

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Sex:	Male
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV280
NAME: George Summerfield
DATE: 5 October 2023
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is the 5th of October 2023. We're conducting an interview with George Summerfield, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz. Can you please tell me your name?

George Summerfield.

And what was it when you were born?

Heinz Günther Sommerfeld.

And where were you born, please?

In Berlin, Germany.

And when?

On the 3rd of June 1933.

George, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. Thank you.

You're welcome.

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

My family background is that both of them were born and brought up in Berlin and that's where they got married and both my twin brother, Peter, and I were the only children both of the two of them while we were living in Berlin.

And what were you grandparents' names, please? What were they called?

I'm not— immediately know of their names.

And your parents? Your parents' names?

Heinz Gunther Peter Sommerfeld and- Sommerfeld was the name for the family as a whole.

Your parents' name? Your parents' names, please. Do you remember?

Heinz Gunther.

That's you.

Yes.

Yes. Your parents, your father and your mother.

Peter, er, that's my brother. And my parents were called- I'm having problems here. Margot and Hans. Those were – Franz Sommerfeld.

Franz? Franz?

Father – Frank, now. Sommerfeld in German. Sommerfeld. [00:02:00]

So, it was Franz Sommerfeld, your father?

Yes, it was.

And tell us a little bit. What was his profession? What did he do, your father?

He was mainly working in an office.

What sort of office, or –

Which involved average information that was coming in and he was answering it.

Okay. A bank?

Similar to a bank, but a part to an organisation which was- that he was dealing with.

And your mother, did she work or –

My mother worked and then she is completely capable as a woman who helps with any- for anything people that women were working, were using at that time or who were lifting in that time. They were –

What was it?

Dressmaker.

She was a dressmaker?

She was a dressmaker.

Okay. And did she have – did she work from home or –

Mostly at home because obviously she was looking after the two of us together, so that gave us [sic] little time to work, other than at home. But she did help women who needed help as well.

Okay. And George, where did you grow up in Berlin? Where?

In the, er, where they were living.

And what was the address? Heylstraße?

Heylstraße neunundzwanzig is the main part of our time there where we grew up, until the age of about six years old.

And can you tell me, what do you remember from the Heylstraße? From where in Berlin was it? What memories have you got?

Oh, well, I just remember that in the time we had to be very careful because I think we were always kept from staying alone outside but we did make friends with the people we got to know. [00:04:02] But I think somehow we also went to a local school for a while, so what I remember there is certainly that we were allowed to go to school but that our mother was always around and made sure that we were capable of doing whatever we did because there did seem to be some sort of a problem at the time in view of the relationship with other people.

So you remember that there was – I mean you were born at the time Nazis, there was, you know, Hitler was in power.

There were certainly – Hitler was in power and there were certainly – there were problems and that is why our mother always kept very close to us, so that even when we went to local, er, for extra time at school, we know that our mother was there and she would take us there and then be available immediately to pick us up afterwards in safety, because we all got the impression at the time that we had to be very careful of whatever we did.

So that you remember, that –

I do remember that, yes.

So some element of fear or something or –

There was an element of that. And I think if one of us went alone to a local shop, for example, we had to be very careful. And I – we knew I think at the time which shops we were allowed to go on our own and others we had to be more careful about.

So which shops were you allowed to go?

Well, there was a shop at the corner and I used to go on that on my own. And I remember as well that our mother always agreed to us going there. But I think anywhere else, we had to be much more careful.

What sort of shop? What was it?

I seem to remember that- just a local, er, extra things that we – that I managed to purchase there for eating and so on. There was a small room where – or other place where they knew us and I spoke to them and they were always happy to see us. [00:06:06]

So in Schöneberg? In the –

In Schöneberg, where we were living.

And you, you have a twin brother. So you're the older?

Exactly, I am told that I am twenty-five minutes older than my twin brother, Peter.

And was it a surprise for your parents that you were twins or –

I think it was a complete surprise and I think they were very happy about that as well because I think in those days the knowledge and advance of expecting two of us instead of one was not really well-known. I was the older by about twenty-five minutes compared with Peter, my twin brother.

Yeah, so they were surprised by his arrival [laughs].

So I'm told [laughs].

Yeah. What other things do you remember? Tell us, did you live in a flat, or what was it?

Well, at the time when we [ph] first got married, it was a surprise for our [ph] parents as well and I think that my mother had to arrange with my father to go and spend an immediate move into another flat because the one flat that we were in involved going up two flights. And that was very difficult when you had two children, so they moved to a ground-floor flat so that they could meet the needs to deal with the children, where both of us needed it at the same time. Because otherwise, you'd have to try and carry both of them together all the time and that was fine in the very early days but as you grew older of course, it became more difficult, so they adjusted their place of living so that they could cope with that.

So Heylstraße was – that was where you were? The ground floor, that was where you mainly lived?

And that's where we went to, Heylstraße, at *neunundzwanzig*, exactly.

And what sort of building? Were there other Jewish families? So tell us a little bit about the milieu, what, you know... [00:08:04]

There weren't many other Jewish children at the time but the very fact that – I think that as twins, we were liked immediately by others and we made lots of other friends and in particular, the people who lived- one family who lived locally, and in fact looked after the whole area. And we made lots of friends, some of whom in fact we retained right through for many years, even until after the war.

From the building?

From the building itself, yes.

We're going to talk about that a bit later. Yeah. So you went to this kindergarten, you said.

Started off by going to a kindergarten.

And was that a Jewish kindergarten, George, or was –

It was. And I think that we were particularly a surprise to everyone when we arrived because we were looking identical to each other, so it was very difficult for anyone to tell the difference. We were absolutely alike [laughs] and –

How did your parents manage that? Did they – could they tell you apart?

[Laughs] I think they also made mistakes sometimes. It was an extremely difficult thing and I've seen photographs of the two of us and even both Peter and I have looked at these photographs and have discussed ourselves to try and sort out which of us is which, because we were so alike and even now, and here we are in our nineties now, are still looking very much like each other.

And you used that as well, in school and later on? Did you exchange yourselves, so to speak?

Yes, and indeed of course we soon found out that was a good way of making [laughs] use of this. For example, if one of us got into trouble at school and then got accused of doing something which they shouldn't have done, that person could always say, well, it never was me, it must have been my brother. [00:10:03] In other words, each one of us could always get out of trouble by pretending the other one was the person who caused all that problem.

But did she do that already in Berlin in that kindergarten, or later on?

I would think of that more in Germany, almost in Berlin. I think that as we grew older, that became less sort of a thought that came into our mind.

And what about – did you meet your grandparents at all in Berlin? Were there grandparents around?

The few on the – because on my mother's side they already had died, and my father's parents were not particularly well-known either. But we certainly got lots of friends in those days who knew us and always enjoyed seeing us because I think that as twins looking exactly alike, we certainly became quite popular [laughs] wherever we went.

So you drew a lot of attention?

We certainly did [laughs].

Yeah. Okay, George, but do you remember at all – you said you – there was an element of fear. Do you remember when things got worse? So, for example, do you remember Kristallnacht at all?

Only in the sense that we were able to see even the day after, going by train to school, the trains coming from the actual building that had been set aside [ph] the Jewish synagogue at the time and realising, although obviously we were quite young still, but realising that there were problems and that the need for our mother in particular, as our father was out at work

anyway, that our mother would always come with us and follow us wherever we went, to take care that we were safe. [00:12:01]

So you saw the flames, of which synagogue? Which synagogue was that?

This would be the local synagogue in Berlin that we knew of and we had visited once for one of our ceremonies which I remember, because obviously when you're very young you don't go to all that many of the synagogue affairs. But we had been to one and when we saw the actual *shul* burning in the distance, it is something that even at this age we remember.

What was it? Oranienburger Straße that –

I think it was *Oranienstraße* [sic], yes.

And you had been there before?

And we had been there for one of the events which was especially for children, available for children, and that's something we do remember because obviously we didn't go all that regularly.

Simchat Torah? [Third person]

Simchat Torah, which is a special event for – where young people are attracted.

So that was just before Kristallnacht, the Simchat Torah celebrations?

Yes. I think so, yes. Certainly, we remembered that- where synagogue was but we didn't go all that regularly but we do remember it.

And then, George, when – do you remember any preparation made for emigration? Or what did your parents – what was the situation?

Well, our parents, although they wouldn't talk to us in any detail, definitely decided that it would be best to try and leave Germany if at all possible, so that they began to see whether we could find other places to go to, and we in particular applied to America. [00:14:01]

And what happened?

Well, we were contacted by relatives in America and also in Australia. Some of the people we approached in Australia, for example, weren't able to offer us the possibility of moving to them. I don't think they realised what sort of danger we were in at the time but when we approached America, we were told that if we could go out there, they would be very happy to welcome us and would look after us. So, our mother, at the time with Father, took the initial decision to try and see whether we could get into America.

So, did somebody guarantee from America? Did they have an affidavit or –

They did. In fact, they offered us the possibility and I believe at the time our parents began all the physical side to see whether they could get organisation to leave.

Was your father affected by Kristallnacht? Did they arrest him or did –

For part of the time, my father had lost his job and then for quite a while was unable to get any work whatsoever until he was given some short amount of work by someone else who had a small Jewish firm. But most of the opportunity for him to work was difficult. My mother was able to earn extra money at the time because she was in any case – she knew what to do as a woman looking after the needs for woman, as far as their accommodation is concerned. So, she would help with the preparation of accommodation for women and did some work on the side as well to earn extra money. [00:16:09]

As a dressmaker?

As a dressmaker, while working – and working for that sake, while looking after us as well.

So your parents could feel the effects. Economically as well, it was more difficult.

It was difficult, certainly.

And what about other family members? I'm thinking of emigration or leaving. Were there aunts and uncles and –

[Third person] Sisters.

Yeah, your mum's sister?

Well, we knew that some of the sisters had gone to, er, abroad and managed to get into Palestine, as it was then, so we knew that other members of the family were also making moves. And we certainly decided as well to try and get out of where we were living at the time and move towards ideally, America.

And so what happened, then, on – what do you remember about leaving Berlin? And how did you manage it? How did your father then manage to actually do it?

Well, leaving was even difficult at that time but eventually arrangements were made for us to go to America and it was a question of departure. We – I now know many – at this stage that when we were trying to leave, this was fairly short before the war was about to begin, although obviously at the time I wouldn't have known about this but my parents knew that the danger of not going away would probably mean that war would start and they wouldn't be able to make it. So, they worked hard to try and get to America as possible. **[00:18:18]** And certainly it was not very easy for them at all to get the arrangements made but at the last moment they did get occupation, the possibility of occupation abroad, particularly our intention at that time was to go to America.

I think you had difficulties getting visas. [third person]

The visas, yes.

It was a question of getting visas and also making the arrangements, indeed.

But when they had the visas and they booked a ticket, right, to come to England and how – what was their ticket? What did they arrange?

