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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV175

NAME: Liesel Grunberger

DATE: 25th May 2016

LOCATION: London, UK

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 25th of May 2016. We are conducting an interview with Mrs Liesel Gruenberger. And my name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.

Can you please tell me your name?

Liselotte Grunberger.

And what was your maiden name?

Liselotte Kober.

And when were you born?

On the 13th of the 9th, 1925.

And where were you born?

In Vienna.

Mrs Gruenberger thank you very much for having agreed to be interviewed for Refugee Voices. Can you please tell us something about your family background?

Well, my parents - both my parents - were born in Vienna. My grandmother, on my mother's side, was already born in Vienna. On my father's side they came from... Czechoslovakia. From... well I only know the German name. I think it's got a Czech name now. Weißkirchen [now Hranice, Czech Republic]. It was a garrison town. And my grandfather came to Vienna when he was a boy of twelve or thirteen. And he worked, he was very proud, because he was an accountant for Kaiser Francis Joseph. And he loved Kaiser Francis Joseph. He had a – a huge painting of him in his flat. I remember that very well. And my background otherwise... My parents had a small shop in the Sixth District of Vienna. And my father had studied electro- engineering but he never used it. And my mother...Well, I should really say my father was in the First World War. He was a volunteer- he volunteered at the age of seventeen. He was so keen to protect the fatherland. And he went on this journey after the Nazis came to power. He tried to go to what was Palestine then, but he was not allowed to go, he was not allowed in by the British. And so, he was sent to Mauritius, where he spent the war years. And at the end of the war, he was sent to - to Israel, which I think just about became Israel. It was 1948. And then a few years after that he came to live with my mother and me in London. And what else do you want to know?

[0:02:34]

So, let's go back a little bit. Tell us a little bit about what are your first memories of growing up – of Vienna?

Of Vienna? Oh, my first school day. I have a photograph here of my first school day with my friend, standing outside the school – the door of the school. Which actually is still there. The school has gone, but the door has remained. That's right. Hietzing am Platz. I lived in Hietzing till I came to – to England. And as far as I remember I was very happy there, although I must have lived through very, sort of difficult times for my parents as well. But because I was a child, and maybe I wasn't grown up, and in my teens, I wasn't really aware of it. I remember even- I was still in Vienna during the Nazi takeover in '38. Well, I left in... when did I leave? In '39. So, I was a year there. And I was, I was even quite happy then. Although there were lots of difficulties and hardships you had - what happened to other

people. But I and my friends we used to enjoy ourselves. We went on long walks, we went swimming. And somehow it didn't impose on us for some reason. Maybe- I wasn't at all political. I became political when I came to England but in Vienna I wasn't. But I loved Vienna. And I still do, you know, when there are programmes on television about Vienna, I'm very eager to look at them. And the food that's being produced there. And it's – it's something that's ingrown. I always loved Vienna. I know when I went on holidays- when I still lived in Vienna, I went on holidays to Semmering. I don't know. And... when I came back, I was so happy. I was going to my Vienna again. How wrong I was but that's...I don't even think it came from my parents, although they were very Viennese orientated. But I don't think- I don't know where it came from.

[short audio break]
Yes, you were saying how much you loved Vienna.

[0:05:04]

Yes, and for some reason I still have very fond and loving feelings for Vienna. In spite of what happened. I mean my family was more or less annihilated. I really- My aunts, uncles, cousins, none of them survived. Really, it's just my mother, my father and me who did survive. My uncle and aunt and my two cousins, whom I was very close to, they were going to go to Israel. But that was already after the war. But they had booked a boat and they had sent furniture to Israel for them to have when they get there. And the boat was going to leave from somewhere in Yugoslavia, I'm not quite sure which port it was. And there were lots of Jews queuing up to get on this boat. And suddenly a... a, a number of Nazis came along and shot them all, just like that. You know, without- well, they didn't have to have a reason, you know? But it seems... so incongruous, doesn't it?

Yes.

So, they didn't survive. And I had an aunt - my mother's older sister - who lived in Vienna, around the corner from Sigmund Freud she had a house; that's where she lived. And she was already– she was the oldest sister, she was already in her sixties. And when she was asked by friends, "Aren't you trying to leave?" She said, "I'm an old woman." I remember hearing that. "Who will do anything to me?" Little did she know. She- she and her husband they

perished in Minsk. I think they were sent to Minsk. So, they weren't- age didn't help them in the slightest.

Let's go back a little bit about your- Tell us about the grandparents maybe from both sides, and...

Well, my grand- my mother's mother, who was born in Vienna, I didn't really know her very well because I was only five when she died. But I do remember her, and I had a photograph. I don't know where that is now. And I have a ring actually, that she left to my mother and then my mother gave to me. So, and the grandfather I didn't know at all. He died before I was born. But I certainly knew my father's father very well. And I loved him. You know he was my grandfather and he was the one who was so keen on Kaiser Francis Joseph. He was an accountant.

[0:07:50]

What was his name?

Adolph Kober. And he came from Weißkirchen, a small garrison town in Czechoslovakia.

Where did he live in Vienna?

He- he lived in Penzing, which was Hietzing, not far from us. And we used to- as a matter of fact, when my, well it was his third wife, actually, when she died, he moved in with us. That was the last year we...you know, before I left for England.

[0:08:24]

Yeah, and did you have any brothers and sisters?

No... no.

You were a single child?

Yeah, yeah. I think at that time, it was the interwar years. There was a lot of poverty in Austria and a lot of families only had one child. I think it's changed a lot now. So, what else would you like to know?

So, tell us, maybe- can you describe the neighbourhood? What was it- were there other Jews who lived there? What sort of neighbourhood was it?

There were... there were. My best friend whom I sort of walked around- during the Nazi period, we used to go on long walks all over. She was Jewish.

What was her name?

Herlinger. Valerie Herlinger. Klimt, when she got married. You may have come across her family. I don't know. They live in Wembley now. But she - she went from Vienna to India, which we thought, everybody thought, a most exotic, amazing place. And she stayed there until 1958 she came to London with her husband. And her children are all born here. And I- Actually I've got a photograph of my school, on an outing. And I was looking at it, and I remember lots of the names. And I remember all the Jewish girls, actually. Not that I was necessarily particularly friendly with them, but - but I do remember them. So, it was obvious that one was aware of other Jews. And somehow it may – not to me so much, but maybe to my parents – it was a comfort to have other Jews nearby. But the district where I lived in, there weren't that many Jews. There were some, but not a great deal.

[0:10:06]

So, was it sort of working class? What...?

No, no, no, no it was middle class.

Middle class.

Hietzing, yeah. I think it still is. I think so.

Sorry, I don't know Vienna so well. That's why...

But you were born in Vienna?

No, no. No, I grew up in Cologne.

Oh, you said, I'm sorry...

...So, what other, what other things do you remember from school, you said you went to primary school.

Yeah, and I also went to secondary school to Wenzgasse for... a few years. I didn't do well there at all. ...I don't know why. Whether I wasn't happy. I can't really remember. I don't think I was unhappy. But I- I did well in my primary school, but secondary school I didn't do very well. And in a way, when we heard that we were going to England, I was very pleased because I didn't have to go to school anymore. And when I came to England I didn't either, because the war broke out and there was such a confusion. We could have- my mother and I could have been evacuated, but we somehow didn't want to, or didn't understand it. So, I spent the war years with my mother in - in London.

You said your parents were maybe quite happy. There were other Jews in the area. Were they- how religious were they?

No, they weren't religious. No, no. Not even- well, my grandfather had a sort of ...religious inkling, but he wasn't really. Because I remember when he wasn't feeling well, he used to say to my grandmother, "Bring me ham! That's good for me!" But otherwise, he was kosher, you know, wouldn't eat pork, or... My parents weren't- they were not kosher, no. We were – the whole family, my mother's family – they were typically Viennese. They had lots of non-Jewish- my mother also had, but my uncle especially, lots of Viennese non-Jewish friends. They mixed in a certain... class. Middle class Jews, and middle -class non-Jews. But they weren't particularly Jewish orientated. They knew they were Jews, but it didn't mean such a great deal.

[0:12:37]

Yeah. And what was your father's profession? You said that he had a shop, that he studied...?

He studied electro-engineering. I think that's what it was, yeah. But he never used that. And what did I say? In Israel he worked at a power station. He must have used it then, at the power station...

How did he get to have the shop? What was the story?

Well, actually my parents- my mother came from a family that was pretty well off. She wasn't; she was the poorest. And one of her brothers, who was a doctor, he bought that shop for her. And it wasn't a very large shop, but you know it seemed to... sustain them.

And they worked together, your parents?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, my father must have had - I'm not quite clear about that - customers connected with his electrical experience, because I remember he used to go out and see people. So, he was a salesman, you know. But that he only did part time. He was mainly in the shop. I don't think the shop did that wonderfully well. None of the shops did in the inter-war years. It was...

Did you help? Were you in that shop? Did you spend time...?

I didn't, no. No, I saw it. I knew it, but I didn't, no. I was too young. I was still at school, so...

Yeah. What other past-times do you remember? Did you go...?

Well, I went- Oh, I had joined, because my friend joined, Bet Av. Have you heard of Bet Av?

Yes.

Not that I knew anything about it. Not that I knew what it stood for. And I was quite intrigued because they used to sing very catching songs. And I loved those. And then they did sort of a military... they - they shouted military slogans. And stood to attention. And I remember that I was very impressed with that.

Which years? When did you join Bet Av?

In 1938, when... it might have been already when Hitler was in power, or maybe just before. But I joined mainly because my friend joined. And I don't think I had any idea what it stood for. But my parents weren't political - not at all. Which is unusual I think, for Jewish people, in Vienna. No, they weren't - not particularly. And they weren't- they weren't socialists. Not at all. Not really. Although Vienna was run by a socialist...it had its own kind of government.

[0:15:30]

Yeah.

And that was certainly socialist, because Vienna had the name 'Red Vienna'.

Yeah.

Yeah. You've heard that.

And when do you remember did things change? Was there ever- You said you were very happy. When - when did you feel that your parents talked about things? When did...

Oh, you mean after the...

In the 30s. In the 30s for example...?

In the 30s? Well, yes, I remember an incident in 1934. There was a fight between the Socialists and the Christian Socialists. And opposite us, to, on one side, was a council block. And there was shooting going on. Actual shooting, which is something that never happens there. And I remember my - that is a vague memory - my mother moved me from my bedroom into the passage so that I should be away from the window. And I remember seeing the holes in the block of flats, you know, where the bullets went in. That was– I don't know whether that was after Dollfuss was assassinated or be- Must have been before.

Yeah. Around that time.

But as I say, my parents weren't political. They did obviously talk about that. It was a talking point. And…But otherwise my parents were also happy in Vienna.

[00:16:56]

Yeah. You were not worried at that point.

Pardon?

You were not worried.

No, no, no. Well, that was 1934. I know that... there was... this incident of actual fighting with guns. Something that you never had here. Not since... Cromwell, I think. But even so it didn't really make a lot of difference to me. It didn't even frighten me particularly. Because the next day things - things seemed to be like they had been before. I mean once the Nazis came to power, then of course it became more frightening. Because they came- On the 10th of November they came to our flat. And I know they took my mother's savings...savings book. And they took some money and some jewellery. And when they came, they said they 'came to look for arms'. And we didn't, and the majority of Jews, I'm sure, didn't have any arms. But that was the pretext.

But that was Kristallnacht.

That was Kristallnacht.

So, let's just go back. How do you remember the Anschluss?

1938... Well, I remember that I was crying. So... No, I had a, I had a French lesson. An old lady gave me French lessons, and I usually made my own way home. But my mother came to collect me and she told me that something rather frightening had happened. And I don't know exactly what she said, but I know I started crying. Not that I really knew exactly what it was all about. Although I had- We had heard about the - the Nazis and Hitler. But in actual fact,

up to ’38, they didn’t do such a great... lot of damage even to the Jews - did they - in Germany. I know that Jews were restricted in many ways. But it wasn’t that frightening. And everybody said, “Oh, it will blow over.” They said that in Austria as well. I remember my relatives said that. “Oh, we don’t have to worry. This will blow over. It will be over in a year’s time.”

