross. So according to that paper, I was an illegitimate child because my mother, Julia Sarkany, had no husband. And I was born as Agnes Sarkany. Well, it's neither here nor there, but I can't resist telling you that 'sarkany' is a Hungarian word which means 'dragon'. But this Julia Sarkany, Mrs. Gross, was clearly no dragon. Neither was my mother. It's just the name. Which is just goes to show that you cannot trust people by their surname. Can I just stand up please for a moment?

[00:25:22]

Where was I?

You were going to explain how...your birth certificate reflected your mother's situation and how she didn't want you to appear to be Jewish.

Yes, well my mother was hiding under this false name and also, she took a job with this false name as a, well, in Hungarian, 'havi terhes'. She was pregnant, I mean by 15th of October she was heavily pregnant, 7 months pregnant. And she escaped from the house where she lived. I think it was in a Jewish house, but I don't know where it was. It's not clear. Because I only know these things from the memoirs, written memoirs which she left behind. And in fact, it's

only very recently – to be more precise - this morning, that I discovered while I was re-reading these memoirs, that she refers to the houses where all the Jews were taken. And then she says that on the 15th of October she realised that that was really dangerous to be there now. That's when the Arrow Cross and Szálasi took- took over from the previous governments, and she decided to escape. And she escaped with the excuse that I was due, although I wasn't due. And she went to this hospital, where she was what they called '*havi terhes*' so, because she was pregnant, she could stay there, but she worked there. So she was given a job. All this '*Havi terhes*' is the 'resident pregnant person'. I can't think of any other English word.

Would it be 'maternity hospital'?

Well perhaps you can call it maternity hospital, but it was important that it was resident...

'Help for mothers'?

You could say that as well, but '*havi terhes*' is the resident pregnant person who also works. Because others didn't work. Because there were a lot of people there, maternity and home for pregnant people; they didn't work. They - they were just in the hospital to be looked after. But in this category, they had to work. They were lower class of people, and they worked for their upkeep there. And so she became a '*havi terhes*' – sort of a 'resident pregnant worker'. However, amazingly, she was given two jobs. One, to help out with office work. And the other one also to clean. So my mother was – had access to all the administrative things. Now, this is far too long to explain what happened, so I'm just going to put it in a nutshell. That's where she started, but for various reasons she had to leave. And for the next few weeks she had to go from one place to the other. One- It's a continuous horror story. And interestingly, life for her was not that terrible because she was Jewish – because in fact nobody knew she was Jewish. Life for her was terrible because she was an unwanted, pregnant woman without a husband.

So there's a social stigma...

[00:29:36]

That was the social stigma. And she was extremely badly treated when she went from place to place. It's a long account in her memoirs, day by day, which day she went where. And it was very, very difficult. But eventually- She was a very strong-willed – well, at that point she was a very strong-willed lady - because she wanted me to be born, and of course she wanted me to survive. And the horror- the worst horrors happened after I was born, because then the reason for her troubles, was like I was crying a lot and I was ill. And nobody wanted a crying baby and an ill baby among all the other healthy babies. So in fact she struggled because of her status, and because of my very bad condition in health. But eventually she managed to make her way back to this hospital. Now, that's partly because of her incredible strong will. And she was just so resourceful how she managed to get out from one place where she was not really allowed to get out without permission. And she got back to this hospital. And this was a credit to a professor there in this hospital, a medical professor, who already took her in in the first place. And when my mother made her way back, she pushed her way in through the porter who didn't want to let her in, because she already had to leave because of my illness. And my mother just pushed her way back into this hospital saying that she left something of hers there, and then disappeared into the building; the porter didn't know where she was. And then my mother went to the apartment of this professor and knocked on his door. And that professor actually had guests for dinner but he came to the door because someone knocked at his door.

And my mother just briefly said that, "You know I did work here because you arranged it for me, and then I had to leave... because my child was very ill. And I'm here now." And the professor... [Agnes has emotion] I'm sorry I have to stop for a moment. And the professor said, "Leave it to me." And he arranged for her to come back again. Now the name of this professor was Frigyesi, and the name of the clinic was Frigyesi Clinic, Frigyesi Klinika – Hospital Frigyesi. And this is just to show that not all Hungarians were members of the Arrow Cross, and not all Hungarians were horrible people. Well Professor Frigyesi had no idea that my mother was Jewish. But he must, well when I say 'No idea', officially he had no idea, but it is possible, that he felt it. We will never know. But he went out of his way to help someone who was in a very bad situation. And apparently, there were complaints to him, that he allowed my mother to return. And it's not apparently - my mother explained that in her memoir. And he said to the person that complained, who was the Chief Maternity Officer – don't know what is the right job description for it in English - and the ... professor said to her,

“If I allowed her to return, there were reasons for it.” So my, so this professor really stuck up for my mother. And as I say, we can’t be sure if he felt that there was something behind this primitive, unschooled, and low class half-foreign lady. Because she was also not born in Budapest. I mean my mother was, but Julia Sarkany wasn’t. But the professor did help... So I now want to emphasise that the problems my mother had in this hospital officially were not because she was Jewish, although she thinks that some of them suspected her. Probably because of her ability to – to type. And then, also for her getting a job in the office. So there was some suspicion.

Was there jealousy as well?

Jealousy. I mean that word appears in my mother’s memoirs again, and again and again. Jealousy and hatred and... spite... spite. Spite.

Spite.

But - but the jealousy features. And every time my mother encounters jealousy, it’s always me who suffers. After I was born she puts me somewhere where she feels it’s safe, and then she goes to work, and then I appear in the worst possible places. And because of that I was getting ill-er and ill-er.

What about nourishment during the war?

Well, that was the other problem. That- The food was ration...rationed.

[00:36:09]

Rationed, yes.

And there was a bitter fight for it. And I’m not sure if she had enough milk, because she was breastfeeding. And I’m not very sure if she had enough milk for me. In fact, there was one issue when- Oh ja, that was another job description of the... so-called resident pregnant person, was that she also needed to breastfeed others, but my mother didn’t even have enough

milk for me. So this was another problem why a lot of her co-workers were very much against her. She didn't deliver the milk, because she didn't have enough. But again, that was Julia Sarkany, not - not my ...Jewish mother. We think that nobody knew she was Jewish because if they did, then possible they would have betrayed her. I would like to think that perhaps some people did know, but have chosen not to betray her. This is what I would like to think. Certainly in the case of Professor Frigyesi.

So, she and you survived all these things.

Miraculously, we survived. But it's partly miraculously, and my mother gives a lot of examples of the miracle of survival. And otherwise I would say it's her desperation to be a mother. Cause she wanted to be a mother already for eight years before. They were married already for eight years, but I just wouldn't come. And finally, my mother was pregnant; she was not that young. Well, young by today's standards. I mean these days, people are pregnant much older than when my mother was pregnant but in those days it was supposed to be a relatively old pregnancy. And... she desperately wanted me. And she had...She had a very strong will and I think that's one of the reasons and she says in the memoir that I had strong will. [half-laughs] Now that's hard to see how a little baby has strong will, but she said I was such a strong fighter. But in due course afterwards, after the horrors of this three months, because this kind of hiding was for three months. But for me, for one month because I wasn't born until the 13th December. And the Russians came to Budapest 13th of January. And as far as my mother concerned, and her memoirs clearly show, when Russian soldiers turned up in the basement where they were all hiding because by that point the Russians and Germans were shooting each other. Not just in Budapest but, and not just near, but as my mother said, the Germans set up the- all the big weapons, in the house opposite this hospital. They knew then well that this was a hospital, but as my mother says in her writings this is how low they sunk. That they set up all these big guns and I can't remember now the English word for 'agyú' [cannon] . Anyway, not just weapons for the, for the, not just hand weapons for soldiers, but those big guns which they have to fix to buildings. They set it up there, just opposite the hospital. And they were shooting from there, the Russians and whatever. And the hospital had lots of hits as well. And...