Well, we had – well, then it was a question of making a departure and it was only a question of not realising us, as the parents didn't realise how close it was to wartime, so that when we did eventually leave, it was a last-minute change in all our ideas because instead of going back by – going out by boat, we decided at the very last we would – to go by train and try and depart from Germany, just before the – not realising at the time how close we were in fact, to the beginning of war. In fact we only left Germany about seven days before the war started. So if we hadn't made the very special effort to get out by train rather than to wait to go by boat, we would never have left and you would not be talking to me today. [00:20:06]

So you had booked – your parents had booked tickets for a specific ship leaving – I guess leaving Hamburg? Leaving Hamburg.

They had plans which were to go by ship and that never left, so luckily we decided to change our views at the time and our parents were wise enough to leave by train out of Germany itself. And it was a question of hours really, a difference, because we also know some very close – a cousin at the time that belonged to them who tried to get out a day later and never made it, whereas we just made it. So the question of our departure was one of real luck and we might have found ourselves stuck in Germany if we hadn't taken such special arrangements to leave at the last moment.

Yeah. I think Peter told me that your grandmother came and said she heard that war was breaking out and that they should change their plans.

That's right, she visited us early in the morning and said –

On a Saturday?

On a Saturday, and said, don't wait until the middle of next week, go immediately and go at once. And my father luckily took that advice and managed to get a – at least onto a train that was going to go out from Germany into Holland and then via Holland to Britain and then eventually I think our main aim was to go to America. But anyway, to leave at all was a matter of hours rather than any other time, which enabled us to get away.

Yes, so – but of course one problem is he had already bought tickets, so did he have any money to buy some other tickets? How did he manage that? [00:22:05]

We didn't even have enough money to buy the tickets and we borrowed money from local friends at the time, saying that in due course we would return that. And in fact, we were given help and that was help which we could only then return after the war.

And that was from the caretaker of the building?

That was from the caretaker and the family there and with whom we have –

What was his name?

Schaefer.

Schaefer? [Schädler]

With whom we kept cover after the wars, well then we made friends with them of course.
So–

And were you friendly with his children, the son of the caretaker?

Yes, indeed we were.

And what was his name? Rolf?

Go on.

Golf [ph]?

Golf, Golf [ph], yes.

Rolf?

Rolf, yes.

And that was the son of the caretaker?

That's right. And so, we made friends and we –

Two sons?

We contacted them after the war and made our thanks to them as well for all the help we got at the time.

So your father managed to borrow money from the caretaker.

Exactly.

And then how did he manage to get a ticket on the same day or within a short time?

I think we just managed to get some places, although not actual any seated accommodation. It was a question of getting onto the train which was completely covered with everyone standing if they didn't have a place to sit down. But I still remember at – even at this time that one very kind man who had a seat decided to give up that seat and allow my mother to sit down, so that she give – could hold each of us together [laughs] for the journey itself, so we

were given some help as well at the time, which many years later, even now, one can still remember. [00:24:05]

So what else do you remember from that, going from the flat to the train station? Do you remember that, leaving?

Only that I think one – we were only six years old at the time but I think there was certainly – there was a remembrance of the fact that we were going to go either by train or by boat from a local place, although the exact details were all made quietly I think by our parents because they had to get away as quickly as possible without giving too much information.

What luggage, what – because I remember – I know that your brother brought his teddy bear, a small one.

He did.

What did you – did you bring anything specific?

No. I still remember that he did have this teddy bear but we didn't have very much. We only had a small case, each person, and that was all because the intention at the time was to take our other luggage separately but of course most of that, we never saw again, so in the end we lost everything that we had there, except the small amounts that we took by daily – by the travel itself.

So was it for –

It happened at the border and then it happened. [third person]

One second. So, it was the – you prepared, there was a crate or something prepared?

We did have some luggage with us and we were taken to the local place where they were allowing people to hand in their – all the details and it was at that stage in fact we – quite a lot

of what we still had at the time was lost as we decided to make a journey out of England at the time – sorry, a place out of Germany at the time to get away, even though some of the items that we still had were lost as a result. [00:26:10]

Yeah. But George, you said so the person gave you – you went to the train and then somebody offered your mother a place, you said. That was in the first bit, from Berlin.

From Berlin to the end of the – to the first – where the cover [sic] then moved from Germany into Holland, the place where the cover [sic] was going to take place.

And what was it like to cross the border? Was that difficult? Did –

Well, that was quite difficult indeed because first of all, we spent a night there waiting to see whether we could get abroad at all and the Germans were certainly making life extremely difficult for us. But the next day a train from Holland itself happened to come through and by that time we had all the documents that we needed and we were able to get onto that train and quickly grab the train itself to move from Germany into Holland itself, because that made all the difference. And we both remember at the time the feeling after we moved from Germany into Holland, the feeling of safety and the- how pleased we all were that the danger had passed.

Who else? Do you remember anyone in the train? You said it was a full train, packed train. Who were the other people? What –

There were lots of other Berliners, because the whole place was full of others like us who obviously were people from Berlin who were also trying to get out of Germany itself at the last moment. [00:28:07] And bearing in mind that war was going to start, which we didn't know at the time of course, but then within a very short question of weeks, the fact that we were able to get away at all made all the difference.

And tell us about your cousin. You said your cousin was supposed to come. And then what happened?

Yes, we had one cousin and we said to her, because her husband had already gone ahead to England, why don't you join us? And she said, well, I'm coming the next day, so don't worry, I'll be coming, but I've got one or two last-minute things to attend to. I'll see you when I get to England. And in fact, we know very well that her husband we met in England when we got there, but this woman never managed to get the train out of Germany and she was eventually arrested by the Germans, lost to war by the Nazis, and her husband who would see us regularly in England never met and could never see again his wife who died as a result.

Yeah, because I remember Peter telling the story where I think he said she wanted to pick up a dress or –

From the dressmaker. [third person]

From the dressmaker. She wanted to pick up –

Yes, she was only –

A specific dress.

He was only delaying his delay for some short things that he wanted to fetch, had he forgotten or –

She. She.

Insisted that it was not important and that it was best to leave. She also would have got away. As a result of this, she lost her life.

Thank you, Peter [sic]. Is there anything else you remember from the journey? So you slept one night. Where did you sleep? In Bentheim or – yeah, in Bentheim? [00:30:00]

That's right, Bentheim is – was the place where –

So is that still Germany? Was that still in Germany?

It was still in Germany and the question of getting into a train into Holland nearby, and the – once the train got there, all of us were forced to go and wait for the next stage. And I still remember we had some very unfortunate – what felt like unfortunate feelings, waiting, because all we could do is in that German area, is to sleep there overnight and wait because we couldn't get the train to get away from that area. So for a whole night we were quite concerned at that time, parents in particular, that we still hadn't left Germany. But the next morning a train came in which was moving into Holland and by then fortunately we had been given all our luggage, cases and –

Passports?

Our, er –

Passports. [third person]

Passports.

Passports and everything we needed so we could get on the train and move out of Germany itself into Holland. And from that moment of course the difference between being in Germany and being in Holland made a very big difference, particularly for our parents who knew that at the last moment we'd managed to get away from Germany itself.

What about your suitcases? [third person]

The suitcases?

On the train. You lost them. [third person]

Did you lose the suitcases on the train or –

Um...

The train from Berlin. [third person]

Well, we only had by then – we only had the small trains [sic] that we were carrying because the large trains [sic] that we were hoping to take with us as well had to be left behind and were lost altogether. [00:32:10]

Okay, don't worry. And you slept on the floor? Was it a sort of a waiting area where you spent the night?

It was, just all you could do was lie down on the ground and I still remember the discomfort one had. But the thing is that when you look back on it now, you realise that if you hadn't done that, we wouldn't have got away.

Yes, so you lost some luggage, some luggage on the way, from the first train?

We lost some of the luggage but they weren't – the main thing was to get out and even when it meant a question of leaving some of the stuff that we had there at the time, it was out of our hands of course. But they decided that it was – what was important was to get out and get away, rather than take a risk.

Yeah. Or was confiscated, the luggage, by the Nazis? Yeah, they took the luggage and didn't return it.

They – and we know. So, when we got to the- out of that area all we had left was a small suitcase each and we virtually- when we eventually arrived in England, had very little left other than a small suitcase each, and virtually nothing of our own possessions. But on the other hand, we had got out of Germany which was the important thing. And once we got without anything of any value, of help at all, the British when we got to London, helped

immediately and gave us help in any way they could, including accommodation on a short basis.

So first of all, what about being on the Dutch side? What do you remember? You said crossing, crossing into Holland. [00:34:04]

That the parents felt, and as a result we did as well, the feeling of satisfaction and- pleasure that at last we'd got out of Germany itself. It was there we had escaped from Germany itself and become available to look after ourselves in future.

Did you know as children where you were going at all? Did you know you were going to England?

I think not fully, although I think also even America was being discussed at the time because I think our main aim ultimately was to go to America.

Yeah. And did you have any English? Did they teach you some English in Berlin before you came or –

We did a few because our parents remarked that we would like to go to somewhere where English would be a useful language and we were given little bits and pieces of knowledge in English just before we left.

Like what words? Do you remember what they taught you or –

Well, just sort of everyday words that one would use in – if living in an English place.

And which train station? Where did you arrive in England? In Liverpool Street?

Yes, I mean obviously we went by boat across into England itself and then we arrived in England in –

Liverpool Street? [third person]

Liverpool Street Station.

And do you remember the crossing, the ferry, by ferry, the crossing?

Yes, the weather was rather rough itself. I think if I remember rightly, my mother felt a bit sick at the time.

From Hook of Holland?

From Hook of Holland to- where did we go, now? [00:36:00] Hook of Holland.

Harwich? [third person]

Yes.

Harwich?

Yes, Hook of Holland, Harwich, and then we had to go by train from Harwich into London itself. And certainly, the journey by boat wasn't a very pleasant one because I still remember now that our mother felt ill and I think she was a bit sick on the way.

And what were your first impressions of landing in Harwich and arriving at Liverpool Street Station?

Well, I think it's partly because the – our parents seemed to be looking much more content than before and that obviously was passed on to us, so we felt, well, you know, here we were, safe, and safer than we were in the past, immediately.

And who – did somebody pick you up at Liverpool Street Station, or when you arrived was –

No, there was no one there and we were just standing around waiting, not knowing what to do. But eventually we did actually discover somebody who was there among those who were helping and spoke to us. We of course, only spoke German, so it was awkward anyway, but someone who could speak German talked to the parents and found out what the background was and arranged for us to go to a place where we could stay on- immediately for a few nights.

In a hotel?

In a hotel which was a hotel that was open to people who were in – having problems. There were a number of people at the time who were having problems and –

In Russell Square?

This was in Russell Square itself, or near Russell Square.

So was it near Bloomsbury House? Were there –

We had no money of course to pay for all this but we were –

[Inaudible]. [third person]

Yes, there was help being given immediately for those of us who arrived there without any funds. **[00:38:05]**

By the Central British Fund, was it?