So, your mother picked you up from school, and then...

[00:19:23]

And took me home...

Yes?

And... told me what had happened. As I say, I’m not sure whether I fully understood but because my parents looked worried. So... I was worried. And I remember I cried. I do- I remember, eating something - I can’t remember what - and crying. But then the next day... Well, at school, of course, I had to leave my school, after three weeks. And I remember one incident, I remember that now. I don’t know- what is that, the classroom *Vorstand?* Do you know what that is?

Yeah...

The person, well, she was a teacher, but she was more. She was in charge of the class that I was in. She was - had been an illegal, illegal Nazi. There were lots in Vienna. People who belonged... because you know the party was illegal... under Dollfuss. But a lot of, sort of, pro-Nazi people - especially amongst the teaching profession. They were, they came out suddenly. They had been. And I remember she said there was a... a little talk she gave and she said, “No Jew has ever fought in any wars for us.” And I remember saying, “My uncle and my father did. I have photographs to prove it.” And she said, “Rubbish.” She didn’t do anything to me, but she sort of shut me up. And after that, I was only in that school for another three weeks. And then I had to go to a Jewish school... much further away from where I lived.

That was in the Lyzeum already? You were in the Lyzeum?

Yeah, that was in the *Lyzeum* still. But afterwards I went to- I don't know exactly what it was. It was in the Sixth District. It was a Jewish school. Children, Jewish children came from all over the place to- We had huge classes. And we didn't really learn a great deal. It was nice. It was enjoyable. We had a good time.

And this was a teacher who said that?

The teachers were also Jewish.

No, the teacher who said the thing about the Jews not fighting. That was a teacher or pupil?

No, that was a teacher. That was a K*lassenvorstand [form teacher]*. I'm not sure what that is in English, whether they have that at all. It was a- she was a teacher. She taught French, I think. But she was in charge of this particular form.

OK.

And I remember, I must have been quite upset. I don't know. And I also remember my friend and I, my closest friend, that's the name - Herlinger. We used to go on long walks. But we did, not always but at some time, we used to tell each other if we were held up by Nazis or you know by SS or- and they asked us what we were talking about, we sort of arranged a subject that we would mention. But it never happened actually.

[00:22:26]

But it's interesting that you were prepared.

Yeah.

What do you- Do you remember what you were supposed to say then?

No, some sort of innocuous thing. I don't know. I can't remember that. But I remember that we said that we both would say the same thing.

Agree...

And it didn't actually happen.

No. And what about other friends? Were there friends that suddenly stopped talking to you, or...?

Oh, yes! Non- Jewish. Well, there was one girl who I used to walk to school with; she lived near me. And after ...the 12th of February - wasn't it – '38, when the Nazis took over. I think so.

March...March.

After that- a week or so after that she came to speak to me and she said, "I can- my mother said I can talk to you, but only if there's nobody about, and nobody can see it." And she didn't come to my house anymore. I was- After that I had friends but they were Jewish.

And were you upset about that or...how...?

I must have been at the time. I don't remember but I must have been, surely? Because she was very much part of my life; I saw her every day.

And what about your father's shop?

[00:23:39]

Sorry?

Your father's shop?

My father's shop. Well, they had it for still, quite a few months after. But then it was *arisiert*. You, you know what – Aryans took it over, Aryans. It's a ridiculous term, isn't it?

Yeah.

So, then they didn't- I don't know- well, it got to that extent after they didn't have an income, there were Jewish kitchens, you know, where you could get your food. And I remember my mother and I went sometimes, and took home soups and meat.

So, there was a problem after- when your father- when they didn't have the shop anymore?

Yeah, there was, not immediately but after a while yes, when they had no income. But oddly enough, my grandfather, who had worked for the Kaiser, he got his pension even after the Nazi takeover. He didn't think he would, but he did. So that's amazing. But then he died. Well, no he died after, after the beginning of the war. Because when I left, he was still living in Vienna. But then he was moved from his flat, to the Second District I think, yes. And... a very large flat was made available for a number of families. So, he, it wasn't his own flat. He shared it, with other Jewish people. That was a common practice.

And he died?

He died in Vienna. Well, he died in the Jewish hospital...in maybe a year or two after the beginning of the war. And I – I often felt very... when I thought…now not so much anymore, but in the early days, that he was all alone. You know, there was nobody. Because his wife had already been taken before.

And does he have a gravestone? Is he buried in Vienna?

Yeah, yeah, he is. We went to see the grave, yes... At Zentralfriedhof. Well, yeah. Yeah, he was buried there, yeah. What I'm a bit sorry about is after the war, because we went back quite a lot, Richard and I and my mother. And in, we went back the first time in '49. And that I didn't say anything to people, you know, that I didn't say, "What sort of people are you? What you have done?" You know, why didn't- and then we went a number of years

afterwards, and I never said anything! I don't know, but I think there wasn't a lot of that. There wasn't a lot of recrimination. I don't think so.

No...

There should have been, but...

[00:26:33]

So, in that time, between the Anschluss and Kristallnacht, are there any other things you remember until it got too...?

Well, it got- because I lived in Hitzing, there weren't that many Jews living there. Not such a great deal happened. But we used to hear what happened in the Leopoldstadt, in the Second District, you know, how awful it was there. But not- nothing ever happ- well, yes there were some Hitler Youths were following my friend and myself, when we went for our walks. And they were following us for amorous purposes. They didn't know we were Jewish. So, in the end we said to them, "You know we are Jewish?" And they started hitting us! And... a man, a Viennese came and separated us, I mean, he said, "Oh, you don't want to do that. That's a horrible thing to do, hitting girls." And they went off. But that's the only thing. But we were frightened quite often. Not as much as I think we should have been, really.

Mn-hnn. What was your address in Hietzing? Do you remember?

Yeah. 128 Penzingerstrasse. No, it goes Penzingerstrasse 128, First, *Erster Stock Tür Sieben*. I remember that. I've been back there.

Yeah?

And actually, I went with some friends four years ago. And they insisted that we must look at the...the flat we used to live in. I didn't even want to but they insisted, so we went. And... Now all the flats have got a bell, you know. And my friend called and said, "There is someone here who lived here before the war. Can she come and see the flat?" So, they said,

"Yes, yes." They weren't Viennese. They were a young couple from either- from Eastern Europe.

Yeah.

And... We looked at the flat, and my friend took photographs. I- actually there are some photographs there. And... we had a little chat, and at the end of it the young woman said to me, "Do you want to buy it?" The flat – you know. I said, "No thank you." Well, they were- when we lived there, they didn't belong- it didn't belong to us, you know.

Yeah. It was rented.

It was rented. But I think they became privately owned.

Mn-hnn. And did it look similar?

Yeah, but I didn't think- It looked a mess, but they had two little children. And one of them was ill, so it was very nice that they allowed us to come in. It looked similar, but some things I remembered very well, but some didn't look. I thought it was much bigger when I was young than it actually was, you know. I thought the rooms were bigger; they weren't that big.

I hadn't asked you how your parents had met? Do you know how they...? How...?

[00:29:36]

Well, what I know is... I don't think it matters now, it's... My mother really wanted to marry someone who wasn't Jewish. But my grandmother would have been so unhappy about this. So, she- you know, she loved her mother, she didn't want to hurt her, so she didn't marry this chap. And then my father was introduced to her by someone else. I can't, I don't know who. But it wasn't a sort of... an automatic love match. But in those days quite often people were introduced much more than they are now.

And did your parents after the Anschluss start looking for ways of leaving?

Oh yes, very much. My father was writing to all the embassies all over the world. But nobody seemed to- you know I often feel this was the time when people really needed it, because they were being eliminated. And nobody seemed to be there to do anything. Really.

What options did he explore? Do you remember what...?

What, what?

What options did he explore?

Well... there was Shanghai, he wanted to go there, and then he couldn't. And Brazil. But Brazil- did Brazil have a fascist dictator? No, the Argentine, Peron. No, he wanted to also go there. And he wrote all over the place. And... then he happened to come across the name of Kober in United States. And he wrote to that guy, implying that he was a relative. But we never had an answer. Probably we weren't related.

And your mother, what did she...? Because...

Well, she- he did most of it. She didn't really do that so much. Well, she came, we actually came - I told you that already - through Eric Sanders.

So, tell me now; we haven't discussed it for the tape.

Yeah, yeah. Well, Eric Sanders was a friend of mine. And my father actually said to him, he knew Eric had relations in England, "If you can do anything for us, we haven't got anywhere to go." And I hold Eric in very high esteem, because only eighteen, and a boy of eighteen has other interests. And he really helped; he talked to his whole family and one of them guaranteed for my mother and me to come. Eventually. It took a long time.

And was Eric already in England, or still in Vienna?

Yeah, yeah! Well, I knew him when he was in Vienna. But by that time, when he got his relatives to do things, he was already in England. He went much earlier. I went to his goodbye party. Because he also lived in Hietzing and I remember that party. I remember his

mother was already here, but his father was still there. And I do remember there were no seating facilities because the flat was already empty. We sat on the floor. But we were young. We had a...

[00:32:44]

And it was a goodbye party - goodbye for...?

For Eric - for Eric, yeah.

Yeah. And so, what happened? So, two relatives guaranteed. So, was it- your mother didn't come on a domestic, or was it a domestic?

Well, it was a domestic, but it was with a relative of his...who said she needed a domestic servant and she would guarantee. Because in those days, the State did nothing. You know, it was left to the Jewish organisations to help ...people who came over. As a matter of fact, you had to- there was a document that said you would be no liability to the State, and you had to sign that. And we weren't.

So, when did your mother's visa come through?

She got it earlier. Her visa came through, I think, in April '39. And I didn't go until August '39.

So, at Kristallnacht you were all still there?

We were all still there. Yeah.

Please tell us what you – what you remember.

Well, I remember that actually the concierge, you know, the- came to us. She was a very nice woman; she wasn't a Nazi at all. And she said to my mother, "It's best if Mr Kober goes out, because they are making" – that was on the 10th of November – "they are making the rounds." And so, my father left, because apparently very often they took the man and... sent

them to camps. So, there was only my mother and me. Was my grandfather already there? No, I don't think so. And... they came, saying they were looking for arms. And you know, they looked everywhere and they took – as I said - my mother's savings book, her jewellery and... cash that she had. So, we had nothing left! No cash. But I must say, they did give us some back. When we said that we were leaving Austria, we got some of the money back that they've taken. Not all of it, but some.

[00:34:52]

Mn-hnn. But your father was not in the flat?

He was not – no, no. He didn't come back- he walked around the area. And whether it was the concierge who told him that they'd gone, I don't know.

Then he came back?

Yeah. He came back, yeah.

And do you remember any- But what, what about damage to...

To the flat - flat? No, they didn't do any damage.

Was there a synagogue, for example, in Hietzing?

Oh, the synagogue was burnt down. All the synagogues were. There's only one synagogue that's left. That's the Seiten...

Seitenstetter Gasse.

Yeah, yeah. That was the only one. They left one...

But there was a synagogue in Hietzing?

There was, yes.

A couple of synagogues, or...?

No, one. One. A very modern one actually.

One. Did you ever go there?

Yeah, I went- *Jugendgottesdienst [youth service at the synagogue]* Saturday afternoons. Was it morning or afternoon? I went to that, yeah. And then I got entangled with Bet Av.

[00:35:52]

From there?

Yeah.

So, what happened to that synagogue?

It was burnt down - on 10th of November. That's when all the synagogues were burnt down except one. And that was because- that's what I heard, that Hitler, or one of his henchmen said, "We will leave one because we want to historically, to remember that there was once a people like the Jewish people."

But you're sure the synagogue burned?