[00:41:12]

And you were both there?

Well, Yeah, I mean.

And this was January, 1945?

Ja, 1945. And one of the miracle escapes, as my mother puts, is that she put me in the window because the others just were very against her, and they didn't let her to put... me, with some, with some of other kids. There was some story; suddenly I can't remember. But she put me under the window. And then one of the hits was through the window. And there were lots of things on the window sill, like jam jars and lots of things. And they were hit. And they all fell on me. But, my mother says that miraculously, I survived. And this was one of those amazing things that I could have been killed. But...

Or maimed or cut perhaps?

Nothing. And this is the other thing she says, that because she put an awful lot of stuff around me because that was the coldest spot in the basement, just under the window. She says that in her memoirs that she thinks that that saved me. Because everything fell on me, from the window sill. And I was so well wrapped, that nothing happened to me.

She must have been so anxious about you all the time.

[00:43:02]

She was – she was incredible anxious of me all the time. And she gives a day-to-day account of this in her memoirs.

And did she know where your father was?

No, she didn't.

That was another anxiety.

Ja. And first, when- Before the 15th of October, although my mother was already with false papers, my father was in forced labour. But his unit, at one point, was moved not far from where my mother was. And she says in her memoirs that for three wonderful weeks, they were able to meet every day. My mother went to meet my father. So my father knew that she was pregnant. That's when he found out. Because prior to that his unit was I don't know where, but not near where my mother was hiding, or my mother was living under false papers. But for three weeks before 15th of October, they were near. And then they met every day and my father therefore knew that my mother was pregnant, and they were planning the future together every day and they were dreaming. And of course they had no idea what would happen. So after the 15th of October, my mother was unable to go and look on the streets of Budapest. Furthermore, my father's unit was moved. And I don't know where he was moved. My mother doesn't say anything about it. But in due course, my father landed in Mauthausen. And... my mother knew nothing where he was – about where he was. And she writes these memoirs- She certainly started to write these memoirs on the 13th of March - 13th of March, one, nine, four, five. Because the memoirs start by saying, "You are now three months old. And I want to tell you the story of your eventful life until now."

What prompted her to do that? Was she afraid of being killed and not being able to tell you as an older child about your life and...?

[00:45:58]

I do not know what prompted her to write on the 13th of March, and I need to add that I'm not sure if she really wrote the whole thing on the 13th of March, because it's quite long. But she did start on the 13th of March. And well, depending on what size of pages you use, it's ten or twelve pages, thickly typed text. So whether she wrote down the whole thing on that day, or whether she just left it like that I don't know. But I do know that she does say that "I want you to know what happened". And in her- And she finishes her memoir saying that there are three people I want- or in fact she already mentions, refers to this at the beginning as well. There are three people who she wants to know what she is here to tell. That's myself, my

father, whose whereabouts were unknown, and then Doctor Fabian. That was a medical doctor, and his name was Fabian. Because, as my mother tells me, he really put in all his knowledge to save me. Because I was in a very, very bad shape for a long time. And he managed to save me. And afterwards I remember still going to him as a young child for quite a while. But only as a young child. And then I don't know what happened to him. But I became healthy, and I survived. And I still intend to survive for ...long enough to be able to tell, not necessarily my story, but stories of the Holocaust, because it's essential. It's very important. And now at this stage of my life I feel compelled to do as much research into Holocaust as I can manage, and do as much publication – publishing – do as much publishing as I can manage. And I give public talks. And it so happens that I'm restricting my Holocaust research publication and public talks to musicians. Because I'm a musician, musicologist. My mother was a piano teacher. And there's only so much one can do. So that's what I'm doing. But I inherited this wish from my mother. Now, she gave me the memoirs only when I was thirteen. And she does say on the front page of the memoirs that: [emotionally] "To my Darling Agnes on her thirteenth birthday, so that you remember and fight that such times should never be repeated." So I would imagine that was already the motivation for her, when she actually started to write her memoirs and wrote her memoirs. Although this front page was attached to it only thirteen years later. But I imagine that was already motivation then. And that is my motivation now.

I think that's very important. Is there anything more that you would like to add about your mother at this particular point?

[00:50:41]

Yes, I would like to mention in particular, the time she felt able to come out of hiding. She describes this very movingly in her memoirs, when she felt that it's now safe to leave because the Russian soldiers were there. And...she did think the Russians would protect the Jews, so did a lot of other Jewish people, because for all intents and purposes that is what happened. When the Russians came into Budapest, the Germans' rule was over, and so was the Arrow Cross's rule. So, when my mother felt that she can now come out, which was 13th of January, and she did come out, then she... created a second birth certificate for me. Now, the first birth certificate was for Agnes Sarkany, because I was born the 13th of December as Agnes

Sarkany. And mother's name is Julia Sarkany. I actually don't have the – that birth certificate, but I would imagine, that the name of the father was mentioned there. Something which my mother invented, because she told people when she was questioned, and when she was admitted to various places, that she does not know where... the father of the child to be born was, but somewhere on the front fighting the Russians, and that his name was Tibodor Körösy. Now, this was pretty good because my father was Tibor Köri, and Tibor is a Hungarian, 'Christian' name, if I can use that word. It's first name but in Hungarian it's called Christian name. God knows why. And so is Tibodor. And I would say Tibodor is nearest to Tibor. And Köri, which was my father's name, surname, Köri, comes from the word, 'kör', which is circle, but...the surname which my mother invented was Körösy, actually it's almost the same, except a more elaborate way of saying that's someone from the circle. So she invented this name, 'Tibodor Körösy', and in fact, at one point, when I was - I think when I was taken back to the original hospital, although I would need to research. At one point, someone complained that I wasn't baptised, so I had to be baptised. And as my mother puts it, I was baptised in the name of the Father and the Mother and the Holy Ghost...but into the church the Reform Church. Because Julia Sarkany- Oh! Julia Sarkany wasn't Roman Catholic, Julia Sarkany I think was Protestant, *Református* in Hungarian. And so my mother very movingly says that this very difficult... fate of mother as Julia Sarkany, because she had a very hard time as Julia Sarkany, and as herself, I was baptised in the name of the Mother...

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Father the Son and the Holy Ghost and... as Agnes Sarkany. But when she left, she had the facility, because she had access to the office. And she created another birth certificate. But she wanted to make sure that I never have to go through what she went through and I went through. So she just, it's creative writing, she invented a birth certificate whereby my surname finished with a 'y'. My father's surname and her surname finished with the letter 'i'. I need to tell you that usually, when a Hungarian name, surname concludes with the letter 'y' it shows some sort of aristocratic background. But more certainly, doesn't show a Jewish background except when Jewish people manage to...

Use it.

[00:56:46]

...fiddle their way in it. I mean Baron Hatvany, who was a very, very famous Jewish person who was very rich and then became a Baron, and a member of the Parliament. He was made 'Baron of Hatvan' so therefore he did get a "y", but he was made an aristocrat, so it's a different story. But by and large, Jews were encouraged, or in some cases compelled to change their surnames earlier in the century. Of course we're talking about the twentieth century. Because a lot of Jews had German names. So then they were encouraged or compelled to take on different names. But they were not- either they were not allowed or they were... I'm not quite sure how it worked but I don't think they ever had a "y". That letter 'y' at the end of the name was I think preserved for Christians and aristocrats and so on. So the first thing my mother changed was the i. So hence I've got my "y". And, and then she made me a Roman Catholic. She made my father and herself a Roman Catholic. So I got a birth certificate and not only did she make it up, but she had access to the official stamps and all that. So this is my only birth certificate. I do not have any other except this one.

