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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

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<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Willer
<b>Forename:</b>	Paul
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Male
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<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
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## REFUGEE VOICES

**Interview No.** RV215  
**NAME:** HP Willer  
**DATE:** 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018  
**LOCATION:** South Cerney, Gloucestershire  
**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

**[Part One]**

**[0:00:00]**

*We are conducting an interview with Mr. Hans Paul Willer. My name is Ben Lewkowicz and we are in South Cerney, Gloucestershire, and today is the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2018.*

*Can you please tell me your name?*

Hans Paul Willer.

*And when were you born?*

8<sup>th</sup> of May 1928.

*And where were you born?*

Würzburg, Germany.

*Thank you very much Mr. Willer. Thank you for sharing your story today with the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. Can you please tell me something about your family background?*

My mother, who was born in Strasbourg, lived in Würzburg with her husband Johannes. And she was living there from 1927 until just before the outbreak of war – 1939.

*And can tell us a little bit about your parents' backgrounds and...?*

My mother was medically trained and my father was a... doctor, pathologist.

*And did they meet in a hospital or did they work together or how...?*

I think they worked together but I don't know much about their meeting.

*And when did they get married?*

1927.

*Yeah. And you said your mother was born in Strasbourg...*

Yes.

*So, when- when did she come to Germany?*

I would say about 1923.

*And did she come by herself, or with her parents...?*

She came with her parents.

*Yes. And they settled...?*

They settled...?

*Where did they settle?*

In Würzburg.

*So, they moved from Strasbourg to Würzburg.*

Yes. It wasn't at that time... suitable or fashionable to be German in Strasbourg.

*Right...*

Because Strasbourg has been either French or German depending on who won the last war.

[00:02:32]

*Yeah. So, what did the- what did her father do? What was his profession?*

Her father was a - a Professor of Medicine.

*So, did he come to the university? ...Or what did he...?*

Sorry?

*Did he come to the university- when he came to Germany?*

Yes, he came to the university at Würzburg.

*In which department? To which department?*

I don't know.

*But medicine?*

Yes.

*What was his speciality?*

...I think his speciality was medicine on children. But I'm not sure about that.

*And what was his name?*

Edward

*Edward...?*

Menashe.

*Edward Menashe. So, was he quite a well-known person – in Würzburg?*

Yes, and well-respected. Almost famous, one could say.

*And what happened to him? Tell us a little bit about him.*

Oh he- he was a much-loved patriarch of the family. And he travelled all over the place. And one day, when traveling by train in Italy, he choked on a bone... and died, there and then.

*Which year? When was that?*

19...27. ... So, I never knew him.

*But you knew your grandmother?*

Oh yes. My grandmother was around for a long time after that.

*And what was her name?*

Helene.

*And what about your father's parents?*

[00:04:38]

Oh, they lived in Danzig. He- he was the owner of a pub and also the creator of ‘*Goldwasser*’ which was a sort of spirit or schnapps with little bits of gold leaf floating about in it. They

had a very happy marriage. They lived also in Zoppot [German, present day Sopot, Poland], which is a seaside town not far from Danzig. And they kept chickens there and I always- I always remember he had of very nice... vegetation of raspberry bushes. And every summer when we went there for our holidays, we would be happy to pick raspberries as long as we could like- as long as we could. Happy memories. Before the war.

*Did you go there in the summer holidays?*

Yes. Every year.

*It was quite far, from Würzburg to Danzig.*

Oh, it's a long way. We- we had to go... In those days you had to go by ship from Swinemünde to Zoppot. Because you- you couldn't travel through the 'Polish Corridor'. So it was an exciting transit by ship on the way to Zoppot. ...Very exciting for young boys of the age of six, seven or eight.

*And you had a brother?*

I had a brother who also- who also came with us.

*And he was younger or older than you?*

Younger.

*How much younger?*

He- he was- well, four years younger.

*So, what are your memories of Würzburg? What are your earliest memories?*

[00:06:43]

Oh, my earliest memories.... was- in the days before cars were commonplace, you had horse-

driven traffic. And my friend and I used to hold a paper streamer across the road... which, when a car came along, we would put down, so it wouldn't damage it. And when a horse and cart came along, we would raise it so the horse would break the streamer. All very exciting for a four-year-old. A bit later... In the years of Hitler, I always remember... In the days of the Hitler Youth, my sole ambition was to join the Hitler Youth, because I was in an impressionable 6-year-old. And I thought this was the way to live: swastikas and so on. And all the children had a swastika flag tied onto the handlebar of their bicycle. But I wasn't allowed to do that. I had to have the flag of Danzig, which actually was quite a pretty flag - a cross and two crowns on a red background. But it wasn't as fashionable as a *Hakenzeug* [Hakenkreuz]. At school, I had no problems at the first school, the *Maxschule*. But in the *Realgymnasium*, the spirit of Hitler was beginning to creep in, and my mother had to... sign a form, which would proclaim that I was Aryan and not Jewish. And I always remember how ashamed I felt when she had to write, he was *halb*-Jewish – half-Jewish. And I thought, “Oh... This isn't a good omen for me at all.” So anyway, I took the form back and that was that. On another occasion, I remember in my- my bedroom was next to the sitting room, and it was a brick wall. And I brought home a compass from my geometry set. And I gradually bored a hole from the bedroom into the sitting room, through which I could peek at night, what the adults were doing. And to my astonishment, one night, the local chief of the Hitler Youth was sitting at the table with my grandmother, who was trying to explain why I couldn't be allowed to join the Hitler Youth. Because I was half-Jewish. So... that was interesting. I think the hole might still be there.