Yeah, yeah. I saw it. Because we – we didn't go on the actual day, because we would be frightened to do that. But I think I went the next day or a few days after. And it was still smoking. And also, I remember the chemist that we went to was Jewish. And he was still- the shop was still his, but you had- when you went there to get something there were two Hitler Youths. Huge boys, standing outside. And if anybody wanted to go in, they said, "You know this is a Jewish shop. You don't go and buy from – from Jews. And I remember I was there. A non-Jewish woman came, and they said that to her. And she said, "I've been going to this shop for the last twenty-five years. You're not going to stop me." And she had to – you know everybody had to wear... a Nazi emblem. And she tore it off, and threw it on the floor. And

she said, “I don’t want to be a Christian anymore.” So, you had some people... who were sort of enraged by what went on. But not the majority.

And do you remember your feelings at the time when you saw, was it...did you feel threatened?

Well, I did obviously I felt a bit threatened. You know these two big boys. Well, I wasn’t going into the shop. But... what we often did if we saw, my friend and I, Hitler Youth boys or SS. We’d cross the road to the other side, you know, not to be...

To avoid.

...in their view. Yeah. Not- We didn’t look Jewish, well I certainly didn’t, and Valerie didn’t either really, no. So, I don’t think people thought that we were Jewish.

[00:38:11]

You had no problems walking around?

No, not in Hietzing.

Yeah.

There were in the Second District, and more in town, where more Jews lived. Oh, there were horrible incidents that I heard about. I didn’t see myself. People being thrown out of windows, you know, in the Second District mainly. Yeah, it was pretty terrific [horrific].

And were you- you said you went to the Jewish school?

Yeah.

And what happened after Kristallnacht? Did you continue?

Yeah yeah. We did continue, but there was a sort of constant emigration. So many children left. Already before, but it became more and more so. But I went to that school... almost until I came to England. It was still functioning.

So, from when to when roughly?

Well, from 1938, you know, the 12th of March was it?

March.

Yeah... till I went in 1939, till maybe a week or two before, I didn't go. But...

Sorry, what was it called that school? Where was it?

Stumpergasse. It was in the Stumpergasse. It didn't have a name. It was always referred to – in the Sixth District – as 'the school in the Stumpergasse'.

Stumpergasse Schule, or?

Yeah. You haven't heard of that? Stumpergasse, yeah.

No.

[00:39:29]

In the Sixth District? And... well I've met after, when I came here, I met people who had gone to that school, whom I didn't necessarily only remembered by sight. Because like Richard- We joined a group - he must have mentioned it - the 'Young Austria'. Have heard of it? Very left-wing. And I met quite a lot of people who'd gone to the Stumpergasse.

In England.

No, no in Vienna.

No, but you met them in England.

I met them in England. Yeah. In 'Young Austria'. And they, of course didn't want to have anything to do with Jewishness, because they were communists you know, and- no religion. A little joke because I'm reading a book about Stalin. And he was, became quite... well, anti-Semitic. He was anti-everything.

So, do you remember any of the... teaching? Was there language instruction? Did the school try to prepare the children for emigration, or...?

Not really.

What do you remember? What was taught there?

Well, you - you had the usual subjects, but they weren't taught well. And it wasn't a - a strict regime at all, like I had before. The school in Hietzing that I went to; that was very strict. No, we used to make fun of the teachers. Partly because we, knew we were Jewish, and they were in a similar situation to us. So, it was a shame we didn't really learn a lot, no.

No...

I think it – it was mainly a sort of...a fun thing, getting together with other youngsters.

Yeah. And in terms of chronology of your emigration? When did your father...?

He left Vienna, I think in either 1941 or '42.

So, after you?

After the war – yes. And after, yes...

After the war started.

Yeah, yeah. Well, they were, there was a boat going from the Danube all the way through the Black Sea... and going to Israel. As they, I said, they weren't allowed to land. Cause I remember he always used to refer to his journey: "It was an Odyssey". You know, the Greek...

Yeah.

Yeah. He had lots of problems.

But it left from Vienna?

From Vienna, from the Danube, yeah.

And who organised that boat? What...?

[00:41:52]

That I'm not sure. It must have been a Jewish organisation, I would think. Well, the Nazis sometimes helped, because you know they wanted to get rid of the Jews.

Yeah...yeah.

Well, that's what they said. But...They didn't help enough, I don't think, because in the end - the killing. You know there wasn't anything like that...as long as I was... There was brutality, but not – not to that extent.

No...

Nobody could have visualised that. Nobody believed it could happen.

And do you think, was there any- did your parents consider sending you on the Kindertransport?

Did they what, sorry?

Did they consider sending you on the Kindertransport?

Yeah, they did, but it didn't come out, it wasn't in time.

Right.

So, Eric, in the meantime, got his aunt... to send a – a visa. That took a long time as well. And I remember the - the Quakers helped. They were very good, actually.

Did you- did you have any dealings with the Quakers?

No, we were- I went to see them. They had an office in Vienna, right in the centre in Kärnterstraße, I think. And my father and I went there, so that I was put on the Kindertransport, you know. That I could...

You were on the list?

Yeah, but I wasn't- not in the ordinary way, because I only went along so I shouldn't- I had this special visa. The other kids were all on one – one visa, I think.

Aha, so your father went there to ask if you could join a Kindertransport?

If I could- if I could join it, so I didn't have to travel on my own. Yeah.

So, what was it like, do you remember, your mother leaving? Was there...?

Well, we took her to the station. And... she was crying. And my father- I was- we were all crying. I remember that. But we were in touch with her; she wrote to us quite - quite a lot. I think she even phoned once.

[00:43:51]

But you felt it was a matter of urgency, so she didn't feel like...?

Well, she didn't really want to go, but everybody said to her, "Look, you've got the opportunity. You must go." Because you know people unfortunately, a lot of people didn't see what might happen. They couldn't... visualise that such a thing could happen. I think they would have done more... to get out. But luckily, we had- my parents- well, Eric was the one. He saved my life, really.

Yeah...yeah.

And I'm forever grateful to him.

And so how many months was it between your mother leaving and you going?

My mother left in April '39 and I left in August.

August, yeah. So, a few months.

A few months, yeah. I lived with my father, I mean it wasn't the same, because...my mother was a very caring. Not that my father wasn't, but he, you know he didn't understand things as well as - as she did. But oddly enough, I didn't even – as far as I remember - miss her that much. Because I had so many friends who were Jewish children, young people, who, before they left, you know they were all of them were ready to go somewhere. They had a permit or... And I used to meet up with them and we had a very good social life.

Yes, so in a way, the Jewish school helped you in some way?

Yeah!

...Be together with other...

Yeah – yeh. I had a better social life then than I had before.

Yeah, I understand. And then you said it took a bit of time. And then once you got the visa, how long did it take to organise...?

Well, I- not that long. But I think it must have- I must have left about five weeks after I got the visa. My father took me to the station. Westbahnhof. Do you know it?

Yes.

[00:45:50]

Yeah. I remember that, and I remember, that was the last glimpse I got of my uncle- the family that was shot in Yugoslavia. Because they all came to the station. And I still- there were so many people milling around, you couldn't find anybody. But when I looked out of the window when the train started moving, I saw them. And we waved, and that was the last I ever saw of them. Yeah. I was sad, really.

Yeah. And were you- did you know anyone on that train?

No, I didn't, no, no. But we all talked to each other. It was quite easy. We were all in the same situation, more or less, so. But there were lots of very young children. You know, practically babies, two or three, and they were all crying for their mother. That was pretty sad.

But... you must have been one of the few people who had their mother in England. Who was...

You mean, did I know other people?

No, but you, in contrast to other children, you had your mother in England.

Yeah, I was very lucky! Of course. Very lucky. My mother was at Liverpool Street Station when I arrived.

Before that, can you- what else do you remember about the journey?

About my journey?

Yeah, your journey.

[00:47:06]

Well, I know that... there were quite a lot of German soldiers on the train. And also, SS and SA used to walk past. And we - a few of us - we got a little frightened. But they didn't do anything really. Whether they ignored us. But they weren't even unfriendly. That was the strange thing. And when we came to Holland, there were lots of people at the station. They were throwing chocolates, and cakes and sandwiches you know, through the train window. And was Holland already under the Nazis then? I'm not sure. When did the- when did they walk in?

A bit later...

Maybe it was, yeah. Yeah, Holland was still independent.

And the boat? Do you remember the boat?

I remember, but we- the boat, the crossing, was at night. So, we got on to the boat in the evening, and in the morning, we arrived at the Hook of Holland, I think it was. And we had breakfast... on the boat and I remember thinking, 'My God, what is this?' The bread. You had, you know in those days, you had the very square white bread. And it was deadly white, and we- I had never had anything like that before. And we didn't- well a lot of us didn't like the taste of it. We were used to, you know, the sort of...German rye bread, which even now I like a lot. But they don't have this bread so much anymore. You can still get it. You know those square white loaves.

Yeah...yeah.

And we had an English breakfast, that was nice. Because we had bacon and eggs and... jam, or something. We- in Vienna you didn't have a breakfast like that. You had a cup of coffee or ...cocoa and... a dry roll. That's all you have. So, that was... rather nice.

[00:49:11]

Yeah. Where was the breakfast? When you arrived in England? Where was it?

No, no. On the boat.

On the boat.

We were still on the boat, in the morning. But we arrived very soon after that. And I remember arriving at Liverpool Street Station, which was a horrible place. I mean now it's very nice, isn't it? But it was really ghastly then, for a main station. And I remember seeing - looking out of the window, and there was my mother running alongside the train, looking for me. So, I was very lucky, because...

Yeah... You must have been the only person, I mean...

I, I don't know. No, I think most didn't have anybody here. Nobody at all, like Richard, you know, the Jewish... who was it? Jewish Committee. They - they found places for- not always, but... Richard did find someone, but not immediately.

No. No.

Well, I never had any of that.

So, your mother was waiting for you at Liverpool Street?

Yeah, yeah… And she, we went to- she was staying with one of Eric's cousins, who had guaranteed for her. But we didn't- when as soon as the war started, we left there. We didn't go along with them. They were evacuated. And they had, I don't know Eric must have told- Did you interview Eric?

No...

You should do. He's got marvellous memory. And he's got it all written down! That he knows exactly- I'm amazed. What I said, in 1939. I mean, I couldn't remember it.

No, you're doing pretty well...

You know, but not like that.

Yeah, OK. We shall...

You must interview him.

We shall... interview him.

He's very good.

So, just to ask a question- so your mother got this domestic visa, but she didn't work as a domestic for them?

[00:51:06]

She, no, well she did, because they were so good to us, you know? They weren't rich people ...and they fed us. So, my mother used to cook for them. And she was a very, very good not only a good pastry cook, but an excellent cook. And I remember she made... apricot dumplings. And they didn't like it. And I, we couldn't understand how is it that they don't like them? They liked- my mother did other food. She cooked for them.

Was she a good cook in Vienna?

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Did she train or just...?

She didn't train as a cook. She- before coming to England, she trained for a few months as a pastry cook.

Did she?

Yeah. And she won a prize because... I remember she made a cauliflower out of marzipan. And it was a first prize. So, she was very good.

Was it in the Jewish community, or where did she train? Was it- do you know...?

No, I think- well, I don't know. It must have been a training course. Maybe it was... recommended by...

To prepare for immigration.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

So that was how she became a pastry...

A pastry cook. Well, at first when she came to London, she didn't work as a pastry cook. She worked for a family. She looked after... a child. And these two people, they were Jewish. They went to work. And she used to do the shopping, the cooking, the cleaning. But that was only for – for a while. After that she worked for the Waldorf Hotel... as a cleaner. And... I don't know how it happened, but she must have made a cake or pastries for someone. And there was a very wealthy American woman living in the Waldorf. She lived there permanently. And they told her about my mother doing the pastries, and she tasted them. And so, my mother didn't have to do cleaning anymore. She worked in the kitchen... at the Waldorf. Yeah.

When was that?

That was during the war. That must have been... 1943. '42- no, the bombs were still falling. So- the incendiary bombs. I think, were they 1941, '42? Yeah.

[00:53:23]

So, the whole time you managed- you stayed with your mother.

Oh yes, until I– until Richard and I married, I stayed with my mother. Yeah.