Exactly.

Yeah, which helped the refugees.

Which – and, you know, obviously we weren't the only ones who were being in trouble at the time and so help was – being helped all around.

Did you ever look for your files from World Jewish Relief?

Did I...?

Have you ever looked at the files from World Jewish Relief? Are there – were you in there?

Tania found a file. [third person]

Archives, because if, you know, anyone who was helped by the Central British Fund –

I think we did have some files which our father managed to –

Tania, Tania found the files in World Jewish Relief archives. [third person]

Oh, really?

Later you found some files.

Oh, then you heard then, yes. There have been some – there has been discovery of some of the documents that were being used at the time.

So for how long did you stay in that hotel in Russell Square or –

Um...

One week. [third person]

Yes, it was about a week in that hotel and then from then onwards we were actually sent some money to help us immediately from England itself.

And where did you move on to, then, from Russell Square?

You moved to- [third person]

We were given accommodation because I think we were told who was looking after our help [sic] with us, with extra money that they made available and got us some accommodation in Camden Town, in, er...

Near. [third person]

Yes, near Camden Town.

Do you remember the address? Where was it?

Well, I think we also got some accommodation. [00:40:00] I seem to remember the place- no, not immediately, sorry.

Don't worry, don't worry. Anyway, near Camden.

Near Camden Town.

And did your parents manage to get some work or –

Little – no, not immediately because obviously it takes time. We were just given one room for the four of us and given some accommodation.

Your mother's sisters in Palestine sent money. [third person]

Okay. So, your mother's sisters sent some money to support –

We were given some financial help because our mother's two sisters had managed to get to Palestine and when they realised that we were without any help in England, sent some money as a- we borrowed for a while, which would help us with our – with whatever we needed.

And did your parents have any relatives? So, there was a cousin, the husband of the cousin who didn't make it. Were there any other relatives in England? Did they have anyone?

No, we didn't have any relatives. That was one of the problems.

So there was nobody to help?

No, nobody to help at all.

So that must have been quite difficult.

Oh, life was very difficult and- but on the other hand, the fact that we'd managed to get out of Germany was the important thing, so I think that we just made the best that we could. My mother was able to help quite a bit from time to time, helping in one form and other to earn a little bit of money and found it easier to make a little bit of money, rather than our father. [00:42:03] So quite – there were times when our father would be looking after us while our mother made some local work.

As a dressmaker?

As a dressmaker or even helping in a shop or in some way which she could earn some money, whereas our father who found it much more difficult to get any accommodation [sic]. He would take us out for walks and look after us while our mother was earning a little bit of money so that we could manage to earn our – enough to buy some food and look after ourselves.

That's interesting. I think that happened in a few families probably.

Very likely because it was easier for a woman to get a job, just as a job helping in one form or another, but not so easy for the man who – in any case when he spoke German [inaudible], so like from a language point of view it was very difficult.

Yeah. And do you know – you said they had contact obviously with the Central British Fund. Were they in touch with any other refugee organisations?

Only the – probably we were also trying to find out what we could do to go to America, but otherwise we were just –

Bloomsbury. [third person]

Bloomsbury House?

Bloomsbury House, yes, and going along there and finding out what help we could get.

What about – because I know you're members of Belsize Synagogue. What about – because that was – the Belsize Park Synagogue, were they involved in that at all?

Well, only that Belsize Square had only just started, so the majority of people there were all from Europe, the majority from Germany or Austria anyway, and most of it was still being spoken in German.

But they did the attend early meetings of Belsize – I think it was at that time- there was a hall given, um –

Yes.

You know, it was started at that point. [00:44:05]

Yes.

Were they involved in that? Do you think they –

They made their own German-speaking course [sic] and this was arranged by the English-speaking one, which organised a small area which was then made available to those who could only speak German.

And yeah, by Lily Montagu, wasn't it?

Yes, by Lily Montagu.

And did you – did they go there? Did you go there?

Yes, we did.

In the very early days?

In the early days because it was a helpful – and they were certainly – we spoke to a lot and met quite a lot of other people with a similar background.

So, it was people because you said your parents went to [Synagoge in] Oranienburger [Straße] so with a Liberale background who then founded Belsize Square Synagogue.

That's right, yeah. In fact, it had already started about a year earlier than that. It was a company that was gradually expanding of people who originally had German as their main article. And so even then, even in the early days nearly every – we were still speaking lots of German within those areas because the knowledge of English was very little at that time.

So do you remember attending some services there in the – it wasn't called Belsize, it was called the New Liberal Synagogue.

Yes.

Do you remember that?

Not as a name but what I do remember is that lots of people we used to befriend were speaking German together rather than English. And English was only gradually coming to – for use. And in fact, for the first few years, that particular group, all the services were still in German, particularly –

Yes, with Rabbi Salzberger? [00:46:02]

Yes. I mean obviously either in Hebrew or in German. And English only was added in gradually, until such a time when it was only English and no more German any longer but that took quite a few years before German as one of the additional countries at the time was stopped, because a large number were German – originally German Jewish.

And what about schooling? Were you sent to school with Peter?

Yes, we did spend a bit of time when we first arrived in, er, outside London we went to–

Near Chiswick. [third person]

Chiswick?

Well, Chiswick was – yes, we spent – we spoke some German near Chiswick where one or two people, one woman in particular got to know us, who could speak both German and English, who helped us.

So was it before you moved to Camden you were sent to Chiswick?

Hmm. [third person]

Yeah? Before?

Hmm.

So you had some time in Chiswick before you came to Camden?

Yes. And then also we spent some time in- but we weren't allowed to stay there any longer. It was outside London itself.

Eastbourne. [third person]

In Eastbourne?

In Eastbourne.

On the coast.

Yeah, exactly, for a short while. But then all – anyone who was born outside in a country in Europe was told you're not allowed to stay in that area anymore because with war, there were always possible difficulties in the future, so we had to report back to London again.

And that was about internment, wasn't it? The internment.

And then the men in particular, which included our father, were all put into internment and sent elsewhere, so our mother in fact had to look the two of us alone. [00:48:09]

So he was interned?

He was interned –

And was he interned from Eastbourne or from London? In Eastbourne?

He was interned originally from Eastbourne but then we also had to leave Eastbourne because Eastbourne being on the countryside- on – near the –

Coast. [third person]

By the coast.

Near the area there. Anyone who was non – who came from Germany originally was told you're not allowed to stay in that area. And we also had to move into London.

Okay, George. We were talking about Eastbourne but I'd like to go back a little bit and take you back to – so you were in the Russell Hotel when you arrived and then you actually moved to Chiswick. Tell us a little bit about that. Why did your parents move to Chiswick? And was there – and the schooling in Chiswick, because there was a story you wanted to tell, the private school in Chiswick, that they gave you a place.

Yeah. Do you want me to start?

Yes, please.

Yes, there was a school in- opposite and [clears throat] they were prepared to take the two of us. I think they were interested as well in the fact that we were coupled, in other words, doubles. And they asked us whether we'd like to do some time with them, speaking English of course.

So they offered you a free place?

They offered us a free place to come and join them and answer the questions they were going to put to us. [00:50:02]

And what do you remember? Was it a good experience for you or was it –

I think we just enjoyed the fact that we were actually invited. I think that we were happy to do that. And we liked the school anyway.

And then you moved to Eastbourne. So why did they move out from Chiswick to Eastbourne, your parents?

I think our parents thought at the time that living in Eastbourne would be more interesting as it's by the seaside and also probably cheaper to learn- to live there. And also, we discovered that we could accommodate there at much less expenses than in London itself.

And were there any other refugees there in Eastbourne?

Not that we knew of necessarily. We were – we just liked the idea of living there because it seemed a pleasant place.

But then you found yourself there when the issue with the interment started.

Well, that's right because our father, being removed from that area – and in fact he was one of the first to be removed because the first they removed were anyone near to a place where they could move more easily. In other words, near the port there that they had. And so also we were told within three days we would have to move as well and move back to London. So we had no choice after a short while.

But were you allowed to stay there a bit longer? Because some – Peter got hurt or – on his knee. Were you allowed to stay there a bit longer because Peter hurt himself?

Oh, you remember that, yes. Well, we were told that we would have leave within about a week and that would have been normal, except that within about two or three days before leaving, Peter had an accident. [00:52:05] We were playing in there with some friends at his place and he hurt his knee, so he was told that it would be all right but he shouldn't move for a while, so we actually stayed within that area little bit longer than originally anticipated.

And somebody – he had a doctor – you found a doctor who treated him there?

Yes, and took very little money because we had very little but which certainly helped. And there were lots and lots of friendly people in that area as well.

And do you remember, what did your father feel about suddenly being interned? I mean you had just escaped, you know, from Germany and here you are and he had to – he was interned.

Well, we could – Mother and we anticipated all of a sudden he has disappeared. I don't know whether our father knew exactly what was happening because people were being interned all of a sudden. It was a new atmosphere. Of course, he felt less worried after a while when he saw that people were being taken, all those who came from abroad, so that he wasn't the only one and – but certainly to begin with it gave him quite a shock.

And where was he when – where was he interned?

Well, that I can't remember immediately the place. I mean he – on his way, it took a little while but then he moved to- I'm just thinking, further away from every – any danger. The –

Isle of Man?

Isle of Man, exactly, is where they interned all the- those who arrived from abroad.

Yeah. And was he in Central Promenade Camp in Douglas?

He was, yes. And he soon actually became involved within that area and took as – the situation as best as he could, helping there as well by – within the organisation itself.

[00:54:11]

And here you – because I have your biography here, so I'm just helping you a little bit. It says that he was involved in the canteen, building up the canteen.

That's right. He actually offered to help and they made him in charge of the canteen there and helped – to help with the way things were being worked.

Yeah. And so how long did he stay on the Isle of Man?

I think about nine months.

So in that time you had to move with your mother to – back to London.

Exactly, because we weren't allowed to stay there any longer and we went to London itself.

And again, how did she choose where to live? How, do you know?

Well, I think it was just a question of where room was available. And I think to begin with we moved more or less the north-west of London. That seemed to be the area where a lot of the people who were living there were in a similar position.

So she looked for other refugees?

Looked for other refugees.

So you ended up it says here in South Villas in Camden Square.

That was one area where we started, yes, it was. And near to Camden Town.

Yeah. And do you remember at that time, did you experience bombings?

Well, that's why I mentioned Camden Town just now because I think that certainly the bombing started and we used to go via Camden Town and take refuge and in fact we decided that Tottenham Court Road at the time was a useful place in order to meet- to be there every evening, partly also because within that area we could also discover what possibilities there were to travel to America, because that was still in our mind at the time. [00:56:10]

So tell us a little bit about that. Was it a shelter or the Underground station in Tottenham Court Road?