*How did you feel, when you were listening to that?*

I, I felt uncomfortable about all that.

[00:10:08]

*Was that the first time- did you know that you were half-Jewish?*

I, I knew but I didn't know what it meant. And I certainly didn't know what the... after-effects would be.

*But when you grew up you said you were Protestant. You grew up...?*

Oh yes. I didn't go to any Jewish synagogue or anything like that. I- we went to Protestant church, Sunday school every day. Ice-cream on the way back. So...

*And your mother as well, or just the children?*

Oh, the children, because it was Sunday school. My mother, I don't think worshiped anywhere in particular.

*But did it come as a surprise to you that you couldn't join the Hitler Youth?*

That I couldn't what?

*That you- that you couldn't join the Hitler Youth?*

It did, yes! I was disappointed!

*Yes?*

I really was!

*Yeah.*

It was the thing to do. Everybody else did it.

*So did you feel excluded from that?*

Yes. Yes, somewhat.

*How- what other aspects did it affect this being half-Jewish?*

None really. I was- I was bullied and teased, but I don't think necessarily about my half-Jewishness.

*What were you bullied for? What...?*

I don't know... No good reason.

*Yes... But you must remember- your brother was younger, so you remember more?*

Yes.

*And had more experience. But in primary school you said there was no...?*

No... no.

*That was still OK...*

Yes.

*And what about Kristallnacht, for example?*

[00:12:05]

Sorry?

*Kristallnacht. ...Were you there in Germany for Kristallnacht?*

Oh, Kristallnacht! Yes, I was- Yes. Yes, of course. It wasn't called that at the time, but I remember extremely well. I was... We had to walk to school, a distance of about two miles, in my case. And I was- I was doing that walk one morning and there used to be two huts on the way to school. One hut was a little... kiosk, for sweets and things. And the other hut was... a very small police station. They were about a hundred yards apart. And one day when walking to school, I noticed that the kiosk had been ransacked - ruined. So, I went up to the police station and said, "Frau Schmidt's kiosk has been broken into. Did you know that?" And the police officers were just laughing and... smacking each other on the shoulder as if the jo- as if they had witnessed a great joke. I didn't realise the... significance of that at the time, but obviously they had done the job!

*What about any synagogues? Did you...*

No, I didn't go.

*...see any...?*

I didn't go, and I didn't know.

*On Kristallnacht, I mean, did you...?*

I, I didn't know whether there was any such thing. But my mother, on that day... She used to cycle to the market. And she came back that night, that evening, and said that one of the women in the market who she knew quite well said to her, "Go home! You must go home quickly! It's dangerous here!" And she had no idea what was- what she meant. But obviously that was it.

*And at that point was she working your mother, as a midwife, or...?*

No, she- she was a housewife.

*She was a housewife. So she wasn't working then. ...And tell us a little bit more about your parents. They- your parents got divorced?*

Well... It became more and more obvious to my father that he couldn't be seen to be married to a half-Jewess. So what with that and his affair with his girlfriend called Lydia... they divorced. And he departed... I think for- at first to Leipzig. But he came back to Würzburg eventually.

*And did that come as a big shock to you, or how did you- as you were...?*

I was only about five or six...

*Yeah.*

So it wasn't so much a shock; it was just one of those things that happened.

[00:15:07]

*Do you remember it?*

Yes.

*Yeah... And at the time, did you understand that the Jewish issue, let's say, that that played a part...?*

No, no... I thought it was more to do with the Nazi-ism than the Jewishness.

*Why? What was your father's attitude, or how- what was his view?*

With me?

*No, politically, I mean.*

...Well, he was a Nazi.

*At that point?*

Either that, or he became one.

*So, when did he join- did he join the party? Do you know...?*

I don't know much about that.

*But he was a supporter?*

Yes.

*Mn-hnn. And how did- how was that expressed in the house? I mean, how did you...?*

I didn't notice it.

*No, but his views... He had- he expressed his views?*

If he did, I didn't hear them.

*...So that must have been then untenable for him to be married to your mother.*

That's right... So, off he went.

*And how did your mother deal with this situation?*

Oh, she was very business-like about it. She found us a little house... on the outskirts of Würzburg. And we lived there for a short while. But then, the landlord of that house was obviously... told not to house us, on account of our Jewishness or half-Jewishness. So, we then moved in with my grandmother, who had a large flat which was owned by the university, on account of her husband's job there. And we lived there -oh, for about three years, I suppose, until the university decided to oust her... on account of her Jewishness. So, then we had to pack up everything. And we went off to live in a hotel near the main station, hoping to catch a train out of Germany - a task upon which my mother worked long and hard with many visits to Frankfurt to the British Consul there, from whom she finally got a visa. And so, we left Würzburg... in April 1939.