You didn't want to- your mother didn't want you to go to somewhere else. And she could manage to keep you with her?

Well, she did- Well later, I worked myself. You know. I started working when I was fourteen. I worked in, not a munitions factory – later, in a munitions factory. But to start off, they made uniforms. And I started off ...on a sewing machine. That was the worst, because I was no good at that sort of thing.

When was that? When did you...?

That was at the time when my mother- when we moved away from this family, which must have been in 1940. And we had a furnished room somewhere. And I worked in this factory... in Hackney, in Well Street. I still- I remember exactly where it was.

And where was the room? Where was the furnished...?

In Stoke Newington. Yeah, we lived in Stoke Newington. My mother had a house later. Much later she bought... the house she lived in, in Stamford Hill. And we had- well, I had it. I inherited it. But I sold it. That was a foolish thing to do. [half laughs]

So, she had enough... She made enough money for you to...

Yes, she earned quite- well, she was very good. When she worked at the Waldorf, she didn't earn that much. But then she got a job at Willoughby's, I told you in...

No, not on the camera. What did she do please?

At Willoughby's? She did, she was a pastry cook there. And you know, that was quite a smart, big restaurant. They had five o'clock tea. And there was a Jewish... there…conductor, music conductor. I forgot his name now. I knew his name. He was- at the time, he was quite well known.

English or...?

[00:55:26]

He was Jewish.

Yeah, but...

English? No, I think he came from Poland. I think. Oh, Geiger! Isy Geiger.

Yes...?

Have you heard of him?

Yes, I have.

Yeah. He- he worked there. He was the conductor you know, for the... dancing. They had five o'clock tea.

Yes...?

But my mother didn't have anything to do with that, really. She just...

And what did she make? What sort of things did she make?

Oh, very nice things. ...*Topfengolatschen*. Do you know what that is? That's… cheese, not dumplings... like Danish pastries, but much nicer.

Yes?

And she made marzipan potatoes. You know they had- Oh, you had that in Vienna, in the patisseries. And... *Indianerkrapfen*. Now what is that?

Aha...that's...

Chocolate with cream inside... cream slices. And Malakoff Torte, have you heard of that? Malakoff was an Austrian General, way back. And he... he didn't create that cake but they made it for him. And it's lovely! It's done with almond cream.

Aha...?

Really delicious. My mother made that...for my children as well when...

So, she had a big repertoire.

Oh, yeah, yeah. But she really could cook anything. But she was employed as a – as a pastry cook.

Yeah. And was there any question of you going to school at all, or... was that possible? Or was that...?

Well, it would have been possible, but because the war- actually I was already ...listed in a local school in Stoke Newington. But then the war started, and the school was evacuated. And... they- I could have been evacuated with them, but my mother didn't want it, and I didn't want to be away from her, so...

You wanted to stay together.

Yeah. Which I don't know whether it was such a good idea, because it was quite horrific at times. You know, the bombing.

Yeah. Do you remember...?

[00:57:36]

Yes, I remember.

Night-time, or...?

Well, we used to- there was a shelter not that far from where we lived. And we were on the floor, you know, everybody was sleeping on the floor. And I had hair lice...you know they came from sleeping on the floor. It wasn't that clean obviously. But I remember one occasion a time bomb had fallen in Stoke Newington High Street. And I came home from work. I was working in this factory, making uniforms. And when I got home. I couldn't go into my house, it was all- where I lived, it was all ...cut off because of this bomb... that had dropped. And I – I couldn't see my mother. And I thought, 'My God, what's going to happen to me?' And I started crying, and a woman came and took me to Lyons. Do you remember Lyons? Probably not.

Mn-hnn.

There was a – Stoke Newington High Street there was a - a Lyons coffee shop. And she took me there. And I don't know how I- that I don't remember, how I came across my mother again, but, I did. But that was a frightening experience. And you know a number of times we had frightening experiences when we heard the bombs drop. And it seemed as if it was right on top of us.

Yeah. But you were very close to your mother?

Oh, yeah. Very, yeah. But no so to my father. But to my mother, yes. Very close, mnn. And, you know, she was very close to me. She was- she was quite happy here. She had lots of friends, you know, Viennese ladies, who came when she was off. When she wasn't working, they came for tea. And she made her lovely cakes. I think that's what they came for. I don't know. But she enjoyed, you know, she wasn't... unhappy either.

She managed – she managed. And in that time, did you have any contact with your father, or correspondence?

Yeah, but it was through the Red Cross. So, there weren't many letters you know. They came very sporadically. Because the Red Cross, I don't know whether- well we, we- My mother wrote to him, and he wrote to her, but he didn't, he couldn't- on a Red Cross letter you were limited.

Yeah.

You couldn't say that much.

But you knew that he was in Mauritius at the time?

Oh, yeah, yeah – well, he told us, yeah.

You knew where- and you said, any contact to the other family in - in Vienna?

[01:00:15]

No, they were all, well, my grandfather died I think in '41 or '42. And my uncle- well, that we didn't know until later. About my uncle, aunt and children being shot in Yugoslavia. But we heard at the end of the war, that my mother's older sister was sent to... Minsk, I think it was. And there was a ...a camp there I think, yeah. And... my youngest aunt, my mother's younger sister, well, she and her husband ran, they went to Italy. I mean Italy was also Fascist, but it was better, I suppose. But they didn't survive there. Something happened. I know that the Red Cross sent my mother a letter at the end of the war, saying that they hadn't survived. So, it was really...the whole family, my mother's whole family. My father was an only child, so he didn't have any sisters or brothers. It wasn't really... Did I have someone? Oh, vaguely. There was someone in Australia... who was a cousin of my mother's. And in Israel there was also a cousin. But... My mother wrote to them a few times, but didn't keep up the - our relationship.

Did you have any contact with refugee organisations?

Here?

Yeah.

My mother. Yeah, well the Austrian Centre I suppose was a refugee organization.

Please tell us about it.

Well, my mother was a member. I was a member from... of 'Young Austria'. But they operated- in Paddington, they had a house.

Yeah.

You know about that, do you?

Go on... what...?

There was a restaurant there, where we always used to go to. Because they cooked a bit like we used to cook in Vienna. And we liked it. And my mother made quite a lot of friends there. And I was in 'Young Austria'. I made lots of friends in 'Young Austria'. But we always used to have meals... in the Austrian Centre. And the Austrian Centre also put on... Bertold Brecht. Not the whole play but some of the songs. There were two people, and one was called Erich Reich, but it wasn't that one, I'm sure.

No...

No, well he, I remember he sang The Threepenny Opera. And... also we did- there were some other operas, and they put on plays. Oh, and there was a choir... which I belonged to for a little while. 'Young Austrian' Choir. And they went all over London.

[01:03:03]

And what did you sing? Do you remember?

They were communist songs. What was it...?

Aha. Such as?

[Liesel recites:] "*Wir sind die Arbeiter von Wien." [We are the workers of Vienna]* Did you hear that?

Yes, I heard it. Somebody sang it for me. Do you remember it?

Well, I don't remember the words, I mean... [Liesel sings the lines she remembers]: *So flieg', Du flammende, Du rote Fahne, voran dem Wege den wir ziehn,* [Fly you flaming, you red flag, ahead the way we are marching ...*Wir sind die...Oh, Gott... Wir sind die*… I don't know... something to do with communists from Wien. That's how it ended. Yeah, we used to sing that every- We had '*Heimabend'* [social evening] – what do you call that in English? I don't know.

...Difficult to translate.

Yeah. Well, I don't know... exactly. And every- we had that once a week. And when we finished, we always sang that, *'Die Arbeiter von Wien'*. Yeah. Where they were after the war, I don't know. [half laughs]

And was 'Young Austrians' part of the Austrian Centre?

It was part, yeah.

So, the meetings were in the same...

But meetings were in the same...place.

...In Paddington.

Yeah, in Paddington. In...in a beautiful house. They were all lovely houses, but I forgot now. Not far from... the underground station. I knew the - the address. I actually went there a few years ago, because somebody from Vienna came, and took photographs of the people who were still... had been in 'Young Austria'.

Yes?

And she came to - to that house. What was it called - oh, god - the Avenue. I don't know.

[01:04:41]

Yeah, don't worry.

It was a house that was empty.

And what food, you said you came for the food, so what...What do you remember? What food was served there?

At the Austrian Centre? Well, you had *Würschteln[sausages], Sauerkraut,* and *Schnitzel,* and *Rostbraten [roast joint]* and *Geselchtes [smoked and salted meat]* and *Knödel [dumplings]* which I loved. And also cakes. Some cakes, yeah. ...Not *Sachertorte* really. I think *Sachertorte [chocolate cake named after a famous café in Vienna]* is overrated, really.

So 'Young Austria' became important for you?

Oh, very! For some years. Well, I had my mother, but there were lots of youngsters who had no parents. And 'Young Austria' became their family. So, when they were criticised for 'communist deviations', they thought that was the end of the world. Richard was; he must have told you.

Yeah. But tell us again, what happened?

Well, Richard had an uncle who, when the – when the Anschluss came, he left. And he actually went to Poland. But then when the Nazis took over Poland, he went to the Russian- You know, they separated...

Yes.

...to the Russian side. And so, he worked for the Russians. And he wrote to Richard and - well he didn't write it openly. No, what was it? There was something about 'that my uncle was declared by the communist regime as a – as a saboteur'. ...What was it, an American spy. And Richard knew that that was not true. That could never have been true. And he was very

upset about it. And we had... a couple of friends, they were not Jewish, English, that were communists, but were very close friends. And they didn't believe Richard. They said, "If the communists said that he's... a spy, then there's something in it."

Right...

I don't think they believed it later, but at that particular time, yeah.

And what was the- how communist was it? What was the message 'Young Austria' tried to...?

Well, to go back to Vienna, after the war, and build up Vienna in a socialist framework, you know. Together with the wonderful [laughs] Austrians. No, they really believed that the – the majority of Austrians weren't Nazis.

Yeah.

I don't- you know, lots of them went back.

Yes.

Did you know that? To Vienna. And a lot of them became... very wealthy. So, nothing much was left of their... former ideology.

[01:07:44]

But it seems that a lot of the, I mean a lot of Jews...

They were all Jewish!

In 'Young Austria'?

Well, there were one or two which we used to say - token - non-Jews, you know. Left-wingers. But the majority, of course, they were all Jews. Yeah.

And some went back?

A lot! Quite a few went back.

Some of your friends?

Well yes, I - I went to see some of them when I went back to Vienna. I don't think they're alive anymore. But...But they were- you know, the Communist Party was dreadful. They all belonged to a Communist Party. But some were smeared as being... you know, infiltrators on behalf of the Americans, and then they - they were, I mean in Russia they would have been killed. But in Austria they were just- nobody talked to them. They all believed it.

Yeah. And for you- You said you were not very political before. Was that...?

Well, I became more political through 'Young Austria'. I wasn't before. Richard already was, but I - because his mother was. My- my parents weren't... really.

And because of that, did you meet, as you said, other sort of left-wing, communist, British? Was there...?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. We had meetings with the YCL, you know, the 'Young Communist League'. And the rambles we went on with the 'Young Communist League'. And so much so I became so... enthusiastic... that I had a very good job in the early 40s. I worked in a lovely, very elegant shop in Piccadilly. And I earned a lot of money. And suddenly the... the 'Young Austria' authorities said, "Everybody has to work in munitions work." You know, 'nobody can work privately'. And my mother begged me not to leave, but I did. And I worked in the munitions factory, where I earned next to nothing. The war effort.

So, you listened- it was a sort of group – group...?

Well, it was a...

Pressure– Belief, or...?

Well, it was a bit of pressure, as well. And belief you know, I believed that they were right.

[01:09:85]

So, you left your job.

I left my job unfortunately. And I remember that was a very good wage I had. Because my boss wanted to keep me. It was very difficult to get staff during the war, you know. And I was used to the work. And as far as I remember – I think I'm right - I earned over four pounds a week, which was a lot. Because a family man sometimes didn't earn any more than that. Less, actually. And then when I worked in the munitions factory, I got two pounds twenty – no, no, two pounds, we didn't have twenty – two and a half pounds, something like that.