This was the- just a – an Underground more or less where the Northern line came in the Underground itself. And part of that, at the end of it, near the wall itself was used by people to sleep there on the – in evening – every evening. But evening already started at about two or three o'clock in the afternoon, so basically every day from that time onwards until about six o'clock in the morning, one used that area in order to escape from the war times at the time because below ground of course in the Underground, you were safer than you were anywhere else.

And why Tottenham Court Road? What about, let's say, Camden or – I know some people went to Belsize Park Station. Why did your mother choose Tottenham Court Road?

Because our mother was still trying to discover what possibility there were to travel to America and from that area itself it was easier to ask from the local area where the Americans had their main offices.

Understood. And did you – so you slept on certain platforms? Was it on a certain platform?

Yes, it was more or less the same platform all the time. And this was customary. After a while you just slept there every night and we got to know it.

So did you meet – you met the same people every night?

You met the people every night and also [laughs] even- they organised even- proper facilities so that they organised toilets, for example, in that area. [00:58:02] I still remember a little incident, for example, where my brother had used the toilet at the end which they'd open up and then when I went shortly afterwards I got into trouble because they said well, you've just been there. And I said to them, oh, actually that would have been my twin brother, Peter and they didn't believe it, so I said, well, I'll prove it to you, so I went off and got Peter to come

and demonstrate the fact that there were two of us. And from then onwards we had no more problem about using the facilities in that area.

And was there food? Did people bring in food into the shelter or –

There were some organisations who were very – at that – at the – in the early days you could get pieces of chocolate and so on, so that offers [sic] in that area where you could perhaps take – I remember this in particular – you could take the Underground itself to the next station which was better occupied for food, Leicester Square, and then we'd take whatever we thought from there, and then went back to Tottenham Court Road, which is where we had the evening every night.

So was that quite – from a child's perspective, was it quite a sort of adventure or –

Oh, yes, and I still [laughs] remember now that we quite enjoyed it and one could sort of use the Underground there and back all the time. And also, sometimes we would pretend that we were helping people where to go. And as Tottenham Court Road itself was quite a large little area where people were going after different departments of the station, we would stand there and tell them where to go. And I think we made ourselves quite popular at the time by people who got to know us, particularly as twins looking exactly alike.

George, please look at me. Better for the camera. [01:00:00] Okay, and so at what point did your father then rejoin the family?

It took quite a while for our father to- were relieved from his position but then I think it took about nine months and then he was also relieved and he joined us in- where we were living at the time, so that obviously was – and he also then started to begin with to join us in the evenings. But then the whole question of the particular attempts at- overnight causes to leave there and to get away from the dangers, that we leave because the Germans decide not to send regular aircraft in the evening anymore and so we were able to stay at home in a normal way.

And did you move from – then from Camden Villas, you moved to, was it Steeles Road, near Chalk Farm?

That was a move to Steele Road Farm [sic] –

With your father?

With our father and by then the daily evening became quite regular and we didn't have to move out all the time. There were some difficulties still locally but very few in comparison to what we had at the time.

So there was still some bombing when you went to Steeles Road?

Occasionally but far less than we had in the early days.

So did you – were you then sent to school in Chalk Farm?

We tried a local place for our school and we weren't particularly happy. I think at the time we still were taken over as German and so [clears throat] life wasn't very easy for us as supposed to be of German origin. [01:02:10] And so our parents were wondering what to do, and this is where a decision was taken to see whether there was any chance to go into a private school. We then decided to see what else there was available and our parents decided that if we could go to a private school, that this would be better from our point of view, and we discovered that there is a private school near Tottenham Court Road.

Here, in Belsize Park?

In Belsize Square, near Belsize Square, where they would be prepared to take the two of us at the cost of one. And this is what we organised.

So you got into the Hall for a reduced fee?

We got into the – yes. They were short of schoolchildren at the time. A large number were leaving that area anyway because of the bombings that were taking place, so they were quite happy to occupy the two of us as one. And we went to what was in fact a school which was at a relatively high standard and that really helped a great deal in the English that we were learning at that time.

And did you find you had – because you said the other – in the other school you had problems being German. In the Hall School – was that still a problem or –

That – no, that became no problem as well. And the school was defeated- accepted by people from all different countries anyway and there was no problem with that school. And in fact, the classes were very small, relatively small, and that helped as well. And the level was extremely high, of the standard at the school itself. [01:04:01]

So the Hall School never evacuated the children? They stayed in –

No, it stayed there. Occasionally we had some problems about food in that area because we had to go across the road because there were some short problems but the overall problem was very small. And the decision to go to that school made all the difference because it increased the knowledge and the ability that both Peter and I had of our knowledge of English within that area.

And what did – what work did your parents manage to find at that point? Did your mother work as a dressmaker?

My mother, yes, she found work locally as a dressmaker and my father also started getting different jobs at different levels and gradually increased his ability to speak English and therefore he got jobs which were far more demanding.

But he worked in, it says here in your biography, in insurance business.

Yes, well, once his English was good enough, he could actually go into insurance. And as an insurance broker he was able to deal particularly with the large number of foreigners that were also in the area who used him and his knowledge of German as well as English by then, to produce whatever they needed. And my father also certainly improved quite considerably in what he was able to do.

So, that facilitated another move, to Gilling Court in Belsize Park.

That's right. And we could afford it, although initially we could only afford a two-room flat which meant there was one room which – in which Peter and I slept and our mother made her dressmaking and the second room was used for them to sleep and for us to have our food. **[01:06:14]** Then after a short while we were able to improve quite a lot by having a three-room flat where there was a single room for both Peter and I as a bedroom and the other two rooms, one of them was used by our parents for – where they stayed overnight and where my mother did a lot of her work, and there was a middle room, if you like, which was used for food and spending [sic].

And were there many other refugees in these, I think Holmefield Court and Gilling Court, which was on the corner I guess of Haverstock Hill and Belsize Grove?

Yes. I think the whole area had become – a very large number of foreigners came to that area, also because of the synagogue which was nearby and which therefore introduced an increasing number of people who originally spoke German and – but then by then had become more English.

This is Belsize Square Synagogue?

The whole – Belsize Square Synagogue.

Which was not far – by that point, moved into Belsize Square, in their vicarage, in that vicarage.

That's right, and therefore was having an increasing number of people joining it with an original German language as theirs, so that made a big difference for that area.

And did you go to the services there?

We went on a regular basis and of course made a lot of friends as a result as well because we got to know people in that area with a similar background to ours and with a similar knowledge and the whole atmosphere improved quite considerably. **[01:08:08]**

Do you remember who were your friends at Belsize Square or – because there couldn't have been that many children of your generation, I would assume, at Belsize Square Synagogue, because most of them would have been born probably after the war, you know. Or were there people like in your age in Belsize Square?

Miriam [third person].

Yeah, I mean there were a few and those were friends with whom we spent time together as well, although obviously a question [sic] then depended on your age, but quite a lot of those we're still in touch with even now, at this stage, and we're still involved with the same beginners now, as we did in those days. So that it's gone on for many more years afterwards.

So that was important for you and for your parents?

Very important because it meant at that time we had no relatives living who we knew and so most of our friends were those that we met through these ways.

Can you remember any of the names, other refugees who lived in Holmefield Court or Gilling Court, or any other friends from Belsize Square Synagogue?

I'm finding that difficult at the moment, although I do know that [clears throat] quite a number of them or the children of those at the time [sic] are still members of Belsize Square

Synagogue and so there you made friends and those friends are still around, although obviously ages have changed quite considerably.

Yeah [laughs]. For example, I know that Belsize Square, there was a youth club called The Phoenix. Did you go to that?

Well, Phoenix was a group where the youngsters used to meet together and we continued with them as well. [01:10:00] And that continued right through for many years, although at the time originally we were perhaps a little bit younger than the majority of the group that made that- group, but even now we can still meet people that we saw many years ago, some—

[Inaudible]. [third person]

Yes, probably. It's seventy or eighty years ago, so it is all taken, and when one's living ninety years later with friends that were made many, many years ago.

Because I think somebody like Henry Kuttner but he is probably – he was a bit younger. Was he older or younger? Henry Kuttner.

No, Henry Kuttner was slightly older and is no longer alive. But certainly, quite a number of the people one got to know at that time are no longer alive. We were among the youngest who joined that particular group. And one can still remember names from those times.

Hmm, yeah. That's amazing. So from that time you went and your parents went as well. And what about your bar mitzvah? Were you bar mitzved in Belsize Square?

Yes, and of course, Belsize Square had an increasing number of people who were of German-speaking original and therefore, that changed after many years into English. But at the time quite a lot of the [inaudible], the daily was in German. So I still remember our own thirteen – when we were thirteen years old, becoming *bar mitzvahed*, and we made a group of people for *bar mitzvah* together and also had a celebration with others who all are roughly our sort of background. [01:12:00]

So tell us a bit, what do you remember of the bar mitzvah? Who was your teacher there, for example, do you remember? Who taught you? Was it the rabbi himself, Salzberger or –

Well, Rabbi Salzberger was the main one who taught a lot, not only in the synagogue itself but even in his own home. We would go on a fairly regular basis because in those days people in our sort of age were small numbers and we were given a lot of extra help and work in those days to undertake what was needed.

And where – did he live in – where did Salzberger live in?

In – near Swiss Cottage. And we used to go there and in his own home and take extra lessons in his- where he lived.

In German?

In German as well, because a lot of the work was still done in German because the group we lived in and spent time with at that time were of a similar background.

So how many children were there in that bar mitzvah group? Or you said there was a group of people.

Oh, only a small group. A very small group indeed.

Because which year was your bar mitzvah? Which year? Let's say, thirteen –

I was thirteen years old, having been –

'46?

So it would be about 194 –

'46?

'46 would be about right.

So just after the war?

Yes, and so it was still recovering from the war because the war had only just finished.

And was there a celebration afterwards? Was there –

We did, and we had a big party for the two of us where we invited the local group to dinner in the evening, I remember. And that was something quite unusual in those days because they couldn't do so much, there was still a shortage of food.

So where did you go for dinner there? Where? [01:14:00]

We went to the- there was a small area where people used to eat with – where we had our synagogue and on the- down below they had a whole area which was a restaurant down below the – in the main area.

Where was that?

In- near Swiss Cottage.

Was it near the Finchley Road where there was the Cosmo and the other coffee shops, the refugee coffee shops?

Very close to all that area. And then we had a dinner for the people we knew and friends all together, we made a special dinner to celebrate our – having our bar mitzvah.

So it was a memorable occasion for you.

A memorable occasion and we still have a photograph which shows us how we all enjoyed that together.

But probably also difficult for your parents, just after the war and by that time they must have known what happened to their family, to their parents.

All that by then of course, yes, it was after the war and we knew that many of our own family no longer survived but on the other hand, we were making a greater number of friends within the area itself, all with a similar background, so life was beginning to look very much more active and enjoyable within Berlin at that – within where we were living at that time.