[00:58:40]

Kory, Agnes with a 'y' at the end of my surname: Roman Catholic. Now that was a problem when I was thinking that I would like to go to Israel. Because how can you go with a birth certificate like this? So luckily, I mean by then I was in, in England so I'm sort of jumping decades there and back. And I was very seriously thinking of going to Israel. In fact, when I left Hungary, that was at the back of my mind that I wanted to emigrate to Israel. But first I wanted to make sure that I get a profession, and that was supposed to be the music. Because in Hungary, while I lived in Hungary, because of the ...permanent, constant reminders of the Holocaust- Because my father and mother were so damaged that there was not a day in their lives that they did not refer to it one way or the other. And I think they did think that probably everybody was anti-Semite, or they were looking to check. They were almost paranoid about this, because they were that damaged. So while I lived in Hungary, I never felt Hungarian. So when we learned in history, when - when our ancestors came to Hungary, which was about 1,000 years ago, and where, which was from the Ural and East, I always thought that my...ancestors didn't come from there. Although I still remember the seven leaders of the

seven tribes, who actually came and settled in Hungary. So I still remember *Arpad, Elöd, Ond, Kend, Tas, Huba, Töhötöm*. So although I thought at the time that they were not my ancestors, I never forgot their names. And even now, very many decades later, I just demonstrated, I still know the seven names of the Hungarian leaders who brought the Hungarians to Hungary. But I was absolutely sure while I lived in Hungary and I was in school that they were not my ancestors. Furthermore, while I was a child in Hungary, I was not keen to talk about me being Jewish because I was always afraid. So I mean, this scare was instilled in me. It's only much later that I thought, "I am Jewish! I am Jewish!" Because my mother and father did tell me that I was Jewish, but they were trying to protect me. They didn't give me a Jewish background; I had no Jewish upbringing. In fact, I was thirteen when, well, apart from the Jewish kindergarten which I mentioned. But apart from that I didn't have a Jewish upbringing. It's partly because my father said, "Where was God while I was in Mauthausen?" And also because they were trying to protect me. So it was a very muddled upbringing. Because they were damaged. Because the Holocaust didn't only kill Jews, they also damaged them. And they also damaged the second generation. So I was damaged as well, because then I spent all my life wondering, "Is this person an anti-Semite? Is that person?" So I was always checking, testing.

[01:02:42]

I ruined a lot of friendships because of that, because of testing in a clumsy way. And... I had this fear like my mother had when she created my birth certificate that you never know when these things will happen. And you know what? You never know when these things will happen. Now I know that you never know when these things will happen. Now I don't just fear it, but I know. So I'm doing my utmost best to make sure that they will never happen. So I keep going to Hungary, and I got my Hungarian citizenship back again so that I can vote. I go there twice a year to vote just to make sure that it's not the right-wing people who get the vote. I give talks there; I try to educate young people. So this is a life-long effect, of what happened, except that the effect was different at different periods of my life. Now to go back to the problem which I might have faced when I- if I really did want to settle in Israel. Luckily I managed to get my parents' marriage certificate, where it's very clear that Kőri, Tibor, and Lefkovits, Maria – i.e. Tibor Kőri and Maria Lefkovits, both Jewish, Jewish, they married. So I've got their certificate of marriage, which makes it quite clear that they were

Jewish. So I managed to get that a decade or two after I was in England. Managed to get it out of Hungary, so that I can prove I'm Jewish.

Which year was this?

[01:04:47]

That I got their certificate of when they got married?

No, when you were planning to go to Israel?

Well while I was in Hungary, and I was a teenager, I was very strongly thinking about that. And when I left – and when I actually left Hungary in October '65, my plan was, at first I go to a country where music is very strong, and I can learn and become a musician. And I was hoping in due course to go to Israel. Now partly, because my best childhood friend was in Israel, and many other childhood friends were in Israel, but also because all the time while I lived in Hungary, I felt that I wasn't Hungarian, I was Jewish. Then what does a Jewish person do? I thought: goes and lives in a Jewish country. But things have changed once I lived in England. And the longer I lived in England, the more Hungarian I felt, but Hungarian-Jewish. Because, I did live in Hungary for twenty years. I was born there. That's the language I spoke and very well, when I was there. I loved literature, I loved poetry. I was at one point the Chairman of our school's literature, literary circle. And I had top marks in all subjects but especially in that. And I participated in many poetry reciting competitions, and I always won the gold medals. And it was always Hungarian poetry. And up to this date, I cannot appreciate enjoy poetry in any other language as much as I can appreciate it in Hungarian. German poetry is not too bad because in fact it was German which I studied while I lived in Hungary, so I can appreciate Goethe and Schiller and Heine. But I find it much harder to appreciate English poetry. I just don't have the same feel for it. I'm not saying that I do not appreciate it. It's just that there is a range. The poetry which I first knew, I appreciate the best. The poetry which I second knew, which is German poetry, I am able to enjoy the second best. And the poetry which I came to later in life, I can still appreciate, but it's the third. Not because it's not the best but because my ability to appreciate comes third. So the longer I live in England, the more Hungarian I feel. Hence I set up the Béla Bartók Centre for

musicianship. Hence I feel strongly that I want to talk about things Hungarian to the big wide world, including the bits which a lot of Hungarian Jewish people forget: that not all Hungarian were murderous Arrow Cross thugs. It is not fair. And even now, not all Hungarians are members of the Jobbik party, which is very strongly right-wing, and which has strong elements of anti-Semitism, anti-racism among them. But there are very good Hungarians as well. And I mean Hungarians like Béla Bartók, and Zoltan Kodaly: neither of them were Jewish. Although I hasten to add, Kodaly's first wife, and wife for a very long time was Jewish. But that is just a coincidence. And then there were all those excellent writers and poets and true...true human beings who were non-Jewish Hungarians. And now I would like to just mention- I think it's a charming example. I was already in England when I made my way to New York, and I met Peter Bartók, son of Béla Bartók, whom I liked a lot. And obviously he was a warm and very cultured – very cultured human being. And I said to him, “You know Peter, until I met you I thought that all Hungarians came into two categories: Jewish and anti-Semites.” And he said to me, “Well, I must have been moving in the wrong circles.” And that's when I learned that not all Hungarians were either Jewish or anti-Semites. And I think that was already 1970 that I met Peter, Peter Bartók. And then I revised this feeling of either one or the other. And I stick with that. And I have a lot of arguments with Jewish people. Especially those who are Holocaust survivors. They actually forget that they have some non-Jewish friends, and they like them. And then they don't think of their non-Jewish friends, and they still think that all Hungarians are anti-Semites. This is just not true. But there are...there are anti-Semitic Hungarians, and the manifestation of anti-Semitism for instance in current Hungary, is much stronger than the manifestation of anti-Semitism for instance in current England. I think it's sort of tradition, because they used to manifest it louder. Because it's not only Jews who have grandchildren, but the members of the Arrow Cross also have grandchildren. So I imagine that they also have their stories. This is not a Hungarian thing, and suddenly I can't remember the name of this very big German General who was a right- hand, right-hand man of Hitler...and who was instrumental in killing...

[01:12:38]

Eichmann?