Yes.

So, I... But you know I felt I was doing the right thing. Yeah, but you see 'Young Austria', they... sort of persuaded these young people, who didn't know anything else, really. Because they felt that that was their family. And they must have known better, some of them, or maybe they didn't. But they persuaded them: "We have to believe in Communism and... therefore we have to support the war effort, and have to leave our jobs."

Come back earlier. I mean, to go back to Austria earlier.

Oh, and that, afterwards? Yes! Richard was looked upon as not quite right, because he didn't go back. Well, there were others. He wasn't the only one. There were others also who didn't go back.

Was it mostly you went on the weekend...or was it throughout the week, or when were the...?

What?

The 'Young Austria' events. Heimabend...?

The meetings?

Yeah.

Well, they were during the weeks as well. I know that... we went three times a week, Richard sometimes four times a week, to Paddington. And we didn't think anything of it!

It kept you very busy!

Pardon?

It kept you busy! It was... Busy...

Yeah. Well, we felt it was necessary.

Also- but it was a social life, it was your....

[01:11:56]

Also socialising, of course, yeah. Yeah, but it wasn't altogether that nice because some of them, they mistrusted Richard. They said, "He is not a whole-hearted communist." And- so he was called in front of the higher echelons, and told that... if he didn't watch it, they would exclude him from the Communist *Verband [association]*. That's what they called it. And at that time, we thought, if that- if that happens, that's the end of our lives. You know. Really, that's how we felt! Because that was our family. What would we do? You know. Where would we go?

And when was that? Towards the end of the war?

That was already towards- Well... just before – '44 maybe. But he wasn't actually excluded. They threatened him.

But what was it he'd said, or done...?

Well, they felt that he- because he criticised sometimes, some of the things that- or he asked questions. That already- if you asked a question, that was already too much. See, I'm…they're all very different, those that are still alive. Very different now. But you know when you are young, you take things... more seriously. In that respect, I think...

But was Richard sort of a Leiter? Was he in charge of the...?

He was! He was in charge of- we had…There were groups all over London, and he was in charge of the Finsbury Park and Stamford Hill group.

Aha.

He was a Group – a *Gruppenleiter* [group leader].

A Gruppenleiter. And was it your group? Was that your group?

Yeah, I was in the Stamford Hill Group. Yes. Well, I never rose to any heights, so - they couldn't do that much to me. But Richard was very upset when they wanted to exclude him.

But they didn't.

[01:13:52]

No, they didn't in the end. I don't know why they didn't. That I can't remember. But I - I remember one incident with Erich Sanders. Eric Sanders was in the British Army. He had joined up. And we went to the cinema... with them- with him. And in those days, you had to queue. Lots of queues for the cinema. And we were in a queue. And one of the members of 'Young Austria', who knew us, and also vaguely knew Eric, came along... and talked to us. And immediately reported it: "Richard is with a... someone from the British Army." And they called Richard and said to him - I remember what they said: "Did you think that the British Army is a... a brother organisation of the *Verband?"* You know. And he was very highly crit- I mean how ridiculous!

Mnn...

We told Eric afterwards. Well, Eric was left-wing, but he was anti- anti-communist. He was a Social Democrat or Socialist.

Yeah.

Those were interesting times.

Those were interesting times. What about internment? Did you- were you at a tribunal?

I wasn't interned. Richard was.

Yes.

Well, I was with my mother. And they didn't intern- well, some women were interned.

What about your mother? Was she...?

No, she wasn't, she wasn't. No. And I wasn't because I was with her. We were interviewed. We all were. Richard was interned, I think he must have told you. Not for very long, because he was quite young. For three months. He was on the Isle of Man.

But you were not interned.

No, I wasn't, no.

So, when did you meet Richard? In 'Young Austria', or...?

No, I met... Did he not tell you? Maybe not. I met Richard in Vienna, still. I never talked to him, but we went to Schönbrunn, you know, the park?

Yes.

[01:15:50]

And he was there with his friend, sitting on one side. You know they had these...what do you call - Alleen? [Avenue of trees]

Alleen, yes?

What's that in English? I can't think.

Well... [both laugh]

Well anyway, you know what I mean.

Yes.

And I and my friend, Valerie Herlinger, were sitting on the other side. And Richard and his friend opposite. And the boys – they were only young boys – they starting with the mirrors, you know, shining in your eyes. And then they left, and Richard dropped a note in my lap. I still remember. "Beautiful unknown, my heart is aglow..." something stupid... [Bea laughs] Well, he was only a young boy. And then he used to- he and his friend used to walk past my window - a lot. They used to call it *'Fensterpromenade'*. That's what he used to do.

How did they know where you lived?

They followed us.

Aha!

Yeah. And... But I never spoke to him. And when I came to England, this family that we lived with first of all, my mother and I, they had a cousin and this cousin said, "Oh, I know a Viennese boy. I don't think he sees many people. I'll bring him along to meet your - the girl." And that was Richard! But- we became quite friendly, but not for very long. And then we sort of separated again and then I met him in 'Young Austria'. Again! So, we met three times, or four times.

So, did you realise it was him, when you met him here in England?

Oh, yes. And he realised it was me. Well, although we knew what we looked like. So... that was fated.

Yes, sounds like it.

It seemed like it.

Yeah!... yeah. Ok, so then... We are still in '33, '34, your mother was working.

Not '33...

'43 - sorry.

1943. Yeah. Yeah.

'43-'44...Your mother was working in the restaurant.

[01:18:03]

She was a pastry cook for Willoughby's.

And you were doing war work. Until the end of the war or...?

I- what, sorry?

You said you gave up the job in Piccadilly to do war work.

Yeah, I worked in this factory in - near Edmonton, further along, during the war. Yes.

And what were you doing, exactly?

Nothing! Well, so ridiculous. They called it ‘de-burring’ aircraft parts. I had to file... smooth. You know. That’s all I did! All day long. Such a waste of time, really. And I earnt very little, as well. But still I felt I was doing the right thing. And maybe it was - well it wasn’t really, but...

And you would do that until the end of the war?

Almost till the end of the war. I did, no for a while- well, before that, I didn’t immediately, No, wait a minute, that was in 19- in- I worked in Well Street in a garment factory who made uniforms, but that was earlier. Before ‘Young Austria’ – yeah- before I worked in this very elegant blouse shop in Piccadilly. No. Yes, I worked there till the end of the war. And then I got a job somewhere in the west- near Liberty’s. I worked in an office for... a couple of years. No, not even a couple- one year. And then... I got married. And I started working at the optician in Fenchurch Street. And I was there for about eight or nine- till I had my children. And then I didn’t work for quite a while, but... then I- then I worked in a bank, in Barclays.

What were you doing for the bank?

I was...in the queries section. People who hadn’t received money that was sent to them. I had to look for it, where it might- it was such a huge complex, you know. There was- all over the place, you had to look. It was like detective work, really. And I didn’t always find it. But sometimes you did; it had gone astray, or something. That’s what I did. But I worked part time... which was wonderful, because I worked one week and the next week I didn’t. So, it was really very nice. But I had to leave there when I was sixty. Because a woman in those days, only worked to the age of sixty.

[01:20:41]

Yeah. What about the- do you remember the end of the war?

Yeah!

Was that important?

Of course! It was an amazing experience, because Richard and I we went to Buckingham Palace like everybody did. You know. And there was singing, and dancing, and people cuddling and kissing, you know. And people you'd never seen before or seen after. No, it was a tremendous... experience, really. And also, obviously, the idea that we would now live in- we wouldn't have to worry about bombs dropping. Because you had- then, you had the – was it the VE2, or? - you know those things that dropped, without you seeing anything. You heard an aeroplane, you heard the noise. And suddenly it stopped. And you knew that's when the bomb came down. And I, what I do remember is Richard- we heard one overhead, and running from one side of the road to the other, hoping to miss it, we did.

Yeah...yeah.

But... you were never sure. But because we were young, you know, we didn't somehow take it that seriously. But neither did my mother! She - she had that kind of marvellous temperament. She was very calm and she managed to get through this OK.

And at the end of the war, did you ever, or your mother, did you consider going back to Austria?

No, not to...

Or going elsewhere?

Yeah, to Israel. Because my father wanted us to come to Israel. But my mother already had a house here, a small house, in Stoke Newington. And my father lived in a furnished room. So, we thought it's a bit ridiculous. So... we asked him, and eventually he came. He didn't come right away, but he came.

He wanted to stay in Israel?

He wanted to, yeah. But he had nothing there you know, so. And... my mother had friends here. I had friends. I had Richard. I didn't want to be parted from him. Well, no, I was already married, so...what would have happened, I don't know.

You and Richard did you ever consider with a group, to back to Vienna? Let's say, with 'Young Austria'?

Oh, at one time. Yeah. Early on. Not later, but earlier on, yes, Richard wanted to go back. Well- because he was a good communist. You know, so...

Yeah. And did you go? Did you go actually? Did you try?

No, I went the first time in 1949, but that was a holiday. And then I went with Richard in 1950. And then - so stupid. We went every year... to Vienna. Why? We could have gone to so many other interesting places, but...

[01:23:40]

Where did you go when you went to- where did you stay?

Well, that's another story. All these stories that I have.

They're wonderful.

My mother- well, I knew them vaguely as well, from before the war. It was actually our concierge, who was very friendly with us. And we told her we were coming to Vienna. She said, "Oh, my nephew - or cousin - they've got a huge flat. They'll put you up." And we went there, and then we realised afterwards, we didn't do anything about it, we didn't even say anything, that that was originally a Jewish flat. These people had been Nazis. And they'd- you know that happened a lot. That Jewish flats were vacated, and Nazis took over. These people- that's what they did. The people we stayed with. But they were so wonderful to us. Maybe they felt they... needed to make amends. I don't know. We never questioned them. Richard didn't either, I mean. It's amazing that we never said anything.

Yeah. And so, you spent a holiday every summer?

Yeah, every summer. And we stayed mostly with these people. But once or twice we stayed in a...a... in a pension somewhere in the Sixth District.

And did you have friends? Did you meet some old friends, or...?

Well, they were- most of the people I knew were in 'Young Austria'. And there wasn't such a good relationship between... mainly Richard and them. We did see them but they weren't that... Because they mistrusted us. You know. They thought we were anti-communist. You can't understand what that means, what it meant at the time, you know. So, we did- we did see them, but not a lot. But I had a friend... who lived in the same house in Hietzing. And... and actually I've got a photograph of she and myself in front of the school door. And she was half Jewish. Her mother wasn't. Her father was, and her father left Vienna. He went to Italy- no not to Italy – to Iraq. He was an Iraqi Jew. And the mother stayed, and she stayed with her mother. But what she told us, which was strange, that the half-Jews mixed together all of them. They didn't mix with anyone else. Only with other half-Jewish people. And I saw her after the war. I had a photograph of- I had one of her, when she was in her twenties, but I couldn't find that anymore.

And what- you said you... really loved Vienna. What was it like to come back in '49 for you?

Well, it was disappointing, because it was very dark. And there was lots of- well, there wasn't even a lot of damage. I couldn't see a lot of damage. But it was- you could tell that a war, you know, had... And you know what somebody said to me? God, honestly…There had been a bomb and she was sort of restoring something, and she said to me – she knew, I was Jewish, she wasn't - "You were lucky you weren't here when all that happened." I was lucky. And again, I didn't say anything. I don't...! Now, I would say so much. All too late.

[01:27:13]

Yeah, maybe at that time, when... wouldn't want to...

No, I was too young also, and I didn't look at things the same way you know, as I do now. But... we, we did come across some people who were still... Nazis. I remember going- Do you know what the *Heurige [Viennese wine tavern]* is?

Yeah.

Yeah. Well, we went with friends... from the Young Austria still, we went to this *Heuriger*. And on the next table sat a group of young people. And they started singing the Nazi songs that I remember from my school days. And... Almost a fight – didn't quite – but almost a fight broke out between... them and us. I remember our friend shouted, *''Pfui, Nazi Buam!*' [Liesel laughs]

Nazi what? Nazi...?