But where was the actual – in '46, where did the synagogue meet? Was it at St John's – it wasn't at – it wasn't in Belsize Square at that time, in '46? So your actual bar mitzvah, was it in a room in the St John's Wood Synagogue? Yeah? In the Liberal Synagogue of St John's Wood? Was it in a special –

Yes, the actual service itself was there.

So your – that bar mitzvah was there? [01:16:00]

It was there but then Swiss Cottage became the main area for that particular- and at the time quite a lot of German-speaking group would meet there as the main area where we had our regular services at the weekend.

And do you remember, did your parents ever go to the Cosmo or Dorice or one – the Finchley Road – did they go?

Yes, we did go to areas within that area but it was all quite expensive, so in the early days I remember our parents didn't have very much available in terms of easy cash but we did do things, what we could but –

What things did you do? What do you remember?

Well, even going on holidays, for example, the very first ones we had to – had to be fairly relatively cheap ones, like staying somewhere near where we could go- but not too close to the area where we could go swimming because those were more- classes that were too expensive. So we'd go to a class that – or a place that was available where we could spend weekends or a week or two every year to swim somewhere locally, which was not too expensive. We had to be very careful what we could spend.

Yeah. What about going to the cinema and things like that?

We did go regularly to the cinema and in fact by then we were old enough to go on our own and there are quite a number of occasions where both Peter and I would go on our own to the cinema [laughs] on Saturdays and Sundays, which I think was an opportunity better for our parents also to be available to be on their own on Saturday and Sundays. **[01:18:08]**

What did you watch? Do you remember some of the films you watched together?

Well, we did both involve the sort of cinemas which were fun and we normally we visited one place only but there were even occasions where there were two main places near us in that area and we sometimes would even go to two different programmes all in one afternoon.

So Odeon. Odeon Swiss Cottage probably. Odeon or –

No, it was in Camden Town we –

Oh, in Camden Town.

Yes. And we would go to different cinemas sometimes. Obviously we were still at an age where you had to be – certain time to be allowed in and quite often both Peter and I would wait outside and ask people to take us in where necessary because some of the cinemas that were being shown were not made to anyone unless they were at a certain age, unless accompanied. And we would ask people we didn't even know [laughs] to take us in and look

after us while we were accompanied in to those shows. Also it gave our parents a chance to be on their own.

Yeah. Because George, what I was going to ask you, because I read also that let's say, on Yom Kippur some of the services were, let's say, in the Odeon in Swiss Cottage, Belsize Square. Do you remember that? The big Yom Kippur services. Or even in – I read they were also in the theatre, you know, in Swiss Cottage.

Yes, I mean that wasn't even big enough, so [inaudible] would sometimes take larger areas just for the main synagogue every year and I still remember that as well because we –

The cinema? In the cinema? Or where? Where would they take? What –

Well, different areas, yes. **[01:20:00]** But even theatres.

So there were so many people?

Because the numbers were quite high for the – for those particular special services. But otherwise, one would just go locally.

Quite extraordinary that there were so many people on High Holidays.

Yes. And it still happens now, but where numbers who go on the main holidays is very much more than the people who go on an average every weekend.

And was the cantor Magnus Davdison when you were – at that time?

He was one of the main ones and well-known for many, many years and made a big difference. And a lot of – and to begin with anyway, a lot of the services were in German as well.

Yeah. And did you know him from Berlin, this Magnus Davidson, your father – your parents, for example?

Yes, oh, yes. And I think they remembered him from those days and nearly everyone who first joined were quite happy for the services to be in German on a regular basis until it reached the stage where English became popular.

Well, it gave a certain continuity for the refugees. It must have been very important.

It was very important indeed. Exactly.

George, I'm going to ask you, at that early time do you think that being together, being twins and having this similar experience, did it help you to adapt to life in England?

Well, I think that where we were together, people seeing the two of us, seeing how much we were alike and having that special atmosphere between us, made a very big difference because whereas if you're on your – an individual, you're not taken over as quickly as when you're one of a couple. And people who saw us, saw that we looked alike, saw that how similar we were in every way, we became well-known and made friends in very large areas wherever we went because it certainly shows from photographs that were taken at the time, that we were very popular as a result. [01:22:22]

So did you all have similar friends? So, you stayed together? You didn't do your own thing?

Oh, no, we did everything together, and this included right [sic] more or less during the time of the war for us to start doing tap dancing.

Yeah, tell us about the tap dancing.

[Laughs] And therefore we would go on a regular basis on a Saturday morning to have tap dancing and learning how to sing and dance together. And one of things that we always enjoyed, doing our acts together. And so we enjoyed it so much that even though we were

very young when they saw that we were doing this, we were soon asked whether there was some way we could be active. And even at the age of about eight or nine years old, we were asked whether we could do some songs and a few shows together at weekends, particularly one organisation that was doing shows for those who come from abroad in – mainly in German still in those days, and asked whether we could also do our dances and contact those particular occasions on a regular basis and be shown as part of the – every weekend. And our parents were quite happy to allow that and to do what was necessary. So both Peter and I, even quite young age, were on a regular basis doing active dancing and singing on – for people of all – at that time from the age of quite young. [01:24:11]

And you acted in some films? [third person]

We – yes, we also as a result of that we were also given some opportunities to take part in films and so on.

Oh, as child actors? Child actors. Oh, what sort of films?

Well, less of that than – we did some but also individually when they wanted someone to do something. Sometimes they would ask Peter, sometimes they would ask me to do an individual as well.

Because they could replace you, so that was quite clever.

Oh, no, no.

In a way they could use both of you for one role.

[Both laugh] Yeah.

What films? Have you got any names of the films or titles? Do you remember any?

Not immediately. I –

You dubbed one in France, a French film. It was – I can't remember the name. [third person]

And did you perform already in Germany? Or was it only – did you only start this in England?

Oh, no, there – but of course there were some German-speaking shows that were being put on, two in particular. But of those, one of those found that we were able to do our own shows and asked us to become members on a regular basis, so that we found – soon found that for about three occasions on a Saturday and Sunday we were asked to take part in the- in shows.

This was still during the war?

No, afterwards as well. Oh, no, quite – for quite a long time. We were then – go in and do dancing and singing on behalf of the show itself, usually in – around Swiss Cottage.

So was it some of the refugee organisations, for example –

These were mainly – mainly refugee or certainly Jewish organisations, they were being put on, on the – in Swiss Cottage itself. [01:26:12] And we would probably put on those performances about twice if not three times every weekend.

And what sort of songs did you perform? Also, some in German?

Oh, yes, some were in German, some in English.

So do you remember some of the German, for example, songs or what was it?

Well, yes, but the other thing about that, not only the words but Peter and I would go on a regular basis now on Saturday for tap dancing.

Lessons?

And lessons. And we were – therefore when we were giving shows, we were not only singing together but we were also dancing together and we became actively quite well-known.

Underneath the Arches. [third person]

Underneath the Arches.

Yes, well, that was once [sings] underneath the arches, [hums] [sings] underneath the arches, whenever we could [inaudible]. So we would go together and we would do everything exactly at the same time together, exactly the same way and we were quite actively known. People enjoyed listening to us doing these shows together.

So your parents encouraged you to do this? I mean they were –

Yes, but we didn't only need their encouragement, we enjoyed it ourselves, so that on every Saturday we would go and do our – and have our lessons and do our practice for those shows.

Because I'm thinking, you know, I know that during the war the, for example, the synagogue had these meetings with concerts because obviously people couldn't afford any entertainment, so you must have – it must have been a wonderful thing for the refugees to see because, you know, they –

It was, and –

Children performing. [01:28:08]

That's right, and therefore we could quite enjoy the- performing in public. And we did this not only there, I mean we even did some public showing while at- for example, when we were together in the army for two years and at – also at college, and we did Pembroke- at Pembroke College in Oxford when we went for our academic work. We would also do shows together and show ourselves together on that side, being able to do things which frankly we

are still able to do sometimes and have done very recently. So that- performances, the two of us, seeing the two of us together, still works out as something that people enjoy seeing and watching us.

And was that something – was there music in the family, from your mother's and father's side? Was there any music or musical performance or – where did this come from?

Not really so much from the family. It was just that we both enjoyed it, we were enjoined [ph] and were encouraged by the mother in particular but both parents, and we have ever done ever since. So even recently, for example, we've –

On your ninetieth birthday. [third person]

On our ninetieth birthday we did a show together and [laughs] –

For the family. [third person]

For the family, which they still enjoyed. And –

They insisted on. [third person]

They asked for it?

That's right, so you put Peter and I together, for example, we could put ourselves together tomorrow and perform for you and I think you would quite enjoy it because even as twins we are still performing very well together. **[01:30:04]**

So what's your repertoire? You have a big repertoire of songs or –

Well, not only songs but also, we did tap dancing and so we even got our voices as tap-qualified tap dancers but nowadays we would only put on songs. And I think both Peter and I, if we choose a song which we both remember, can perform to you and it's almost as if we've

been performing all these years. And even now at this stage, you wouldn't see all that much difference between the two of us.

That is wonderful. But mostly in English or – you said there were some German songs as well.

Ah, I think we would only do it in English now. Yeah.

Do you remember any of the German songs at all?

Might probably remember the – in – but that wouldn't be the sort of thing we would want to show any more.

No.

Maybe remember the mum singing and [inaudible]. [third person]

And I mean once when the two of us were together in Berlin, for example, doing some work in English mainly, whatever we did, we would do in English as well. So, we have done demonstrations of our English together in a German atmosphere.

But you didn't want to professionally pursue this, the performance and singing and dancing? Did you want to pursue a career?

Not professionally, no, because it's – at one time we were asked whether – would we like to do that professionally, even before we went to university but both Peter and I felt that academic was much more important than anything else, so that doing anything of that kind, studio work between us would just be an extra for us rather than anything important. But we still enjoy it and where there are opportunities for us to do something together, we will perform it. **[01:32:05]** We have done quite recently, and still do it equally in the present at the moment, nowhere quite as the standard as we used to be physically but here, we are in our

nineties [laughs] and can still perform for you and believe it or not, you could still – we could still look alike [laughs].

Yeah. Well, it's very inspirational. But what I was going to ask you, do you think if you hadn't been refugees, so let's say if you hadn't been forced to leave Germany, do you think there would have been a chance that you would have pursued your – that sort of career in Germany? Do you see what I mean? Being refugees obviously makes it much more difficult to pursue something like that. But do you think had you stayed in Germany you would have maybe chosen that as a profession?

I don't think we would either of us ever wanted to have chosen it as a profession. That I'm quite certain. I think we both quite enjoy as an extra. Now, if that extra had been offered to us in Germany, we probably would have done it. I mean we both have done German – have done it in Germany at the moment when we were requested to do among the Germans and have performed it without any doubt at all. But certainly we both enjoy doing it as an extra but not the most important thing in our lives.