No, Eichmann I would remember. There is another one and there was a film about him and I saw the film here in London. And I've got his name somewhere among my various files. Anyway, I know that his granddaughter is still supporting ex-Nazis because- And his surname starts with an 'h'.

Heydrich?

No, and it may have an 'ü' in his name? And probably when this interview is over an hour later I will remember. He's a well-known figure. And as I say, there was this long film about him not long ago. I just saw it in the O2 Centre, as well as elsewhere. This film came out in the last three, four years.

Himmler?

Sorry?

Himmler?

Yep! I think it was Himmler. I think it was Himmler. There is no "u" in it, but I think it is Himmler. I worth checking. But it was definitely the letter 'H' and his granddaughter is definitely still alive. And his granddaughter, who has not done any atrocities, and has never been of course persecuted, is still collecting money and whatever for ex-Nazis who have fallen on hard times. My point is here: the grandchild of the Nazi may still be a Nazi, even if not actively. And I'm still disturbed by... And I forget all the important German...that is Eichmann. I'm now a having momentarily a lapse of memory.

[01:14:32]

Don't worry; it'll come.

I don't know why. Because I do this all the time. I have to find an excuse why my brain suddenly stopped. But it must be Eichmann, of course it was Eichmann. The one who was taken from Brazil by the Israelis. They managed to get him. Yeah. I mean his - his son, is an

anthropologist and musicologist. He was four when his father was taken from Brazil. And he doesn't change his surname, because he says, he didn't do anything wrong. But I keep feeling if it was my father, and I was strongly objecting his surname, would I want to be known by that name? So, my point is, even though suddenly, all of a sudden I forgot just temporarily I forgot all these major Nazi players except for the name of Hitler, but nevertheless, my point is that yes, there are still people who are strongly anti-Semitic in Hungary. Some of them are just plainly very ignorant and they are just wound up by more vicious and more knowing people. And you know blaming the Jew is still as rampant as before, except now they are not killing Jews in Hungary. And I still think - I still think that the majority of Hungary is not like that. That's what I think.

Do you think that post-Communism, with the greater freedom, the liberalisation of public views and private views, that anti-Semitism has come more to the fore than during the Communist era?

Well there is more freedom of speech, so the anti-Semites are...are free. I mean, they can say anything they like. They- I don't think there is anything in Hungary- I don't think there is a law in Hungary that like stirring hate with words and so on. I mean, listen, that government which we have now is not one which I voted for and it's not, they are not my favourite people. And their representatives here in England are not my favourite people and they know it, because I tell them so. I told them several times. And I keep wanting them to come and listen to my talks because I want them to know what happened. And I'm not saying that every single person at the Hungarian Embassy or at the Hungarian Cultural Centre has a very strong right-wing view, but I'm pretty certain some of them do. I saw some manifestation of it. I protested against some manifestation of - of it. Some of my protests were taken on board. So, yes. The current government is, in spite of paying lip-service to... otherwise, the number one priority is not to protect the Jews. But at the same time, the paradox is that they were voted in. It's a democracy. The people of Hungary voted them in, but what I'm saying that not all those people who voted for a right-wing government are anti-Semites or anti-racists. Just an example: two of my closest friends, they did vote for this government, because they think that financially ...and ironically, for general security, this government is the best. Under no circumstances would they do anything what we now describe. Unfortunately, they think that under no circumstances would things like this happen again. This is an argument I

have with them, because they are good people. They didn't experience the horrors so they just cannot imagine the horrors. So this is the problem. That's how it is. But I still emphasise that I think that there are a lot of good people in Hungary, a lot of naïve people in Hungary, and there are far too many dreadful people who now have the freedom to say whatever they want. They need to be counterbalanced.

[01:20:00]

Could we go back a little, to A, to the time that your father re-joined you and your mother? And then how you found things and adjusted when you came to Britain.

Yes.

The questions are recorded aren't they? Yes.

Yes, because I forgot. When I came back...?

I'll just re-cap what the questions were. I asked you to go back to the time that your father re-joined you and your mother and some of the difficulties perhaps, and also, how you felt and how you adjusted to life in Britain. What did you first do when you came to Britain and when?

I was- I was eight months old when my father returned from Mauthausen. And it was in August, 1945. Well, according- according to my mother, he just didn't know what to do with me because when he came back, while he was on his way back, he had no idea if my mother survived. He had no idea... if I was born. He had no idea if I survived. So it was all too much for him. And according to my mother, she handed me to him, and he said, "What shall I do with her?" Well, he didn't grow into being a father. And suddenly he was a father. How things went afterwards, I do not know. ...My father was not a very educated man. When he was ten, ten-year-old, that's when his father died, whose name incidentally, originally, was Kohn, Isidor. My father was already born Kőri, so in fact the change of names into Hungarian names, already happened in my grandfather's time. So my father – my grandfather Kohn, Isidor, took up the surname Kőri. And 'kor' is a circle, and Kori is the man from the circle.

My father was already born as Kőri. You probably realise that Kohn is the Hungarian version of Cohen. Today if this name change didn't take place, who knows, perhaps today I would be Agnes Cohen, which I very fondly tell every Cohen I ever meet. And I'm very proud of it, knowing about that tribe. [half-laughs] However, my father was age ten.

When you say, Kohn, do you mean the anglicised Cohen?

Yeah. Well I mean, the Kohn, the Hebrew Kohn turned Cohen in England, and Kohn in Hungary. I don't know... They come up in all sorts of versions, but...

Yes. I just wanted to clarify, that's all.

[01:24:12]

I'm not very good at the Jewish biblical things, but... the Cohens were one of the tribes as far as I know. But we can check this out. But they were the priests... of the Jewish people. My grandfather died when my father was ten. And my father had a brother who was two years younger, and my father had to leave school, to provide for his mother, and for his younger brother. Now in due course, my father caught up, up to a point. But he never became a schooled, cultured person. My mother, on the other hand, who also left school – well, not also - she left when she was sixteen. And she was literate. And she became a secretary; she did some secretarial course and she became a secretary. And as I mentioned earlier, she became her own father's secretary. Her own father was a carpenter, and my mother did all the...

Bookkeeping?

All the written things. However, my mother heard some classical music as a younger child, and she was hooked on it. And she very badly wanted to be a musician. So two things happened. First of all, as soon as she was earning money as a secretary she started to take piano lessons. And she continued until - until she became good enough and she became a piano teacher. So she was a piano teacher. But this is how she became a piano teacher. But my father and mother never bridged the gap, culturally. So... I would love to say that it was a happy ending, because my father survived Mauthausen and he returned. Well, officially they

had a happy marriage, and that's what they both believed, and would have said to anybody. But there was a constant clash between them. For instance, about my upbringing. My mother was very keen that I should learn, get tuition in everything: musical instruments, languages. And my father didn't quite see why was it important. So I cannot blame the Holocaust for this, on the other hand, who knows how my father would have ...functioned if he didn't go through what he did go through. For a starter, he became very ill. He had ulcer of the stomach all his life – all his life after the Holocaust. He didn't have it before the Holocaust. So that was a very important issue; he was never well. My mother also became ill, because she had to get up from her sick bed after I was born, earlier than it would have been medically...

Advisable?