'Buam'. That's a Viennese word. '*Buam'* means 'boys'.

Ah, Bubs, yeah.

Nazi boys, yeah.

Yeah. And that was post- that was when?

That was- must have been... 1950, '51. Oh, there were still quite- well there still may be now, I don't know. No, now not so much, but there were... quite a lot. Well, I think a lot of Viennese did pretty well... under the Nazis. I mean they got... shops and flats...

Yeah.

...which they would never have had otherwise.

Speaking of shops, did you ever get compensation for the shop, or for your father?

No. No, I don't- I don't know whether my parents tried. I don't think- they might have been. Well, we got- my mother got a pension, and my father did also, from Vienna. ...Which we got after the war. And also, some restitution. There was restitution. Whether the shop was included, I don't know. Yeah, but... my mother inherited a couple of houses from my aunt. My oldest aunt, who was... killed in Minsk, I think. And she was the only one left. She inherited those houses. And they- somebody else already lived in there. And we got compensation from them. So, we got something, yeah.

Yes... She was the sole survivor of her family, your mother.

It's what?

She was the sole survivor, your mother.

[01:29:39]

Yes, my mother was the sole- there was nobody else. ...I mean it wasn't such a big family. Well, she had, she had two brothers but one died earlier. She had a brother and... two sisters. And they died with their families. I think there were one or two cousins in Israel. But- I think I did see one of them. They went to live in Germany. They- their- the son. He was, he still lived in Israel but he did a job. They used to send out people to - I don't know exactly what it was he did. And we visited him in Germany, I remember.

Liesel, I think we should have a little break now. Is that good?

Yes.

Yes, we were talking about London, towards the end of the war. What I wanted to ask you, can you tell me about the refugee London? Were there other places apart from 'Young Austria' where you met other refugees?

Not really. Not- I didn't. Well, this restaurant that my mother worked for. And that was still going till about - in the 50s. A lot of refugees went there for five o'clock tea dancing. They were still young enough, I suppose, to do that. But otherwise, no, not really. I mean my, our friends were mainly refugees with English people married on. But essentially, they were from Vienna or Germany. But there weren't any...I don't remember. Well, there was a Jewish arts – called itself 'Arts Club' in Finchley, you know behind John Barnes.

Yes, what was that?

Well, that was a refugee organisation, I think. A lot of refugees- but they may have had discussions sometimes, but mainly it was a restaurant... and also you could dance there or get together and chat with your friends. But I think that's all it was.

And that's where your mother worked?

My mother worked there, yeah.

What was it called again, please?

[01:31:51]

They called itself the 'Jewish Art Centre'; it had very little to do with art, [half laughing] believe me.

But it was a restaurant.

It was a restaurant, and a lot of Jewish people went there.

And since it was on the Finchley Road, what about the other places? Can you remember the other...?

In Finchley Road?

Mn-hnn.

Well, there were only restaurants I remember.

Yes, so for example, which ones do you...?

Well, the Dorice, the Cosmo...

Yeah?

There was another one...where was that? It was a bit further up, towards the - the train station, but I forgot the name of it. We used to go there some times, but it wasn't as popular as the Cosmo and the Dorice. They were the most popular restaurants.

And did you ever go there, or...?

Yeah! To the Cosmo, yes, we went. And to the Dorice. And as I heard, my father treated it as a coffee house, you know he used to... go there, read the newspaper, talk to other people. Because practically everyone spoke German.

So, when did your father join you here in England?

Well, he came in 1951 or '52. Came from Israel. And then he worked here, at the power station for a few years 'til he retired. No, he worked here for quite a few years. And then my mother still worked later than he did. So, he used to come and collect her, and he waited for her at the Cosmo. I remember the – the chap who ran it. He was from Switzerland.

[01:33:26]

Yes.

Do you remember him?

No. What was his name, do you remember?

No, I don't know his name but I remember him. I can see him.

And where was your father sitting? In the coffee shop bit?

In the- in the coffee lounge. They called it 'coffee lounge', yeah. Not so much in the – in the restaurant. Though we went to the restaurant occasionally as well.

Mn-hnn. And what food did you eat there?

Oh, lovely food. Viennese food. Schnitzel and Gulasch and dumplings. You know, all the- and cucumber salad. Mind you, I can make that myself. And... what else? Well, not borscht. [half laughs] They may have had it on the menu, but I certainly didn't eat... Liver! Baked liver.

Right...

Very nice. My mother used to do that, and they did it as well. You baked it... like a schnitzel, it had the same sort of covering.

Right. And at that time, where did you live, when your father came? Were you...?

I lived in Stam- did I live? Yeah, we still lived in Stamford Hill. In Dunsmure Road. I don't know if you- do you know Stamford Hill?

No...

No.

And how did your mother- how come she chose that house in Stamford Hill?

Well, because we lived in Stamford Hill, so... Yeah, we moved around. Although my mother already worked... at the Jewish Art Centre. And I remember somebody, one of her customers, wanted her to come and live there. She said, "Oh, I've got a place for you." But it was- we thought it was too expensive. I mean, when you think about it now, it is a joke. But... it was- It was a lovely house that she- sort of, wanted us to get. Big house. But my mother was frightened, you know, she thought, "What if I can't keep up with the payments?" - or whatever it is.

So, she commuted from Stamford Hill to Finchley Road.

Yeah, by - by this train... from Dalston...?

Yes.

She took a bus to Dalston, and from Dalston it was a direct journey to Finchley Road. That station still exists.

Yes.

So, and Dalston as well. Only Dalston is a very different place now. It's very fashionable.

[01:35:42]

Yeah. And what was it like- your parents were apart for quite a long time, or you, as a family. How easy or difficult was it to...

With my father?

Yeah... be reunited?

Well, I was never that close to my father. I was much closer to my mother. But my mother had such a wonderful temperament that... you know, nothing - she was so calm - nothing disturbed her. They seemed to be OK. And... I only remember my father used to have fits of anger ever so often. And Richard and I we were already married, before he came. And I remember Richard once- my father... sort of created a scene. Richard said, "If I would have known him, I would never have married you." [half laughs] Because he was a difficult man... but he had a difficult life. Very hard, really. Not – not only after, you know, the Nazis came to power, even before, he lost his mother when he was very young. And my grandfather married three times, and... he didn't like any of the stepmothers. So... that's why I think I mentioned, he volunteered to...to fight when he was seventeen, in the First World War. He volunteered because he wanted to get away from home. So, he didn't have a happy childhood. That makes such a lot of difference, I think. Well, some people can get over it, but... you know it effects a lot of people.

And was be bitter because of his experiences, when he was in England?

He must- no he wasn't. Once he was together with my mother, he was OK. But yeah, he was, he realised he never had a proper mother. I think he was well aware of that. But it was- really my grandfather's fault because I think in those days…they didn't consider the children. They didn't think, 'Will that be a good mother?' Not at all. The children were unimportant. In Victorian times, the children mattered very little. Now we've got the - the opposite, haven't we?

Yeah.

The children matter too much, I think. Well, I think so, I don't think it's so good for them, really. Very spoiled. I mean... Yeah, sorry.

When... When you met Richard and decided to get married, was it important for you that you had a sort of similar background?

Oh, yes. Well, we could speak to each other in German and Viennese as well, which is slightly different. And we had a similar background. He didn't live that far away from me. Although I – I never met his mother, which was a shame. Because in Vienna we weren't that close, really. We became closer when we went here. So... But at that time, I thought I wouldn't be able to be... together with someone who didn't have the same background as me. Now that matters less. I think people were more inclined to get together with someone from their own. But it doesn't matter now, does it? It's better in a way, I think.

[01:39:06]

Yeah. But at that time, it was important.

Very important.

And was your mother supportive of you getting married?

Oh, yes. Yes –yeah, yeah. Well, I know- although she was... very open-minded, but she wouldn't have been pleased if I would have married a non-Jewish person. And my children, with the exception of one, are both married to non-Jewish people. Richard wasn't that happy

about that. Although he was... you know, pretty- well, maybe he wasn't open on that point but he, I think he would have been quite upset. He was upset when my daughter married a non-Jew.

It mattered to him somehow?

Somehow. Not- I mean he was friendly with them, but the idea. It's more the idea than the actual... the person. I suppose that was in your family too, or not?

Yeah, I can tell you later because it's not...

Sorry, sorry. Of course.

I can tell you... So, tell us, where did you get married?

In Egerton Road Synagogue, in Stamford Hill. Yeah, we married in the synagogue.

Was it Orthodox?

Well, I heard afterwards it was Orthodox. I wasn't aware of that. I mean I never attended it.

Right...

It didn't seem... particularly Orthodox. It wasn't desperately Orthodox, but it was, yeah.

Was that the only time to attend synagogue in England? Did you otherwise go to any synagogue service?

Not really, I have since. I went to... Yom Kippur... and Rosh Hashanah. We went to the Muswell Hill Synagogue. Your friends maybe attend there, do they?

No... no.

No. But there is one near here... and I went to that one.

Yes, but at that time you didn't?

No – no. No...

For example, to Belsize Square Synagogue?

I did come, but... later – in later years, much later, to functions or... It was nice! A nice synagogue wasn't it? Is it still - of course, it's still there.

[01:41:20]

So, when you married and you had kids a bit later...

Oh, a lot later, ten years later.

Ten years later. How did you want to raise them? What sort of identity did you want to give them?

Well, I wanted them to know that they're of Jewish origin, even if they themselves didn't keep up any Jewish... func-, they didn't. But they all know that they have a Jewish background. Well, I told you about my great-granddaughter. I did tell you, didn't I? Even she, she's far removed. But she told me, she told at her school they were talking about the Jews and she went up to the teacher and she said, "There are Jews in my family." Which I think is very sweet of her.

Yeah...yeah.

But it's only me, who really instil this feeling of... that there were Jews in her background. Her father, well he's not... not really Jewish, although he was a Jewish mother, but nothing Jewish about him. And his wife isn't Jewish, so. I keep on telling him, you know, "Damian you know you are of Jewish origin." "I know! I know," he says. But he's not interested. It's a shame really. I think that, you know once children- it seems as if it's the end. Although it will not be, because there's Israel. But sometimes I feel it's - it's you know the final years of – of

Jews. Will they disappear? Sometimes I feel maybe it will be better, because what we experienced, you know, if we weren't Jewish, would have been a happier…instance wouldn't it?

But it feels as if- the continuity, it's a question of the continuity, or...

Yeah, I think that's... Although what does it really mean, you know, continuity? It's important for some reason, to me as well. I don't know why exactly. But, well it's been handed down from parents, and I suppose you think, if the Jews have survived for so long why shouldn't they carry on?

Was there any- you said you didn't go to synagogue, but was there any Jewish tradition which you kept?

[01:43:45]

From where- from my family?

Yeah.

Well, we always had the high holidays, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. We always kept that and well, my Viennese family didn't speak Yiddish at all. It wasn't- the Jews in Vienna didn't speak Yiddish.

No...

But Richard lived with a family when he came here. He must have told- and they spoke Yiddish. So, he learnt to speak Yiddish as well and I know some Yiddish phrases. And I think they're very apt. It's a marvellous language, I think.

Yeah...yeah. So, speaking of language, you said you spoke German to Richard? Then did it switch to English?

Not all the time. German and English, mixed up.

And with the children? With your children?

Also, German. They know German. They don't- well, my youngest son speaks German fluently. And he loves speaking German. But Peter knows it. He understands, and my daughter also. They understand practically everything, even if they can't... talk that much.

How come he speaks? How come your youngest son...?

Well, he did languages; he did German and Russian at university.

Right. So, it's not because you spoke it with him?

No. Well, he started off with us. But no, no, no - he lived a year in Munich. That was to do with his degree. And he lived half a year in Moscow. So, he is- I think he's forgot most of his Russian cause he doesn't use it. Shame, really.

Yeah, so it- but the German survived?

Oh, yes, he often- I don't see him a lot, but he phones a lot. And... he always drops into German after a while. we speak English and then he speaks German. He likes- he likes speaking German.