Yeah. Just coming back now to your school time in the Hall. So, did you perform there as well, in the school?

When our – yes, I'm just trying to think now. We have done where there were opportunities, for example, to do something together, then we would do. [01:34:00] For example, if the school were putting on some signs of what extra can be done in the way of playing instruments or whatever, doing something which shows what you – we can do in your – as an extra, where we were asked whether we would show some dancing together and it seemed an opportunity, we would allow that and we did enjoy that. But it would always be an extra rather than the most important thing in our lives.

And George, do you remember being naturalised? When did you get your British citizenship? Is that something you remember?

Oh, yes, at – it was, er, we both felt very proud to be English and it's something that we always wanted. I think that the fact that our original- went to Germany is something we always took from- something which we never mentioned. In other words, we always look at ourselves as English. If in fact the fact that we spent our first six years in Germany is only brought up if needed but we certainly don't go and bring it as an active matter in our lives because it's not something we're particularly proud of.

So in the school, for example, you didn't talk about it?

If possible, we'd try to avoid the knowledge and we'd much rather run over as English in every way. And that's why, when for example, we were asked to do National Service for two years, both Peter and I were very pleased because one thing that we wanted to do was to be English, whereas we know there are a lot of people who were pushed into their National Service, disliked it or were annoyed about it. We, on the other hand, just felt very pleased. [01:36:00] Look, here we are, we are English. And then we were dressed in uniform we were pleased. On two occasions we were given additional positions within the army, each of us was improved and impressed on the same day as twins, so we were pleased. So, that even in the army, in our uniform, we were both given additional positions within the army on the same day, so that even in the army, we always looked exactly alike.

Yeah. So, you even had the same rank.

Same improvement and same ranks, improved on each day. And they could never tell the difference.

Well, that would pose some difficulties in the army [laughs] I assume if nobody knows who you are.

[Both laugh] Well –

Which one of you –

Yes, but I mean each of us had – we were given different situations and difficult jobs at – one at different times. But we were always stationed together. For example, we were stationed together in Egypt. We had two years in the army and part of it was in Egypt and partly in–

Malta? [third person]

Pardon?

Malta?

In Malta, in – yes, in Malta itself. And each year, improvement we had in our position was also on the same day, so they always kept us very much alike in the way we looked [laughs] but we each had our own jobs. I had one job in the- mainly in- Passover... Sorry about that. I was in- I get this right and wrong... [01:38:00] Sorry, I got a bit out of breath there. Passover. You know, it – in Malta. In Malta, in Pesach, in, what's the English word? What's the English word?

For what?

[Laughs] I can't remember. [third person]

In the – we were stationed – our station for about over a year in Malta. And when we were stationed in Malta, for example, yeah.

Oh, I know. Computers. You were in computers. [third person]

Signals? [another person]

Computers. [third person]

Computer. Signals? Computers?

No, Seamus [inaudible]. [third person]

Well, I was in headquarters of- of Passover in Malta. And I had one job and Peter had a different job, so we were – but we were both kept to the same level and we were both – I was a lance corporal and a corporal on the same days within the British Army.

Okay. Just before – talking about the army, George, I was going to ask you, you said you didn't mention that you were from Germany. At that point was that something to be slightly ashamed of or did you feel as – or you just found that it was private information?

Absolute – we would only need it if required. So certainly, we both never would have given out information that we were originally born in Germany. And we always wanted to be approved as fully English. But then we were only six years old when we came to England.

And I read here in biography that where you performed this, it was actually the Blue Danube Club.

Hmm.

Yeah? The Blue Danube. And that was on the Finchley Road, wasn't it?

Yes, but that was put on by people who had a German background and we were certainly – they, realising that we can do things, we were asked to perform as well in those sort of details. [01:40:08] And some of that we would perform in German as well, in German, as, you know, the – because that was fun.

And when did you change your name from Sommerfeld, Sommerfeld, to Summerfield?

Well, that was I think partly a path –

1948. [third person]

Our parents started that.

1948? [third person]

About yes, 1948.

So, when you received your British papers, was it already with the name Summerfield?

Oh, absolutely, yes.

And you didn't tell us from the Hall School, what happened then? What did you do for your secondary school?

Could you ask that question again?

When you went from the Hall School, which was a primary school, where did you go for secondary school?

Oh, well, there we got- we took in and we got entrance to William Ellis, which is a secondary school, and we both took our exams there and we both got in. But they put both of us into the same class and in fact, right through our time within, we stayed in the same classes. So although they could have easily, you know, within one year could have put into different classes, we were always together. And academically we were very close to each other. I think that Peter was, if anything, always performed very slightly better academically than I did, whereas I always performed slightly better physically.

In the sports?

In sport and other areas. But otherwise, not a good deal of difference. So we both did- finished up with A-levels and we both had very similar records and the same again when going on to university. [01:42:06]

And what did you want to do when you finished school? Did you discuss it amongst yourselves?

Well, first of all, we knew that we would have to do some time in the army and both Peter and I were quite proud to be- memories of the army and Peter probably mentioned it as well. We were quite happy to go into the army for two years before going on to do the postgraduate. So, we went first from nineteen to twenty-one, we were in the army and then from twenty-one to twenty-four we both did our – went to Pembroke, Oxford and –

And to – you went up together?

We did, together.

And you read...?

We read the same subject.

Jurisprudence. Both of you?

Yes, and both got the same class of level. Although Peter I think found academically easier, whereas I've always found relationships a little bit easier.

So that's quite amazing. All your schooling and everything, even in university, you stayed together. And the National Service.

Yes, that's right. And it was really only after that that we changed. Now, when Peter went and did his postgraduate to become, er –

Solicitor [third person]

Pardon?

Solicitor [third person]

A solicitor, yes, and carry on with his background of law, I decided to change and move right away from that. And I went into work, just deliberately I think because I wanted to do something different.

So, you didn't want to be a solicitor? [01:44:00] You –

I think if Peter hadn't, and I hadn't had a brother, then I might have done that. But I think in those circumstances I thought, well, if Peter's going to do more academic work, I'm going to do something and I got a job as a – immediately to use my –

In the tourist industry for – [third person]

In the tourist – but to use the fact that I had two languages.

German and English.

English. And also, as it happened, my background in French is very high, as I did A-level French as well.

You worked in the tourism industry?

Yes.

Tourism. And then from there, what did you do, from tourism?

You were in business. [third person]

You started your own business?

I did quite a lot of work which involved also my language but then I decided I must do something different on my own and I started my own organisation. Now, in, er –

Personal. [third person]

Personal work within the West End itself. I started a firm.

Career. [third person]

Career analysts. Because my intention then was to see people and help them in the development of their own career. And that's what I started in Belsize Square.

No, Grosvenor. [third person]

Grosvenor Square?

In –

No, Gloucester. [third person]

Gloucester Square.

Gloucester Square, where I began to help people in which career to move towards. I gave career guidance as the main interest. I got background itself, help in how to do this, together with another person with whom I joined, and together we started this organisation on career guidance. [01:46:10]

And you did some psychology. You did a psychology diploma.

And that meant doing more psychology and understanding and doing assessments of people and helping them in their career guidance.

So that's quite different. What gave you the idea in a way to move from the jurisprudence to – that's quite people – person-related, isn't it, to talk to people and find out what they want to do.

Hmm, but that's – yeah, but that- I was certainly attracted to that and felt that was something that needs to be done and I could help, and that's when I started the whole business of seeing people and asking – and giving them advice. [Coughs] Excuse me.

And did you employ? Were there other people employed? Other psychologists or was it like a small organisation?

No, I made friends with Joshua Fox who became my partner and the two of us between us set this up together and I took more assessments as well and as a [ph] studying in this field so that the two of us could start an organisation giving people career advice.

And you built it up to how many consultants? [third person]

How many consultants did you have?

Towards the end we had ten, was it? Yes, we had – I built it up from myself until – and I had my own second one, you know, with whom I started. But at the end we had about eight career consultants giving people advice in the West End, where they would come in and we would give them assessments and then so as a result of their assessments we would then give them advice on their careers. **[01:48:01]** So we built up quite a big business in fact. So we were – had a whole large building there with about –

Four storeys? [third person]

Four storeys and people who had been taking assessments and then giving advice and help and individually being seen. So, I built up a whole lot of about six of us who were giving advice on careers.

And did you enjoy it?

Very much so. And it was also financially quite good.

And George, in that time what I was going to ask you, did your parents after the war go back to Berlin? Or when did you go back as well, first time?

Oh, I didn't want to really to go back to Berlin necessarily but on the other hand, only of interest but there was one occasion where we went together and as it happened, they were just starting more information about the background and both Peter and I were involved on that. And we had one evening, didn't we, where one day where we were—

But I think your parents were invited by the Berlin – [third person]

Your parents, were they invited by the city of Berlin?

Oh, we had, yes. I mean there were two occasions, more than other occasions where they invited us to come back and give a talk as well to German students at the time about the background and so on. And that's one – one thing. But on the other hand, there was also the point where you say quite like – quite an interest in what we were doing about the work we were doing in England.

And what were your parents' feelings about Germany after the war? How did they...

If you're asking about our parents? [01:50:04]

Yes, about your parents and then about you. But how did they – did they go back in the '40s and the '50s?

They were invited back by – as official reasons to- in view of what had happened, so they did

—

Yeah, probably a bit later.

The German expression? [third person]

They were invited back to Berlin and so on and they did make – and they took advantage of that and did go back.

What about reparation? Wiedergutmachung. Did they receive any?

They did, but very, very small amounts. We're not talk – I don't think it was anything really very relative to that. But on the other hand, they- but nor would they be particularly interested in going back to Germany as such but they did get invited back and they did take up that.

Yeah. And you, George, when was the first time you went back to Berlin?

I'm trying to think about that and I'm not certain now.

Was it when the Jewish Museum opened or was it an earlier time?

I think the first time was with Peter, wasn't it?

You went with Giselle and – you were invited by the Berlin government [overtalking]. [third person]

Yeah, at the same time as Peter was I think. We were just given an invitation because of our background.

So in the '80s or something like that? The '80s?

It would have been about then, yes. Yes.

And what was it like when you came to Berlin? Can you – could you recognise anything?

Did you –

Yes and apart from anything else, where we were actually accommodated because the actual place on the ground floor that we used to live in was still there. You couldn't get in because it was not being used by anyone so it was closed. [01:52:01] But we went and saw the people above and spoke to them as well and saw what sort of accommodation we had and we have – I have been back to Berlin on a number of occasions now but it's not a thing that I particularly enjoy. I – I'll go back to Berlin because I originally was born there but that's as much as I am prepared to do. I think my brother, Peter, has a different view here because he quite likes going back to Berlin and spending time there, whereas I've always thought whenever I go back, I'll only go because I need to or have a reason to go. But I don't go as relatively as Peter, who seems to quite – will partake with any possibility when if asked to go back and deal with, er –

You're not looking for it?

Hmm.