[01:28:25]

...Advised. Because she, but it wasn't that my Jewish mother, my Jewish persecuted mother had to get up. But Julia Sarkany, in her job, had to get up earlier than it was medically wise. So then she developed thrombosis. And she had thrombosis in her leg afterwards, always. So when she got pregnant two years later, she couldn't carry out that pregnancy. So she could not have pregnancy ever again. It is because of the Holocaust but no because she was Jewish, but because she was Julia Sarkany in the job where she couldn't afford to take care of herself. And she had to get up immediately after the birth and do her duties. So she – she could never have a second child, or a third or a fourth child. That was always there. So, although they thought they had a happy marriage, I personally don't think they had a happy marriage. And that, I think, was one of the reasons, just one. And not the main reason, but one of the reasons why I never got married. You see something you don't want that to be repeated, so - so I didn't have a bad marriage.

What was your relationship like with your father? As his own father had died when he was very young, did he relate to you as a father closely or do you think he would have if he had not been in Mauthausen?

I will never know. I will never know the answer to this question.

What did you feel?

[01:30:30]

On one hand I could say that we had a difficult relationship... all way through. And I don't think he knew how to be a father. He thought that... to be a father meant to provide. He went out to work. He provided – he brought back his income. He did not drink- he did, well, unfortunately he smoked. He did not drink, but his only vice was smoking. He did not spend his money on anything else; it came to the family. And then he did things. I mean. They shared the duty. They both cleaned the flat. And they both cooked at weekends because they both were, they both were at work during the week, they had their food there. And I was at school and I had my food there. But at the weekend they cooked and they both cooked. In fact, my father was a better cook. So they shared that. They didn't share the same aspirations. My father had no love for music or culture. My mother did, so my mother did those things on her own or with her friends. Sometimes they both did, because like- They were married and they liked each other and they thought they had a wonderful marriage, but nevertheless it was still a clash of interests. But in fact my father was not really interested in anything in particular. Now the fact that he was ten when he lost his father, that was one issue. I think Mauthausen didn't help, partly because of the bad health he developed. But also because that was always at the back of his mind. For instance, when I tried to get some Jewish culture, I went actively to look for it. And when I was thirteen, I met the Chief Rabbi of Hungary. And from that point on, I went to his classes like for three or four years. And I went to him every year for Passover. My father just couldn't understand what it was about; why I was doing it. Up to a point he even objected. My mother had mixed feelings about it as well. Well, they didn't stop me. I think probably by then they couldn't stop me. So. But they were not happy about it and they didn't understand it, and it was a different life. But my father did keep saying "Where was God when I was at Mauthausen?" And I did say that I wasn't going for God to this classes and to the Chief Rabbi; I was going for my background which I didn't get at home. Which slipped, which skipped at least one generation, perhaps two. And for Jewish history. I wanted to know more than just the Holocaust which I knew, because my parents talked about it all the time. I wanted to know what happened to Jews before, as well. So, that was an issue. And also... let me tell you, I've been teaching children for the past... sixty years. That's not a mistake. I started to teach when I was ten. I was ten when I had my first

independent, official pupil. And I haven't stopped since. And... there are parents who are very talented. There are parents who are not talented. Now, I meet a lot of loving parents. It's fair to say that all the parents who bring their children to me for music classes they're all committed, dedicated, loving parents. But it's also fair to say that in my estimate, estimation, at least seventy percent of them don't really know how to be parents. They do their utmost best, but they're not naturally gifted parents. There are some parents who are naturally gifted and they just know what to do. Other parents should be trained, but parents are not trained. My father was most definitely not a naturally gifted parent, and neither was my mother. My mother was incredible possessive. So possessive that I think it verged, it really verged on sickness. But there again, it must have some origin of how I was born. The circumstances. The way she had to fight to make sure.

You gave her a reason for living.

[01:36:12]

I mean that: the- the hardship, and the battles she went through in order to give birth to me. And in order to make sure that I survived. After that, she was very, very possessive. But I would like to add that, because that's part of her makeup and her story. That she became very ill with cancer at the age of fifty-five. And it's a very bad form of cancer, sarcoma, which meant that she lost all her weight. And she had huge big tumours in all her- everywhere on her body. Now that was in '68. 1968. Long before the borders opened, and there was communication between Hungary and England. Now, I did not, after I came to England in '65, with permission I stayed in England without permission. I'm talking about permission by the state. So therefore, I couldn't go back and visit. So once I arrived in October '65, I emphasise '65 - not '56. October, '65. Same month, but reverse ...number, '65, I couldn't go back to Hungary even if I wanted to. So when my mother was dying of this dreadful cancer three years later, in '68, I couldn't go back. But she was not going to die until she saw me. This illness struck her very badly in May. And she already lost practically all her weight. I mean, she was practically a skeleton. And she just didn't die. And the doctors in the hospital said to my father, and to authorities, that, "This woman is not going to die until she sees her daughter." So somehow, the hospital arranged some sort of permission so that my mother should come and visit me. But my father couldn't come; nobody could come with her. Now,

how can she manage? So, they put her into an ambulance. Took her to the airport, gave her all the morphine which she was taking in tablet form. Because she was getting morphine injections, but they prepared everything for a week. Then a friend and myself went and collected her at this end, at Heathrow. And of course the Heathrow ambulance came as well. So anyway, in car. And she came to stay where I stayed, and she was immobile, so she had to stay in bed during the whole week. And also most of the time, she was sleeping because she had to take the morphine because she was in such unbearable agony. But there were two or three hours a day when she was able to communicate. And we were able to discuss many things; for six or seven days I was able to play the cello to her, because that was her wish that I should play the cello. That was her wish in the first place. If I could just jump back just for one moment. When she was young, I can't remember how young, but well before she was a mother, she heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Now, the Ode to Joy, Schiller's poem that all men are, should be brothers, in the Fourth Movement, that, the tune of the Ode to Joy is first introduced by the bass instruments, by the cello. And my mother was so deeply moved by the whole symphony, by the idea that everybody should be brothers, and the cello bringing the tune, that at that point she decided that if she ever became a mother, and if she ever had a child, that child will learn the cello. Now this is tough luck, because I did not want to learn the cello; I wanted to learn the violin. I was so desperately wanted to be a violinist. But my mother was a very strong person, and I had to play the cello. So she put me on the cello when I was seven or eight. And – Yep - I became a professional cellist. She wanted me to be a cellist; I was a cellist. Whatever my mother wanted me to do while she was alive, I did and I still do. The only difference is that I tell everybody that I'm Jewish, all the time. Even when I mean, I don't wait for anything, the first thing is, I put my cards on the table. That's the only thing where I'm going against my mother, but otherwise I do exactly what she wanted. So back to my mother when she came to visit me in '68, I was able to play to her. I was a very, very good cellist then because I was practicing all the time like a maniac; I was a fanatic about it. And, I put on concerts for her, friends of mine came. Also musician friends came, and the trios, quartets, and...and she was at peace. And then she went back, again the same way, like, car to the- to the aeroplane and airport authorities notified, and people at the airport, and an ambulance on the other side. She went back, and she wrote a letter saying that she had a wonderful dream. She dreamt that I was a little girl and I was playing the cello in a big, big concert hall. At that point I still wasn't a professional, but I already played in big, big concert halls in Budapest before I came, because I was a sort of prodigy. So I already played

concertos with professional orchestras. Anyway, so that's what she wrote, that's what she dreamt, I was still like a little girl and I played the cello in a big concert hall. Three days later she was dead. So she died on the 15th of October, 1968. So she was, she had that sort of willpower that she willed me to be born in spite of the Holocaust. She she had that sort of willpower, that she willed me to be born in spite of the Holocaust, she willed me to survive... in spite of all the odds. She paid a compliment to me saying that I had a strong will. Well I do now. So now I will, all odds, to live as long as possible, and tell the story to as many people as possible.