Yeah? So, what's the most important thing of your heritage, of the Viennese culture, Jewish culture, to pass on?

[01:45:54]

Well, a lot of Viennese- well, not a lot, but some very important Viennese authors. Like Zweig – you've read Stefan Zweig?

Yeah.

Schnitzler... and other people like that. Who else was there? There must have been more. And there was a great Viennese Jewish culture, in the theatre, in music. So, I passed some of that- I don't know if my - my grandchildren really are particularly interested. I do talk to them about it, but, whether they take it in... My children more so, yes. They've read, I think, Schnitzler and – and Zweig. But whether it means that much to them, I don't know.

So, did you continue to read those books...?

Yes, I read Fallada – have you heard of Fallada? I recently read one of his novels... and I think he's very good.

And do you read it in German?

I can- I read in German. Either German or English. But I can perfectly well read in German. And understand everything.

Yeah. ...Yes, so you... it's amazing. So, you still read German and you still...?

Yeah. Oh, yes. And to my friend, my closest friend who died a couple of years ago, we used to speak German. She came from Vienna. We used to speak German to each other a lot. And also, another friend. Yeah. Jenny Zundel. Does she mean anything to you? Was she interviewed?

No...

She was written about, because Richard wrote an article about her. Because she was very old when we became friends, but very much on the ball, you know.

Yeah.

...Brilliant woman, really.

No, I've never...Sounds familiar, the name.

Yeah. Well, she used to – she was a member of the AJR, definitely. And she also wrote one. And Richard did a - a portrait of her. He did portraits of various people, and she was one of them.

Yes, so- when did Richard become involved with the AJR?

[01:48:10]

...He became involved because, when he wanted to have his major book published. He went to the Wiener Library, and he overheard a discussion. Because one of the directors, what was his name, he died some years ago? I used to know his name. I'm sure you know him. He got very old.

Laqueur? *[Walter Laqueur?]*

No, Laqueur was at the beginning, wasn't he? Richard also knew Laqueur.

David Cesarani?

No, no, no one of the...Director well, he was more than a Director. He died a few years ago. I heard him speak... when he was in his nineties. And he stood...oh God. Arns...not Arnsfeld- Did you know Arnsfeld?

No.

Well, Arnsfeld was connected with AJR but this chap was more recent. He died not that long ago. Spiro – Spiro!

Spiro. Yes. Ludwig Spiro.

Ludwig Spiro. That's the one. Yeah, yeah.

And he overheard him talking?

Talking to someone else, that it would be a good idea to have a book for younger people, for students, at university or - or school, to know more about... what happened, you know, in Nazi Germany. Richard overheard that, and he picked it up and he started talking to them. They weren't that enthusiastic at first, but eventually he managed to take- talk them around and – and they supported him. Because, I'm not sure if he got money from them. He went to Germany for about four or five months, you know, to... speak to people who had been involved with the Nazis. And he did, he still met some. And I think they paid- they paid him some sort of...I think it came from them. That, I'm not sure.

And when was that, Liesel? When...?

Oh, a long time ago. Well, the books are here. I think they were published... in the early 50s! Or, yeah, must have been. He had one on the SS. That was the first book. ...And then he had, he was published by Weidenfeld. You know about Weidenfeld?

Yeah.

Well, he was a Viennese Jew. He published Richard's book. And. But Weidenfeld isn't about anymore. It's somebody else who's taken over. But they're still- I told you that they phoned me and said their- in Spain they're publishing it again.

Just now?

It's amazing! Now, yes. After all those years.

And how- were you involved at all in this research?

[01:51:08]

No, I wasn't.

How did you view it?

Well, I wasn't all that happy, because Richard was away quite a lot. And I had little children. But we managed. You know... He needed to do that.

Was it important for him?

Well, it was important for me, because... it made him happy. You know, that's what he- he wanted to do that very much, and that book was a good idea.

Because he had quite a difficult experience in terms of his own education.

Yeah, he had no education when he came, no. None whatsoever. He – I think he must have told you he got into university because a friend said to him, "I've just enrolled. Why don't you?" Otherwise, he would have had no idea, because the people he lived with weren't that way inclined.

Yeah. So, he did it the hard way. He had to really...

Oh, yeah, the very hard way! He had hardly any support. I think the AJR, was it the AJR? Yes! They did support him a bit but... up to a point.

Only much later he became the editor?

Oh, much later. That must have been- he was already- I think he was sixty-seven or sixty-eight, when he became the editor and this was in the late forties, early fifties. No, fifties, I think, yeah. ...Well, the books are over here. He showed you them at the time, I think. Yeah.

Yes, he did. But... Amazing that it's being published now.

[01:52:44]

Yeah, that is... that's amazing.

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

Well, I think I – I can't say I feel English, because I'm not English. But... I think this is the best country in the world, I really do. From any point of view. I'm not saying that because you're English. No, no I mean that. I really feel strongly about that. More tolerant than anybody else. I think. Much more accepting. And... you feel, I think I feel more secure here, than I would anywhere else. I wouldn't necessarily feel that secure in Europe. ...Certainly not Austria. Does your father live in Austria, or did?

No, my dad lives in Munich.

In Munich, in Germany. How…Well I'm sorry, I'm not intervieweing. [laughing]

Yeah, and where would you consider your home?

Here, in England, definitely. I do feel homesick for Vienna, how it was, in the 30s. But it's not the same place. It's very different. But obviously, I feel homesick. It's probably for my family, you know, my... cousins and aunts and uncles. That's what makes the difference.

Yes, that links to my next question. What do you miss most? Is there something, if you think about Vienna?

Sorry?

What do you miss most?

Well, I miss Vienna, in a way, yes, oddly enough. I mean as soon as there's a program on television about Vienna, I'm there, you know. And all my- well not friends so much, but family, they phone and they say, "You know this is on about Vienna." And I do watch it. And...

They know that you want to.

Yeah, yeah. And I like... looking at Vienna. It's a beautiful town. Really. I don't know, have you been to Vienna at all?

I have, yes.

It is a beautiful town. I don't think ...anybody can deny that. Really gorgeous.

And how do you think your life would have been if you hadn't been forced to emigrate?

[01:54:55]

Well, in certain ways, it might have been easier. But less interesting, I think. I would have probably, as far as I can think, stayed in Vienna. I wouldn't have got to know anything else. Any other way of life. So, from that point of view I think I've gained. But on the other hand- well as I said, I wasn't old enough to feel the hardship so much. But there was a lot. During the war I remember that we were bombed out, my mother and I. We had furnished rooms and we were bombed out. And I, we slept in these awful shelters, or in the underground, which was horrible, really. My mother must have felt it a lot more, because she was older. But I remember that sometimes wondering 'Where are we going to sleep tonight?' So, it was hard.

And what impact do you think did it have on your later life? Those experiences?

The war experiences?

The war and also the fact that you had to leave Vienna, and that you had to be separated from your father. Or from other family.

From the family? Well, I don't know whether it was what's the word – deprimental – detrimental, isn't it?

Yes.

I don't know whether it was that really. It might have been... I might have gained in a way because I had wider experiences. But of course, I didn't have the comfort of a family – of an extended family. I mean I didn't have any uncles or aunts or cousins here. And that I missed quite a lot, not having cousins. Cause I was quite close to my cousins. And I, we used to go and see my aunts and uncles every week. So, I missed that.

You were close to them?

Yeah, my mother was close to her siblings, yeah.

And Richard didn't have...

Richard didn't have anybody!

...any family.

[01:56:55]

Well, his father already died... before the Nazis. He died I think in- Richard was ten... when his father died, so it must have been '34. And he lived with his mother. And of course, his mother didn't survive but I think he told you why, because... she had this very old father. She had actually... a visa and an affidavit to go to America. So, she would have survived, but her father said, "Oh, you can't leave me alone. Don't leave me alone." And she didn't... and that's what happened.

So, you were a very small family here in England?

Yeah, well- yes, it was only my mother and my father and me. That's all. I've made my- I've enlarged my family with my children. No, no family at all really. I think that's quite unique isn't it? Most people that you interview, they do have family. Or had family.

Some – you know, different: some have, some don't.

But I think there was very much the thing that people had only one child... in the inter-war years. So, they were very poor. So different to now, when they're so well off, really.

Do you feel that you're different...as a woman refugee, or a girl refugee was different from the men, male experience?

No, I don't think it's that. It varies from person to person. But I – I don't think I would say that there's a male experience that's vastly different from a female experience. I don't think so. I mean- except that women very often went into domestic jobs.

Right.

And men didn't- well some men did as well.

Yes. Like Richard!

Like Richard – exactly.

I haven't interviewed that many men who did. Richard was one of them.

I know, there weren't that- whilst women, the women did. So that's different I suppose. But otherwise, I don't know. I don't know whether women felt stronger about not being away from a- Well if they left their families behind, maybe then they did. Because aren't women closer to their mother? Not necessarily always, but...quite often that's the case.

Yeah. Is there anything – I've asked quite a lot of questions. Is there anything you want to mention which we haven't mentioned yet?

[01:59:43]

From my past?

Yeah. [Liesel thinks] ...*I'm thinking of something that we haven't discussed: naturalisation.*

Oh, that was... early on. When did refugees become- well as soon as they were allowed to be naturalised, we became. Was it in the late forties or early fifties? Yeah. Yeah, we became naturalised... pretty early on.

Was that important for you at the time?

Well, yes. I suppose we didn't feel a - a great identity with Austria anymore. We did in the war years, because that I remember in 'Young Austria' sometimes they showed a map of Vienna. And they all went like mad, "Oh this is where I lived! This is where...!" Our, you know what, at that time. Later on, it wasn't the same anymore. No, I didn't really identify that much... with Austria. I still have a feeling for Vienna, somehow. I really don't know why. I don't understand it myself, but if there's anything connected to Vienna, I immediately want to watch it.

When was the last time you went to Vienna?

It must have been three or four years ago, yes. I went with my friend. We looked at the flat that I – I used to live in. Yeah. They are English and they're a lot younger than me. They're in their – they're young! - in their early sixties. Well, they're young compared to me.

And were you invited- did you ever go on one of these organised trips?

We were asked! Well, that was when Richard died, just the year when he died. So, there was- they organised a trip and they were going to ask Richard to lead the group. And... I did go, actually. But not with them. I went with my daughter... later on. But we would have gone with them, of course.

Yeah...yeah. And how do you see, because obviously Richard worked for the AJR for many years. How do you see the future?

Of the AJR?

For example, yes.

[01:59:43]

Well, I thought it would dwindle away. But obviously it's getting stronger and stronger. That's what Tony told me.

Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it?

But who are the people who are members now? The children of refugees and grandchildren?

Some are children, yeah.

Well, my children wouldn't want that, I don't think so. Not that they feel that - 100%, well they're English born. But they're interested in what went on, but... I don't think they would take it to the extent that they would join an organisation like that.

Mnn, well it's also to do with the name. I think they tried to change the name, at some point.

Did they?

The AJR.

Yeah. Yeah, they did change it, didn't they? I don't...

They changed the journal, but I think the 'Refugees' are still in the title.

Yeah, well that's what it is. I mean. It has to- it would have to become something else altogether wouldn't it?

That's my next question: Do you consider yourself a refugee?

[02:02:58]

Yeah. ...I do still. My children not, well they're not. They weren't refugees. But they know that Richard and I were refugees. And I tried to tell my great-grandchildren, but it didn't make much of an impression on them. And the grandchildren know as well of course. I think, you know, you can keep it up for quite a long time. But eventually it disappears. But I don't think Richard and I had a particular refugee mentality. I don't think so. I mean what is a refugee mentality?

What is a- that's right! What is a refugee mentality?

Well, except that you don't want to move out of your group. And you don't embrace... the local community, and the local customs. Which I don't know - still happens, doesn't it? With some refugees, they're still very much... in the way things used to be.

Yeah. But you think that's...?

But Jews, not necessarily. I think Jews have become more British than they used to be.

Yeah, but it's interesting. I think the refugees- there's suddenly a lot of interest in the refugees and their stories.