And what did you feel, do you remember? What did you feel when you came and saw your old flat?

Um- I only thought that I will do it because I've been asked to but I never felt positive about it. So, you know, it was one of those things you do because it's been invited but no more than that. I think my brother's view is a bit different here.

You'd rather not?

I'd rather not. But I – I, even now if, for example, it's important for one of us to be represented there and because I know that Peter is at the moment having more physical problems than I have, and if there is a point where they're going to ask someone to represent, either Peter or I, and Peter can't do it then I will do it because I think it needs to be done. In

fact that's going to happen, a possibility that at the end of the year, December, that one of us might want to go back and if Peter won't be good enough to do it, and I might do it then for him rather than that he can go. [01:54:07] But if there were a choice, I would rather Peter did it.

I understand, George. And why do you think is that? Because you are so similar in so many ways but in that way you're different.

I think he used more German as well in his work because he became a lawyer in different – in German.

In international law. [third person]

International. And also used more German than I did. But I think it's just the way we both have felt since. But I will – I will help out if Peter can't. But I – but if it's a question of either of us going and Peter seems to enjoy going into Berlin again, I don't. Whenever I go to Berlin, I always feel it's something that I'm doing it for reasons necessary from the past rather than it's something I want to do.

And you don't feel you go there and you feel it's a home or –

I don't feel that, whereas Peter somehow seems to find it more agreeable to him.

And what do you think about this issue, because it's slightly linked to it, of German citizenship now which is offered to I guess first-generation, second-generation, third-generations? You know, the passport, that people can now get a German passport. Do you have a view on this or –

No. I mean if, for example, any of my family would find it useful, I would agree to it. But I wouldn't go – I wouldn't look at it positive unless it were really necessary.

You wouldn't apply for a German passport?

I wouldn't. But on the other hand, it became necessary for me to take a passport for Berlin because of what I needed at the time, so I took it, but not because I wanted to but because it was necessary. [01:56:11] Whereas Peter I think is much more prepared to think of it as something positive.

So similar, for example, you don't feel a need to speak to German children or about your experiences?

Not necessarily. I wouldn't overdo it for Peter either. I think Peter's a little – little bit different and that he's not – there's not a vast difference between us but there's a small difference.

Yeah. And how would you – how do you feel in terms of your identity today, George? How would you describe yourself?

Um, well, I like to think of myself as fully English. And the fact that, you know, six years were in Berlin and so on, I would never talk about or need or demonstrate unless it really is essential. I like to think of myself as fully English in every way. And that is what I would really like.

And where do you feel is your home? Your home.

Oh, England. London, or England at any time. I would never feel in any way that I have a relationship with Germany any more. I think Peter has a slightly different attitude here.

And what about your Jewish identity, George? How important is that?

It's important. I'm not a very religious person. I find that I – religion for me is not the most important thing in life. [01:58:02] But I think when it comes to the important times I will always accept what my background is. But I'm not particularly religious nor do I spend too much time on religion. But I quite enjoy and feel it's important to have Fridays as something which is basically – Friday evening in particular, even more so than Scotland – sorry, than

Saturday. Friday night is more important to me because quite often things happen on a Friday night. For example, this Friday both Marion and I are invited to go and have dinner with Peter and his wife. We –

Is that something you do quite often?

Quite often. But I think that Friday and Saturday –

We have family here more often. [third person]

But a lot depends on how Marion feels on this because I think that we have to agree this and I think you would agree with me that we feel similar, that it's how [overtalking].

We feel that Shabbat is Shabbat and Friday night is family night and that it's a very important continuity with the religion. [third person]

But otherwise- [overtalking].

But otherwise, I agree with you [laughs]. [third person]

So, in that case, what do you think for you is the most important thing from your, let's say, Continental background, for you?

Only in a sense that in view of what happened it probably gives me a broader view on the whole of anyone living in England. In other words, if – I can't completely eradicate my background or the thought that that gives me. [02:00:00] I don't think it's the most important thing in my life but I think it's something that does have an influence on me in the past and is not something that I'm going to completely eradicate at the moment. But I don't think it does very much difference to my way of thinking. But for example, if it needs either Peter or I to represent and go to Berlin now in view of what happened in the past, for any particular reason and Peter can't do it, I have actually said, well, then I'm prepared to consider it as well. So,

I'm – it still means it's important to me and my background but it's not the most important of all.

And how do you think – has your experience of being a child refugee shaped your later life? Your whole life? Your choices.

I think I was too young to make it a vital thing in my background. I was – after all, I was only six years therefore I look at my background as entirely British, particularly having been in the army and everything else and – but I don't completely ignore it entirely but I don't think it's the most important thing in my life.

Did you talk about the past, for example, to your children? Was that –

Um, I've spoken to them. Both my children are not born by me but brought in, so they –

Adopted?

Adopted, and so they all know the background, so I think they probably accept as well that I'm British in every sense 'cos all that's they – all they've ever known. [02:02:00]

And what sort of identity did you want to give to your children?

Oh, similar to mine, but British.

And do you think for them, that your – the German Jewish past is important? Or for the grandchildren, for example?

They are interested. [third person]

Interested, but no more than that I don't think.

I think they find it fascinating that you had been born elsewhere, that you had come here with nothing, that you had built yourself up and become British. [third person]

Yes, well, their – my background is probably of real interest, yes.

And do you – sometimes do you think what would happen to you if you hadn't been forced to emigrate? If you had stayed in Berlin, if there wasn't a Hitler.

Well, that's difficult.

The interesting – can I... [third person]

That's a very difficult one to answer, I must admit. I don't think I would have felt all that different.

In terms of profession, do you think you – what –

Um, very difficult to think of oneself in that sense. I think that I would have also felt that I did something which was academic, that I had to get really a reasonably high academic qualification and so on but I don't know whether I would have been all that different.

[02:04:04] But I certainly don't value the fact that I happened to spend my six years in Germany. I'd rather think of it as here. So that for example, in- at college, at Oxford when I was studying there for three years I wouldn't go out and tell people, oh, you know, I was born in Berlin. It only came out much more recently because that was different. But I never felt proud of the fact that I – my original was basically German. So I look at myself entirely British in every sense that I can.

It's true. [third person]

But on the other hand, if needed I will admit it [laughs].

Yeah. That's interesting.

Is Peter the same?

George, I was going to come back to one issue because – about the person who gave you the money to take the ticket. Did your parents and – did – you said you kept in touch with them after the war.

Yes.

The house –

The caretaker. [third person]

The caretaker.

Yeah.

Can you tell us a little bit about that? And we'll talk about the BBC film as well. Did they keep in touch with the caretaker after the war?

Oh, yes, yes, because we felt – and in fact, you know, we did meet.

Online. [third person]

Yeah.

And what happened? There was a recent television programme. [02:06:02]

Yeah, where we were on one BBC channel One programme and he on the other. And then they took the two together. Yeah. I mean I feel very [sighs] –

Saved by a Stranger, yeah? That was the –

Yeah, yes.

And they were looking basically for the children, the two children who were your friends, of the caretaker.

That's right.

And who found them? Did – were you in touch with them or did the BBC find them or –

BBC. [third person]

Hmm.

So you gave them the details and then the BBC looked for them?

And the BBC found – hmm. But of course they –

They found German people who do that. [third person]

Hmm. But also, we got in touch with the address there that we had still because that is still standing there.

And was that like important for you to find –

The Germans actually were able to look in and then make the contact together.

And did – were you looking for them?

Yes.

Was it important for you?

Yes.

And who did the BBC find? Both of them?

Yes, and in fact, I think both Peter and I wouldn't have minded if we'd had an opportunity to go to – back to Berlin and to thank them for the help they gave us at the time and the relationship. It hasn't worked so far but had it done, we would have been – I think both Peter – we would have been quite pleased with that. I mean it's more likely now that I'm likely to go to Berlin than Peter because I'm in a – much better physically than Peter is.

And would you like to meet? I don't know, what are their names? Of the –

Well, there's only one person now, because his wife's died.

What is his name?

Um...

Rolf. [third person]

Rolf?

Rolf, Rolf.

Rolf Meier?

No. [third person]

No.

Rolf. The surname I don't know how to pronounce. I've forgotten. [third person]

I've got it somewhere but anyway, Rolf would like, you know, he would – he's older than I am. [02:08:00] So – and whether I have an opportunity to go there and meet him is another – and I think for me to go to Berlin for this alone and as the main reason is not [inaudible] there.

And does he remember you, Rolf?

Oh, yes. Yes.

And did he know what his father did for you?

Yes. Oh, yes. He knows all the background.

But did he know it before you approached him? Did he – was he aware of his father's help?

I think so. I get the impression he was.

Yes. [third person]

And what were his feelings about –

Particularly after the war probably rather than during the war itself because what he did was – would have been – within the Nazis would have been- put him into trouble. But once the war was over in the end he was able to give him some full details, yes, it would be known.

So maybe there is a chance that you will go to Berlin and meet him or –

There is a chance. But one's got to remember that I'm now ninety and although physically I seem to be quite good, I mean I can do much more than Peter, for example. Peter finds it difficult walking up and down. I have no problems at all. Nevertheless, I can't see myself at the moment doing that.

But the BBC, it was – they filmed you here and they filmed them there, so it was online. The meeting was online. Okay. So, it maybe we'll take you to Berlin. Right? If you're up for it. Anyway, anything else you'd like to add?

Just that Rolf's father died young. [third person]

Yeah. What happened to the caretaker?

The caretaker died young. And then the correspondence between Mother and caretaker – I can't remember his name – stopped because he died. [02:10:06] The children moved away from Berlin, so when George and Peter looked for them in the phone directory and things like that, they didn't exist. [third person]

Okay. I'll repeat it because of the mic. So the caretaker, your mother was in touch with the caretaker, by correspondence and then he died quite young, so that's why you didn't keep in touch.

Hmm.

So you didn't – you couldn't locate the two children.

Yeah.

Okay. George, is there anything else I haven't asked you which you would like to add? And obviously we have your brother's testimony as well, so hopefully in the future it will be really interesting because you're the only twins in our collection so far to, you know, compare the interviews and –

Just out of interest, how do you think our two reactions have acted?

[Laughs] I have to think about that. I can't give you a quick answer [both laugh]. Just one thing I haven't asked you actually was about the AJR. Did you join the AJR? Did your parents – were they aware of the AJR at the time?

Oh, yes.

Yeah?

Hmm.

Well, did they become members, your parents?

Yes, I think they did. But I mean I think if Peter and I, the many things that are similar with Peter and I really. I mean you've seen lots of – you haven't seen many twins.

[Both laugh] No.

And I'd be quite interested to know to what extent you feel about that.

Yeah, let me think about it and I need to watch the two interviews and then we can talk about it. But it's – it's very unusual.

Yes, but your Jewish background, it has always been important to you, hasn't it? [third person]

Your Jewish background was important.