[01:44:12]

That's tremendous. Could I go back just a little about your early experiences when you came to Britain, how you felt? Did you feel an émigrée? Did you feel strange? Did you join the Jewish community here?

No, I came alone. By then I was twenty. I couldn't have come before because a too young person you can't come on your own. I came on my own with recommendations from the Chief Rabbi of Hungary [Dr Imre Benoschofsky] who by then for seven years, was, well, I wouldn't say 'a second father', but in a way spiritual father except that I never became religious. But I learnt an enormous amount from him because he was a very, very highly cultured man. And I saw him very often. And I went to his classes, and studied all the prophets and all that sort of thing. So I came with recommendations from him, which was really my starting point. I also came with a visitor visa – no, not a visitor visa, that's the point – I came with a tourist visa, which would have been for – I don't know - three weeks, four weeks – two months I think. Tourist visa. Also I had somewhere to go to for the first two weeks- Oh, that's where the two weeks came from. A piano teacher, whom my aunt, who was also a piano teacher, knew. They were good friends. And she agreed to put me up for two weeks because what I was saying that "Once I'm here, I will find an au pair job. Or whatever. And look, I have all these recommendations from the Chief Rabbi." And I said, if the worst came to the worst, "I've got my passport, and my return ticket. I'll go back." So she decided to trust me. So this is how I came. Well, after two weeks with her, through these recommendations, I then moved from one family to the other; various people put me up. And then I did find an au pair job. And then I was an au pair for a short time. The worst possible

au pair in the history of the United Kingdom. [Jana laughs] Because all I was doing practising my cello, because that was all I was interested in, because I wanted to be a cellist. Because my mother wanted me to be a cellist before I was born. And this obsession came over and so I wanted to be a cellist all my thinking life.

[01:47:11]

And I did a little bit as an au pair. I was very lucky that the lady of the household was a professional pianist. [Jana laughs] I mean, that's how I got to her, because- through musical circles. So she - she kind of pretended that she didn't notice that actually she was doing all the au pair work. And in the evenings we played chamber music. And on my one day off – same as my official day off - she brought me to London. Because this was in Marlow, High Wickham. Bovington Green – the sort of things one remembers! Bovington Green, Marlow, High Wickham. And she was called Marilyn Holzer, and she was a pianist, an American lady. And on Mondays, which was my official day off, she brought me up and took me around all the music colleges to do audition. She accompanied me. And then I did get into all four colleges. Eventually I chose one. And then came the Association of Jewish Refugees. Which again, through these recommendations, the Chief Rabbi recommendation to someone called Elizabeth Eppler, who at that point worked at the World Jewish Congress. And Elizabeth Eppler introduced me to the Association of Jewish Refugees, and they decided to give me a maintenance grant. And the Music Academy gave me a scholarship so that I didn't have to pay fees. And occasionally they gave me prizes. So the Association of Jewish Refugees gave me seven pounds a week – seven pounds fifty a week – which in those days was, well, not enough to live in the Savoy, but it provided a very, very modest student allowance. And then a wonderful man, Hungarian man, who is still here, he is eighty-two, came to my talk about The OMIKE two weeks ago. And OMIKE was the Jewish organisation where the Jewish artists could perform to Jewish audiences. And he was that age that he couldn't go anywhere else by the time he was a child. So he came to the OMIKE – to my OMIKE at all because it was at the OMIKE that he first heard an opera, and concerts and all that. So anyway, he now is eighty-two. But he is a wonderful man. Again, someone, I think the Jewish, the AJR introduced me to him. And not only was he a very good oboist but he knew everything what to do with his hands, so any room I rented he came to put up the shelves and all that. And then he found a more long-term accommodation for me. So whether

you call it a Jewish- I mean, it was semi-Jewish, he was Jewish- He was married to a non-Jew, an English, a non-Jewish lady. He's still married to this English, non-Jewish lady. But, so he supported me. And then these various bits of pieces. But I didn't enter the, the Jewish- I didn't have any real access to the Jewish community. So my access was to those people, the Chief Rabbi [inaudible] and that included Yehudi Menuhin . And... now I can't remember how it was but I did get some... No that one was to allow me to stay in England. Because then there was the fight to allow me to stay in England. I did not want to ask for political asylum. I was adamant, partly because I didn't want my parents to suffer and they could have suffered. But also because I didn't come for political reasons; I did not know any other system except what I was brought up in. And as far as I was concerned, that was a good system. I was a Young Communist. I was a very enthusiastic Young Communist. I was the Chief Secretary of the Communist organisation of the music gymnasium and conservatoire. And every time I went to the meetings of all the all these secretaries like me met from all the grammar schools in Budapest it was wonderful because they were all Jewish. So you know, if I wanted to meet Jewish people who had the same sort of background as mine, this is where I went. And ...So I thought it was good. What was not good, I wasn't aware, and I didn't miss. We couldn't travel; we didn't want to go anywhere. And so on and so on. So I did not think that there was anything wrong. I believed in Communism because on paper I thought it - well it's wonderful! And the dictatorship bit, I myself didn't experience. Later I realised that- what else happened. Also, I had a wonderful education free of charge. ...I'm still a Communist. I still think education should be free. I'm still against dictatorship of any kind. I'm still for democracy. So in other words, I still maintain bits from what I believed in Hungary. At that point I only knew one part of the system, but now I know that you can have more parties. And so I didn't want to ask for political asylum because it wasn't political things which I was against. And then I had to fight to be able to stay, and that was a terrible fight each year. Each year, because I didn't have Hungarian approval. As far as the Hungarians were concerned, I was a dissident. So I had to- So then I had people like Yehudi Menuhin helping me. Like the Chief Rabbi's letter also went to Yehudi Menuhin. Then I had to play. He didn't have time to hear me, but he asked someone to listen to me. They said, "Oh, wonderful cellist." Then, then he wrote to this and that. So basically I had bits and pieces from the Jewish community, but no, no, I did not have communication with the Jewish Community at large, or officially, and I still don't. Because although Hitler thought I was Jewish, the Jewish Community doesn't think I'm Jewish because... I'm not a practicing Jew. Yes, my mother was Jewish and I can

prove it with the marriage certificate but I'm not a practicing Jew. I'm not religious except I keep saying "Oh my god. God help me", but I'm not a traditional religious Jew. I don't know- I don't know these things because although I studied with the Chief Rabbi, I didn't live in his household so I never learned things which people learn in their household. I just learn the high- high-brow things. I learnt Thomas Mann and Isaiah but not- So I don't have any any...

You don't have a sense of community...

[1:55:06]

Except I did, for about two years, when I met Rabbi Hugo Gryn, who was a Reform Jew. And he looked after me like the Rabbi asked him to do. Like I went to his classes and whenever I was in need he was there, and... it was wonderful. And now...but I mean we did speak Hungarian so there was the Hungarian link, and his kind of Judaism so I did go there. But when he- when he died I didn't go to the Reform Synagogue any more. And now, since like about the last two years, whenever I can, if there is something like Hanukkah is coming up on the 6th of December, and Purim and things like that, I go to Westminster Synagogue because Rabbi Thomas Salomon is Hungarian, also he was born in Czechoslovakia.

Slovakia, yes.

Slovakia. The Slovak part of Hungary. And he is the Rabbi there. And I know him from my Hugo Gryn days...

Also from Czechoslovakia, yes.

I know him from my Hugo Gryn days, so I feel comfortable there. Now for instance, this Monday, in three days' time, I'm going to trot the Westminster Synagogue because they have some Czech Torah scrolls...

They do indeed.