Yeah, yeah! It seems to be- it's very odd, because right after the war, you had nothing, hardly anything. And suddenly it became more interesting and more... it was on television and the radio. Books were written. But much later.

And now the Holocaust Memorial. I don't know what you think about that, that now the British Government is...

[02:04:43]

Yeah, well they didn't take much notice of it, I don't think. I remember that, when I worked for the optician – I told you I worked - there was a boy, who started working there, came from Poland. And he had been... He was the only one of his family that survived. And he had been in about five different camps. And he mentioned it, but nobody asked him. You know, I didn't ask him, the other people who worked there. Nobody seemed to be particularly interested. I mean now they would ask, 'What happened, and what?' Don't you think? There wasn't much interest, just after the war. Not really.

No, it took- it took time to- for people to start speaking, and for people to listen. You know, and I don't know when that exactly happened but...

Yeah. Yeah, no, I didn't ask this boy either. Not particularly and... what happened. And he lost everybody. He came from- did he come from Warsaw, or did he come... from the...?

What were the- I've forgotten now. You know the Jews lived separately, didn't they? In Warsaw? The shtetl.

Yeah.

I think his family came from a shtetl.

Mnn. Did you have contact to other survivors?

Me?

Yeah.

Well, in- in 'Young Austria' there were- well, they weren't really survivors. No, well they were survivors that they got out of Austria. You mean people who had been in camps?

Yeah.

There was one... who was in Belsen. And I was quite- he - he went to America eventually. And when Richard and I went to the States, we went to visit him. But I didn't really keep up with him. But for a while we were very friendly. Yeah.

And I wanted to ask you, once you...left – not left, but - 'Young Austria, when you were not involved anymore, did you join any other... parties here in Britain?

The Labour Party.

The Labour Party.

Yeah.

Both of you?

Yeah, yeah. Well, as far as I know, I'm still a member. But I don't go along to any meetings anymore. And… we used to go when we first joined, we used to go to meetings. But then... they became very anti-Israel.

Yeah.

Very left. You know really left-wing. And... so for Richard it was so, so we stayed away from that. We didn't actually leave the party but we didn't- weren't active anymore.

[02:07:24]

Quite topical today... with Labour Party.

Oh, very much so. But that has to do with Livingstone, the remarks he made.

Yeah. But you're still a member.

Hmm?

You are still a member.

I'm still a member, yeah. They still send me literature, but I don't- I don't go along, no. I would probably have arguments. Well, I don't know! They're not all like Livingstone. But amongst the young they are, I think. Not very much, but much more so. That's why they elected Corbyn, didn't they? He's an old- he's a Stalinist, actually.

Well, the whole Israel issue is interesting. Also reading the AJR journal, because there seem to be very different camps.

Oh, they are. Amongst the letters they are. Yeah, yeah. I usually read the letters, and the articles as well. Wasn't our...friend, we mentioned him before?

Tony?

Not Tony, no. They've both died now. ...Flesch.

Yes, Ernst Flesch.

Oh, he was a Communist right to the end!

Yes. Yeah.

And I don't think he had lots of feelings for Israel.

Yeah. What- how, how was your relationship with Israel, or Richard's?

Oh, we were very pro. Always, yeah. That's partly why Richard fell out with some of his friends. Because Richard, I think he told you, acted at- have you heard of Unity Theatre? The communist party theatre. It doesn't exist anymore.

Yes?

But Richard acted there, and he made friends with some of the other actors. And he fell out with one or two of them, because of Israel.

Because of Israel?

[02:09:09]

Yeah! ...Because they thought that Israel was below par, you know, the way they treated the Palestinians, and... I mean, there's probably some truth in it. The relationships unfortunately aren't friendly. It would be much better for both if they were.

Do you have any family in Israel?

Well, I had cousins, but I haven't been in touch with them, so I – I don't... I don't know if they are- well they would still be alive. They weren't my- they were second cousins. They were- their parents were my mother's cousins. And as long as my mother lived, she was in touch with her cousin. But we somehow... drifted apart and I haven't heard from them now. Not for a long time. But my son Peter, lived in Israel for about four or five years.

Right.

And he has very close friends. And he's still in touch with. But not relatives, not really, no.

Anything else. The only I can think is about your mother, when, how old was she when she passed away?

She was seventy-one. Yeah. No, she was very active, you know, right- I mean not politically but active work-wise. Right until the end. She was that sort of person, you know...

So, did she feel bitter or did she...?

No! Not at all! That's what I don't understand; neither of my parents did! They loved going to Austria after.

Your parents as well?

Yeah! My mother loved it! And... she was even- I told you the people we stayed with who were Nazis, which we found out afterwards.

Yeah.

Well, my mother was ever so friendly with them. And they with her. You know, they went to the *Heurigen*. You know what the *Heurigen* is?

Yes.

...together. And they sang songs and they danced. Yeah, very.

So, your mother also kept up, for her that was important as well, to keep the connection.

[02:11:24]

Oh, yeah – yeah, yeah. Well, that was her background, more than mine really. Because she went to school there you know, until the end of her school days.

And I'm sure some people at the time would have said, "How can you go to Austria, and...?"

Oh, they did. They did. Yeah, yeah – yeah, they said- yeah, but...both my parents enjoyed it. I think it was the way of life. You know. It was different to here. They felt more comfortable with it.

And what about- that leads me to another question about English Jews. Whether you had any contact with English Jews.

No... no. Well Richard lived with English Jews. But we didn't have contact with them, no. No, unfortunately, there was a sort of view, that English Jews on the whole are not as well educated as... Viennese Jews. And that was true, actually. Now it isn't anymore, because their children are university graduates with excellent ...jobs. But when we were young, the majority of Jews - English Jews that we met - weren't. They couldn't- a lot of them didn't even speak English properly.

Yeah, so it was a gap. There was a cultural gap, a big cultural gap.

Yeah, yeah. Well, the Jews had been in Vienna much longer I think when they...I think so. Yeah.

It depends on how you sort of count, but yeah. Liesel have you got any message for anyone who might watch this interview, in years to come?

In years to come?

Well, the message from now, but for the future, based on your experiences.

I see. Not for people who are around now?

Oh, of course for people who are around now! [both laughing]

I know...I know. Yeah, but they don't need my message. Well... Just... not to forget your roots altogether, but... remain Jewish orientated. I find that very – I feel that very strongly. I'm not quite sure why, because I wasn't brought up particularly in a Jewish fashion. That was more the Jews that came from Poland and Russia. We weren't really, but I have a strong feeling, that I belong to the Jewish people. I'm not religious in any way but that feeling of belonging to this particular group.

You mean sort of culturally, or...?

I don't …In every way, somehow. I feel they're my people. These are the people I'm from. And I belong to them. And in actual fact generally I don't think that's necessarily a good idea. I think if we would all in the world give up belonging to a special group, we would all get on better. But and yet there is obviously something in us, you know, that's inherent. That we can't share. That we have to belong... to something.

[02:14:18]

And you feel you belong?

I do feel I belong to the Jewish people, oh, yeah. Not from a religious point of view, but generally. I feel there is a common heritage– Well there is, in a way, isn't there? Although Jews lived in different places, but there is still something I think that holds us together.

OK, Liesel thank you very, very much for this interview.

OK. Pleasure.

And we're going to look at some of your photographs.

Yeah. Well, my son-in-law brought loads. I don't know why he did. I said I just wanted a few but- well, you just look at a few. Yeah, but you won't see.

One moment. Just one second.

You can't see it now. Well, I can't, anyway.

One moment...

[02:15:12]
[End of interview]

[Start of photographs and documents]
[02:15:54]

Yes, please. Who is on the picture?

My grandfather, Adolf Kober. Well, he must have been about... in his late fifties there, and I think he was born in 18...1870-something or late seventies. This was already in Vienna. I mean he came…

This is my father in 1914, at the beginning of the First World War, and his regiment. Oswald Kober was his name.

And is it a postcard?

It's a postcard yes. [Written to] his parents, to my grandfather and my grandmother.

This is Vienna, 1925. I was a few months old. I'm not sure exactly how. And that was my nurse at that particular time.

[02:17:11]

This is me, I assume, I must have been just over a year. And it was taken by a professional photographer, in his studio. And it must have been 1926 maybe. It's nothing at the back, is there?

This is myself in Küb am Semmering [Lower Austria] in 1931. I was six years old, and this is in the garden of my grandparents' pension there. Yeah.

They had a pension?

They had a pension, yeah.

Tell us about the pension.

Yeah. I went there every year for two months, because that was school holidays. And although it was a beautiful place because we were right opposite a famous mountain called the Rax. I don't know if anyone- well, I'm sure people know it. And, but I- as I went every year, I was... hoping that one year we would go somewhere else. But I didn't, I always went there.

And what was the pension called?

'Schweitzer'. 'Pension Schweitzer'.

And your grandparents ran it?

My- my grandmother, actually.

Your grandmother.

She had it, yeah. And she- it was called 'Schweitzer', because the stairs were outside... and apparently that's Swiss. I don't know, but that's why it was called 'Schweitzer'. It was only – Küb wasn't far from the Semmering. But it was a small village, really. There wasn't much going on there. A pretty boring place.

This is myself and my friend who lived in the same house as I did. And that's our first school day. We were both six years old. And the big door behind, is the actual door of the school. And this is a kind of uniform that we had to wear. An apron. A white apron.

And the name of the school please?

Hietzing am Platz – *Volkschule* Hietzing am Platz.

This is a school outing, in 1934. Still from my primary school. I can't remember exactly where that was, but my whole class is there, and some of the teachers. And some parents. And I remember the names of quite a few of the girls. Shall I say the names? I've got Inge Schönberger, Erika Goldreich, Eva Schmiedel, then, Alice Behrend. Over here is my friend Valerie Herlinger. And right at the end, I remember that, how horrible that was. She was the poorest girl in the school, in the class. And everybody knew about it. Her name was Pittinger. Her father never worked apparently, and she was looked down upon. And I think that's partly the reason why she's right at the outside of this photograph. I think so. But I remember that distinctly, you know. How did everybody know that they were poor?

[02:20:53]

This is my friend and I. The same one that the photograph from my first school day. But here, we were ten or eleven years old. And we were in Küb am Semmering at my grandmother's pension in the garden. I think we were sitting on a table.

This is already in England. Very soon after I came to England. I was probably about fourteen. And it was a photograph from my 'Aliens' book. You can still see part of a stamp there.

OK. This was myself, when I was about eighteen or nineteen years old. And... I think I worked in the West End. And I had this taken at Selfridges. They had a... a department where you had a photographer. That's really all I can say about it.

This was my wedding day. I had just come out with my husband, of Egerton Road Synagogue in Stamford Hill. And this was a professional photographer who took this photograph. That was 1947.

Richard borrowed the - the suit, and from some- a shop in the East End. A Jewish shop. And Richard had a big head. And we couldn't find a hat for him, big enough. And so, he tried to console Richard. He said, "Some have big heads... others have got big feet..." You know, so typic- Jewish way.

This was my wedding reception, on the 3rd of August 1947, in Finsbury Park Austrian Centre. And my mother is right next to me. And... there are other friends of the family, and also the people that my husband Richard lived with.

[02:23:24]

This was soon after my twins, my daughter and my son were born. And this was our flat. I think it was a flat in Stamford Hill. And my mother, in the background. And that was also a professional photographer.

This is my youngest son, Michael Grunberger, who lived part of the time in Russia and partly in Munich when he did his degree in German and Russian. OK?

That is my mother. She was still reasonably young there. I think in her mid- or late-forties. And that's just after she came to England.

Which one is that? I've forgotten. Oh, this is Richard's sixty-fifth birthday. We had a party in our house here, and we ate very well. And we danced, and we sang. And this is Richard and I dancing at the end of the party. Well, he was sixty-five, so...1989. I forgot yeah, sorry. 1989.

Liesel thank you very, very much again for the interview and for sharing your photographs and your life story.

[And you let me know when, you're going to show me something.]

[End of photographs]
[02:25:12]