Oh, yes, the Jewish background, but the – but the fact that it also has this Berlin and German background, you see, that's what I [inaudible] particularly interested in. [02:12:11]

I mean did you look – for example, did you look, you, did you look for contact with other refugees? Or was that less important? Other refugee children? You said in Belsize you were still friendly with Belsize Square Synagogue.

I think that mattered more to our – my parents than it did to me personally. I think I only became interested in people who were Jewish rather than that background.

And particular in the Liberal, Liberal synagogue or –

Hmm, but...I often think about Peter of course and how I compare with Peter but it's that I find difficult [laughs].

Yeah. But I think to me it's amazing and I think that's interesting, you know, from the refugee experience that you were together, that you could support each other in a way other people can't because, you know, they don't have twins.

No, no.

And that must have impacted how you experienced it and especially being so young, you know, and not knowing the language.

And we have each influenced the other quite a bit. I mean with – within, I think it's been a big advantage really.

But maybe – George, we haven't talked about it on camera, that you started talking to schoolchildren and then Peter took it on more.

Hmm.

Yeah? But you started it. You said you started talking.

Oh, yes, and – hmm. And they have – other alternatives have taken place where for – and I remember one occasion, for example, when we were together with these groups and I was talking to one group about the influence it had on me and Peter was talking to another group and then we discovered afterwards we talked that we'd done the same, exactly the same.

[02:14:07] In other words, it does show how similar we are still in – towards each other.

And how close you are.

Close. And it still exists. I mean- I'm having Friday – we did today, I don't think he even knows- whether he knows you're coming here today but this morning he rang up and said, can you, and the two of you come and have Friday with me, on Friday, for dinner. And I've just – and I said to Marion, dear, can we make it and I said yes, 'cos we have that relationship.

Yeah. But you wrote the – you wrote your memoir.

Hmm. And Peter always said one day he will do his, and never did.

And when – you wrote it about fifteen years ago? Or seventeen years ago.

Hmm, it must be, now.

And was it important for you to write everything down? What motivated you to do it?

Oh, I [inaudible]. A friend of mine, er –

[Inaudible]. [third person]

Yeah, who unfortunately is no longer alive but he once – you know, he was a good friend of mine and he once said to me, George, why don't you write your background and keep a record of what happened? And I thought to myself, well, that's a good idea and then on his –

and I think I meant it at the beginning, if you look at the actual opening, at the very front, don't I mention his name?

Yeah.

But he's no longer alive unfortunately. But there on the very page – very first page somewhere, it says his name.

So, he pushed you to do it, so you have – yeah.

He pushed me to do it, and I did it. And I said to Peter, I, you know, and he told – and he saw it and Peter said that he'll do it [laughs] and he never did. **[02:16:02]**

Okay. So, you did it for the both of you.

But as it happens, whatever I've written there, so much of it also applies to him, so he wouldn't have had to- and I don't think he disagrees with anything at – if he has disagreed, he hasn't told me [laughs].

And George, how, in terms of your – we didn't go much into that and we don't have to – in terms of your private lives, how similar or different do you feel were your lives post-war? I mean not – apart from professionally. Do you see similarities or –

I don't think I – it's difficult for me to answer that because I think that I know what my relief was being and I'm very pleased with that and particularly with Marion. I don't think I want to say more than that.

Okay, we're coming to the end. One other question I – when you started talking to schoolchildren, you, what was important for you to – what is your message? And that comes to [overtalking].

Oh, now we're talking about the German children or the English or who?

Well, both. Or do you have different messages for the German children to the English children? What is your message, based on your experiences?

You have choices. Choices in life. [third person]

Er, no, that's an awkward one to answer but it depends what relationships you're dealing with at the time with those children. [Overtalking].

Well, tell us now for anyone who might watch this interview, based on your experiences, what is the message you would give anyone? Is there a message?

Answer me – ask me that question again, would you? Would you mind? **[02:18:03]**

For anyone who would watch this interview, what we've just done, what would be your message? Based on your own life experiences, what would you like to tell a future generation?

A difficult one to answer. I find that very difficult. All I can say is that in my own situation here, a lot depends upon what has happened to me, so that when I look at my background it depends on so many things and that's why the whole thing is so complicated. For example, it just happens that I stayed in England. It could have been so easy for me to have also moved to America, then it would have been a completely different relationship again. So I think that when you look back on your background you've just got to say, well, you have to accept what's happened, a lot of what has happened during the past, that many things that you think might have happened never did happen. So, I think all you can say to yourself is, well, would you, if you had a chance now, would you have made those differences different? And when I look at my own background all I can say is that I think I've been lucky in many ways because first of all, the question of whether I should have gone to America, which was one of my original thoughts, well, it hasn't happened and I'm now so glad that I'm in England. The fact that when – already it's over thirty years ago – I found myself all of a sudden being completely on my own, the fact that I've now met Marion and we've had over thirty years,

such a wonderful relationship. Now, that's really what pleases me. So one does tend to think about particular episodes that happened. [02:20:01] Whether in fact when I was looking for somewhere to live I happened to see this particular property here and I think that it is an especially – rather nice because of its location. Again, I'm very lucky. When I think about everything that happened from starting off with nothing and that with the work that I've done and with the efforts I've made, I've been able to accumulate enough for myself to live in fairly reasonable comfortable and spacious organisations [sic]. And again I – all I can say is, well, I – it's what I wanted, I've worked hard in order to achieve it. It started off with nothing and I can at least say, well, you can be pleased with yourself that having done that on your own and not being given to you by others, you're very lucky because so many people have done quite well in life because they've been relieved by someone who's died. With me, that hasn't happened. My late wife died but she herself had no money of her own when I married her, my first wife, because she herself was hidden in Europe during the war. And when I married her, she had no money at all, nor any background, nor any family. So whatever's been done has been individually done. And I think in – that's something which is – occurs to me. So I think these are all things that you want to relate to when one is asked, as you have just now, so that at least it's not that one has what one has because you've been lucky to – by someone who's given it to you all, but at least you've done it of your own accord and that I think is very vital in many ways. [02:22:06] But I – it's something that I wouldn't normally say, [laughs] not normally speak of, not normally speak in this way but it just happens, you know, it does seem to me that at least starting off with accommodation in England, in London, where all of us had nothing, to accommodation – personally, whatever I had was always started with nothing. At least one feels well, you know, it's not as if someone has given it to you all and you've been left it. At least I feel that whatever I – has been achieved, you have worked for it and that work has been satisfactory. That's all I can say about my own position.

George, thank you very, very much. I think that is a very moving end to our interview. Is there anything else you'd like to add which I haven't asked you or we haven't mentioned?

No, except to thank you for the interest you have shown, the way you've shown your interest in us as well, because I think it's important to me as well in talking to you, to feel that – how well it's come to you as well, and then to your background and to what you've talked about

yourself. So, I think, you know, it works both ways and I think it's been a satisfactory background which I'm very grateful for.

Thank you, George. Thank you very, very much for this interview.

[Break in the recording 02:23:44 - 02:24:31]

Marion: I'm not quite sure what I'm supposed to –

Thank you for joining us, Marion. Now, we can see you. We heard your voice before. Marion, I just wonder, you've listened to George's story, you know the story but you've listened today. Would you like to say something or add something or –

Marion: Well, I think I'd like to just add one thing particularly at the end, when you asked George what does he think. Well, I think that his life story is very inspiring. I think that I really admired him when he did all the talks that he did at Belsize Square Synagogue on Holocaust education. The children – for me, to see the effect on the schoolchildren who came to listen to his story was tremendous. Really tremendous. The teachers who brought the children to the school were really in awe that these – this man had come as a six-year-old with nothing and that he'd had the wherewithal inside of him to build up a career as he said without father and mother giving you things but what they gave was so important. What they gave was better than money. They gave the whole structure, the thoughtfulness, and the desire. And the desire has been very strong in Peter and in George to make something of their lives as well as being grateful to the British government for having taken them in and I think that is also important. **[02:26:07]** But when they hear – when the schoolchildren heard that they'd come with nothing and the whole story of getting out just in time from Europe, that they were able to go Oxford University, because they put the work in and got there and then became successful people and had families and nice houses, it's very inspiring. And they said so, and that was so many comments that said it was inspiring. So I think he's given back to society quite a lot and for that I'm proud of you.

Thank you, Marion. George, anything you want to say to Marion or anything else? [Both laugh] Sorry to put you on the spot.

No, but –

Marion: Really putting me on the spot, yes [laughs]. But he's a – he is a kind, generous, loving human being and I'm very grateful.

And all I can say is I'm very lucky to have such a wonderful relationship.

You make me cry now. Thank you [both laugh].

Yeah, I am really lucky, as you can probably see.

Thank you. One second, stay where you are. I'm going to take your photo. Yes, please, George. Who do we see on this photo?

Berlin, 1933, with parents.

And you're in the pram? Yes, please? What do we see here? [02:28:00]

With parents, and swastikas in the background.

I think with your dad? Yeah? Your dad is in the middle?

Oh, sorry. Sorry, say again?

No, it's fine. Yes, please.

Celebrate with sweets for school commence.

And where are you on this picture?

Right is on the George [sic].

Yes, please. George?

Eastbourne, 1941.

And where are you- left or right?

On the right.

Thank you.

George on the left.

And what is the review? Or what is it? It says 'By candlelight'. By candlelight, 1941?

By candlelight, 1941.

Thank you.

Yes, please.

1941, not quite right the way it's put in because we didn't know how to.

The cap, you mean? And it's the first day on the Hall School.

Shall I – I'll do it again, can I?

No, it's fine.

Is it – will that do?

Yes, please.

George in the background with the bumped [sic] part in the background.

And you're on the right?

I am on the right.

And it's in Holmefield Court in Belsize Park?

It's of the Hall School, Peter on the right.

Yes, please. Bournemouth? This is a picture of Bournemouth? With your parents?

[02:30:00]

This is a picture of Bournemouth with our parents.

You're aged eighteen?

Aged eighteen.

And where are you? On there? The right?

George on the right.

Thank you.

With Peter and George, Peter on the right-hand side.

And what was the occasion?

The occasion was end of National Service in 1954.

Picture showing National University Service, Peter and George.

At Oxford?

At Oxford University. Married to Giselle Summerfield, on first marriage, 18th of September 1960.

And where was it? Where was this, George? In London?

London.

Yes?

Married 1993, with children.

To whom? And this is your marriage with Marion? Yes?

Marriage with Marion.

Thank you.

Showing the two of us and I am on the left.

And what was the occasion, George? Is it your ninetieth birthday?

Ninetieth birthday occasion.

Just a few months ago?

A few months ago.

Okay. What a lovely photo. George, I'd like to say thank you so much again for sharing your story with us and showing us your photos and everything will now go into the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. [02:32:06]

So you've got everything you need?

We have everything we need and we also have your brother's story.

Okay.

So thank you so much.

You're very welcome.

[02:32:20]

[End of transcript]