And they celebrate that. And they're going to celebrate that with some Czech music making. That's what they say. But it's, it's Dvorak and Janacek. And I'm going. But you see, there, I'm on home ground. Tommy – I call him Tommy - Rabbi Thomas Salomon, whose induction as a Rabbi I attended in the West London Synagogue then, forty? Forty-five, forty-seven years ago? I don't remember, but I was there. He is going to be here because he is the Rabbi in this synagogue, and we will exchange just a few words in Hungarian. And then I'm in his Community, and I was there also at Purim and I go there whenever I can, as a non-member, I go. So, I have the, I have the, some contact with the Jewish Community but it has to be on my terms. I feel at home because he's Hungarian and I've known him for forty-five years. And he knew Hugo... and...So, does that make sense?

Yes, it does, because that sense of identity and association is terribly important in people's lives.

That's right. He doesn't speak Hungarian, his wife is not Hungarian, but he does speak Hungarian; he's fluent. He speaks to me when I turn up. Sometimes he starts in English and I immediately...But his Hungarian is very good – fluent. And he used to...

It's a difficult language.

And he used to speak Hungarian to his mother all the time. Mother Alice who only died about two or three years ago. So his Hungarian is - is fluent and he refers to himself as Thomas. I refer to him as Tommy. When we do email exchanges I say Tommy and he answers back and says Thomas. Fine by me. I'll be there and he knows me and I know him. And... So that's my Jewish synagogue connection now. I'll be there Monday evening.

In terms of your – your own professional career, is that the Royal Academy of Music?

[1:59:15]

Yes, I studied at the Royal Academy of Music. I went there in January 1966. I was there for three years. I... I was practicing all the time, I was practicing the cello all the time and I was very good at it. So I got a Recital Diploma with Merit, which doesn't mean a thing these days

because they have totally different degrees so nobody knows what Recital Diploma with Merit is. But it means that it was the best possible degree for performance you could get. But these papers are no good because they keep changing it. And then afterwards for a short spell, well, for two years, I was Principal Cellist of the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House. But I was quite frustrated because I was still practising all the time when I wasn't doing my principal cello job. And I was doing some solo concerts. But I thought I wanted to practise more, and do more concerts, so I left the Royal Ballet and for two years I was just practising and doing concerts and starving to death. So that was no good. And I was staying in various places, and I always thought that, "Oh, that's great; I'm at home." But it was always someone else's home and someone took me in and then they got bored with me and then I had to leave. And it was very traumatic. So finally, it just- I realised that that wasn't going to work, that it wasn't working. And two things turned up during the same week. There was an advert for a cellist in the English National Opera, and in the same week – very same week – there was an advert for this flat. Cause by then I was living in Finchley Road, just a bit further up, in someone else's home, thinking that, "Now I'm at home." But by then I knew I wasn't at home. But because I was so close, I don't know how I noticed that this flat was for sale and even in those terms it was very cheap. And- So I went for both. I got both. [laughs] And - and then I was a cellist with the English National Opera. I was having a very hard time partly because of jealousy, because I was still very keen and practicing the cello and the other cellists didn't like that. Also, there was a very strongly racist element in that orchestra, and anti-Semitic element, and most of those happened to sit behind the brass section. Very right-wing. And I was very sensitive about that. I mean, they were mainly anti-black, but I just can't stand it. And then...they kept bringing literature in. British National Party literature in. And I was objecting. Now, the majority of the English National Opera were not thinking like that, but they also couldn't be bothered. So when I was objecting, then I was the troublemaker! Because nobody minds who does what and I was doing the protesting. And then there was a cellist – sweet little thing - who kept telling me that "Oh..." - is it ok if I use a rude word?" It's not OK- not OK. But she was using a very rude word about these foreigners who take away English people's jobs. And that was going on continuously. And- One day I hit her. And I was dismissed. The fact that I had to go through this, didn't matter. However, ...

It must have brought back memories of your parents very strongly, and the situation in Hungary.

[2:03:44]

Well, I...I mean- I never forgot that!

No...

And that's why I was objecting to the British National Party literature and that's why I was objecting to foreigners being described with four letter words, and, "they're taking away our jobs". Now, up to date, there is not a single foreigner in the English National Opera Orchestra, while the rest of the British orchestras is so full of them, that you really have to go and search to find the odd English person there. But that's because it's totally changed. I mean now, in the Royal Opera House, Russian leader, Russian co-leader, all Russian principal viola player, et cetera. And then appropriately, all the others. But the same in the London Philhar- It's same in all the orchestras now. It's only the English National Opera Orchestra which still does not have a single foreign player. And you go down, look down: all white faces. Now, for some reason, I forgave that. I never thought that it was the management which was racist; the management wasn't racist. The management wasn't anti-Semitic. The majority of the orchestra wasn't racist, but when someone was making life difficult for someone who was not white or 'loudly' Jewish, because I told everybody I was Jewish, they didn't protect them. I was supposed to be the troublemaker, so what they figured out that if they remove me, there will be peace. And that's what Mark Elder who was the Director at the time told me. He took me out for a meal afterwards and said, "Look, I like you. But there is trouble there, and if you leave, there won't be any trouble,". Now, I kind of forgave them, because they're so ignorant. But I must say that I must be the only person I think, in music history, who gets kicked out from an orchestra totally unfairly, and then becomes an audience member. I'm going on Wednesday; I'm a regular. For several years I was a reviewer. And they did know, and I mean, the site for which I did the reviews – the English site - stopped. But there is still the Hungarian opera site. And in fact I still write opera reviews about the English National Opera. The last one I did three weeks ago, but now less, because I've got other things to do. And they always get very good reviews from me when they do it well. So I

must be the only person who gets kicked out, damaged for life, no orchestra wanted to take me afterwards, because it went round. Because I went to tribunal, and...and it was brought out. And it went around the whole world, fifty-six papers, even to South Africa. And Hungary and everywhere. And after that, no orchestra wanted to employ me. No employ me – no orchestra. Many of them even told me with full honesty, that, “We don’t want a trouble maker.” And I was a brilliant cellist. And I’ve been unemployed since.

Do you feel bitter about that?

[2:07:42]

Well, I was very frustrated. I’m still frustrated, because I go to bed, to sleep and I dream that I play the cello. Why do I dream that I play the cello when I’m doing something totally different now? In a way this is the result of the Holocaust. If I wasn’t a second generation Holocaust survivor, rather than victim, perhaps I wouldn’t have protested so long – so loud when the British National Party leaflets arrived...

That’s what I was going to ask...

And perhaps I wouldn’t have hit Penny Cliff. Perhaps I would have been more philosophical when she said, “---- foreigners, foreigners...” I would have just minded my own parts and would have played the cello. But I was very sensitive ultra-sensitive because of my upbringing. So I think it is because of that that all of this happened. But it’s not because of Holocaust that the trombone player in the English National Opera, who actually brought in the material, has become the Chief Secretary of Musician Union of the Great Britain. And he’s still the Chief Secretary of Musician Union of Great Britain. That’s not because of the Holocaust; that’s because the problem’s still existing. Of course when he was voted in for that, I immediately withdrew from the Musician Union. But what I’m trying to say is that it was the Holocaust which made me more...

Reactive...yes.

Reacting in the way I react. But, but nevertheless this problems continue. And I still don't like him, that, the highly respected, highly feted Chief Secretary of the Musician Union is John Smith, who used to bring in the British National Party leaflets and like, for marches, to the Coliseum pit. So, who knows how I would have reacted, if it wasn't for the Holocaust. I don't think I would have ever liked it.

[2:09:58]

No. But you're certainly doing a great deal to counteract...

Definitely.

Yes.

Is there anything else that we have touched upon, that you'd like to expand on before we finish?

Well, my most recent memory which it comes to mind because it's... On the 23rd of September, during an aorta ultrasound scan it turned out that there are all sorts of things which need to be investigated. Liver and ovary. So the sonographer called the doctor at the Royal Free- a Consultant Radiologist- who seemed a very, very nice lady. She said, "Listen, we found some lumps and tumours and all that which we're not happy about. I would like to do a CT scan immediately. Would you allow it?" And I said to her, "What do you mean about this? Do you mean cancer – a possible cancer?" She said, "Yes." And I immediately said, "I'm sorry, but I don't have time for cancer. I have all these Holocaust talks to deliver. And I'm going to invite you." And she was astonished. Her face was a picture to see. And I mean yes, because that was really – I had one in October. And then she said something like, "This is very important." "So is this." And I also said, "And my teaching." Because my, the people I teach, that's very important. I started a project with them; I want to finish. But the first thing which came to my mind when she said that there is a possibility of cancer, that, I don't have time for cancer; I've got Holocaust talks coming up.

You have your own mission.

Yeah.

Yes.

And that's what I think now.

Agnes, thank you very much indeed on behalf of AJR. I'm sure it will be of tremendous interest to many present and future musicians also.

Thank you very much for taking all this on board, because yes, I do think that these stories need to be told, even from this perspective. So thank you very much.

Thank you.

[2:12:52]

[End of interview]

[Photographs]

[2:13:44]

Ok. Well, my mother was very, very keen that I should never be persecuted again, and certainly not murdered. So, she had the opportunity to create a birth certificate. Because while she was hiding, one of her jobs... that she did under her false name, was to record births in that hospital. And so she had the facility. When I first was born she wrote out a birth certificate for the false name. But then when she realised that now it's safer to come out and start living a proper life, well, it's safe to come out, she made sure that I have a birth certificate with the correct name. However, she did a bit of creative writing there, because she didn't want anybody to know I'm Jewish... because just in case. And so the first thing she did, she changed the surname. Because my father's surname ended with the letter 'i'. So the first thing she did, she changed that, because letter 'i' could always be a Jewish person. 'Köri' means 'the man from the circle' so that could have been a Jewish person. So my mother changed it to the letter 'y'. And Köry, ending with a letter 'y' couldn't have been Jewish, and it could even have been slightly aristocratic. So that was even better. Then the

next thing she did, she made my father a Roman Catholic. So it says, after the name... [can I move?]

Yes, by all means.

Ok, when it comes to the name of the father, which is in the middle of the certificate, it says Kőri, Tibor, and then it explains the job, and then it says... next to it, in the right-hand column, 'r.kat'. Now 'r.kat' stands for 'Roman Catholic'. So that was my father. Then my mother added her own name. She didn't change anything there: Lefkovits, Maria. But, in the right-hand side, she's also 'r.kat' which means she's also a Roman Catholic. Now, if my mother and father are Roman Catholic then obviously I'm a Roman Catholic. So hence, in the first big column there, it does say 'Agnes', it says 'girl', 'lány' is girl, and behold, 'r. kat' – Roman Catholic. I can't remember what I said. So this is my birth certificate proving that I'm a Roman Catholic so with this certificate any further Holocaust events, would defend me against the atrocities, because I'm a Roman Catholic. And that was my mother's intention. Unfortunately, I'm stuck with this birth certificate, because when I wanted another one which doesn't say that I'm Roman Catholic – some twenty, twenty-two years later - it was not possible. And the official bodies were able to issue... OK. Well...it was all very well for my mother to to protect me, but I became, well on one hand I was still very scared of anti-Semitism and what might happen. And I had nightmares about Jewish persecution for very many years. But nevertheless, once I came to England I started to tell everybody I was Jewish. And I also wanted to go to Israel. But then I realised that with my birth certificate as a Roman Catholic, it's not going to be quite as easy to emigrate to Israel. So I asked my parents to go and get a certificate which represents the truth. So they did go to the authorities, and they managed to get some confirmation that yes, Agnes Kőry was born at such-and-such times and these were the parents and they did not mention the Roman Catholic bit any more. But they were unwilling to take out the letter 'y', so there I was forever with the letter 'y'.

This document confirms again, that my birth was recorded back in January, 1945, with letter 'y', and there is no other record of my birth except my father's name with letter 'y' and my own name with letter 'y'. However, this document no longer mentions 'R. Kat'. In other words, here, I'm no longer Roman Catholic.

[2:20:06]

Well, the only way I can prove that I'm Jewish is my parents' marriage certificate. Because as you can see, in the first large column, my father is specified as 'Isr', which is Jewish. And then, when you go for the next large column, my mother is also specified as 'Isr', which means Jewish. So this is their marriage certificate. And my father and my mother, both Jewish people, got married. Therefore, if these two people had a daughter, that daughter was Jewish.

Well then it's going to be really interesting [commentary not relevant]

I feel very strongly that the Holocaust story must be told again and again in various dimensions. Different aspects, because otherwise it's going to be forgotten. So I have done a lot of research. In fact, I started Holocaust research when I was eighteen, but I – and for two years I worked very hard on it. But then I dropped it and now I started again in 2008. I published quite a lot on it, and I'm doing quite a lot of public talks. For instance, just now, on Tuesday, 17th of November, 2015, I gave a talk in Cambridge. And fortunately, there were quite a few young people there. And I was particularly happy about four of them being Hungarians. I was surprised that I found Hungarian students in Cambridge. But I did tell them that it is up to them to make sure that the story is not forgotten, and that such times never repeat again. And I want to add, that none of these four Hungarian students in Cambridge were Jewish. So, that was this particular event. And my next event, is in two weeks' time about another aspect of the Holocaust theme.

Agnes, is a Scottish – I think it's a Scottish name for a man. [commentary not relevant]

[2:23:14]

OK. So my most imminent forthcoming public talk on a Holocaust topic is in Senator's Library. [Senate House, Library, University of London] It's within a series of lectures, talking about imagination, images, images connecting to culture, to fact and so on. So I will have to use images to bring my point across. And I've got lovely images, and some very shocking images as well to prove the point how the Nazis worked and how they administered

Holocaust events. And I'm very grateful to the Senator's Library that they sneaked me in, into this series of lectures. And of course this is the only one which is on the Holocaust and the only one which is not a happy theme, but in my opinion, this is the only one which is really important. And then I know about one more forthcoming public lecture. And I haven't written it yet, and I don't have a poster, but there I think there will be an audience even without poster because it's in New York at the United Nations. And that will be my opportunity to tell the United Nations, "Look what happens if you are not careful."

Well, this is my Mum and Dad. My mother and father. Unfortunately, I haven't got a date for the photo, but I would say it was when they were in their early thirties or late twenties. And that's the best I can do. But I think they are a very handsome couple.

Well this is myself. And I think I was about six. And it was taken in a photographic studio. I can't remember which one, but it was definitely in Budapest.

Well, I played the cello from the age of seven or eight. And here, I'm sitting?? with the cello I guess it's about the age of about ten approximately, give a year or two either way.

OK. Well, this picture was – This picture shows me entertaining people who were participants at a Hebrew seminar, Jewish seminar, here in London. Although to be more specific it wasn't really in London, just slightly out of London. I just now can't recall where it was although I have some records of it. It was definitely within the first five years after I arrived to England, so that would make it between October, '65 and '70. Probably a little bit nearer to '70 than '65, but that is the only date I can do now.

[End of photographs]

[2:27:06.2]