[00:18:18]

*So, in that time... '33 to '39 - did you have any contact with your father?*

No.

*So, he really left you and your brother and your mother?*

No, but I- I've- I learned much later, that... the divorce agreement included that he had to pay a sum each month to my mother on account of the two children. ...As soon as she decided to

leave Germany, he felt obliged to cease those payments totally. Which wasn't much appreciated by the family.

*And what about the grandparents you spoke of? His parents?*

Oh, his parents more or less disowned him, because they were very... fond of my brother and I. We, we- we had spent many summer holidays there in their home, and they were very fond of us. They loved us! And... they considered that what he did to us was despicable, and they completely disowned him. He never met his parents again.

*And did you stay in touch with your grandparents?*

Sorry?

*Did you stay in touch with your grandparents?*

Well, no, because the war started and there was no... No way of getting in touch.

*But before the war, in the... '33 to '39?*

Oh yes! Well, we were there on holiday every year.

*So, you kept in touch with that relationship...*

Yes indeed, until 1938.

*What was their political orientation? Or what... What did they...?*

I really don't know.

*But they disowned their own son.*

They what?

*They disowned their own son.*

They did, totally.

*Because of his political views or because of... the way he behaved?*

[00:20:22]

No, because of- because of the way he treated his family- his first- his first family.

*You said that... your grandmother, the flat- do you remember the address of that flat? Of that university flat where you lived?*

Yes. It was 13 Seinsheimstraße, Würzburg.

*And where- and at what time were you chucked out from there, or, told to leave?*

You mean what date?

*Which year? Which year?*

Thirty-nine.

*So until '39 the university let her stay there?*

Yes.

*Which is interesting, because obviously most people were- had to leave the universities, 1933.*

Oh...

*You know so that's interesting that... they allowed it.*

Well, maybe they... were a bit lax in their records.

*Yeah... yes. But did every- Würzburg is, I guess, a small place- did everyone know... you were half-Jewish, or that your mother was Jewish?*

I don't know what everyone... Probably- probably they knew, but I wasn't... aware of that.

*So, you then change from primary to secondary school. And then you had one year in secondary school...*

Yes, one year in the *Realgymnasium*.

*And how... Nazified was that? I mean, how...*

How?

*You know, how many Nazis were in that school? I mean, how...?*

Oh, I see, yes. Well, ...it was...

*In terms of the teachers...*

[00:22:13]

It was... The teachers were very good and very pleasant. And I don't remember any... adverse feelings towards me. But the... the- the whole school was pro-Nazi. And whenever an aeroplane went overhead, we were all encouraged to go out and look at it, because it was part of our... *Luftwaffe [German Air Force]*.

*Yeah. So, were- do you remember feeling scared, or what- what were your feelings at the time as an... eleven, ten, eleven-year-old?*

No, I wasn't particularly scared but I was aware I had to be careful... what I did and what I said.

*Yeah.*

...And when we- when we were when we were living in that hotel... for just a few weeks... the hotel family, who- who owned the hotel, knew about our plight, and said, “We’re, we would- we should be happy to- we would be happy to have you, but you must have all your meals upstairs, in your bedroom.” So that's another sign of the anti-Jewishness at the time.

*Yeah.*

And we finally left... Said goodbye Würzburg... I thought forever. And the only person to say goodbye to me, was a - a friend from the *Realgymnasium* school. And... [sound interruption]

*Let's start again. Who was that- the one- the person who said goodbye?*

[00:24:14]

Bobby Kohlmeyer waved me goodbye... as the train left Würzburg for what I thought might be the last time. And so, we travelled on and on. And on that journey, we had to go through customs. And a customs office- customs officer came and said to me – they were examining all of our things and said, “Oh, that's a nice watch! The Führer would like to have that. Would you give it to the Führer?” And I was bit... put off because I liked that watch! I'd only had it for Christmas a few months earlier and it had luminous hands - a very modern thing in those days. So, I never- I reluctantly gave my watch to the Führer. And a few- a few miles further on, we were obviously by now in Holland. And my mother said, “We are in Holland! We are all safe!” And I had no idea what she meant. I really had no idea!

*So that shows that you didn't feel so unsafe.*

That's right!

*Your mother must have... sheltered you in that sense...*

Yeah... yeah.

*Mr. Willer, I wanted to ask you before we get onto the journey, were there- there must have been other Jewish families in Würzburg. Did you have any contact at all with the Jewish community that you are aware of?*

No, not that I know of. I personally certainly did not.

*And were there plans that your mother tried to send you on the Kindertransport, or is that a...?*

No, I know nothing of that.

*No. It probably wasn't open to you because you were half-Jewish.*

[00:26:00]

Yeah.... yeah.

*And when was the first time you heard the word 'immigration' or the idea of leaving?*

Oh, well, I'd heard it a few weeks before, because my mother was trying to prepare me for this change of life. And she described English houses to me, and how everybody had a little bit of grass on the front which they called 'a lawn'. And she said, "In the- at breakfast time you will get cornflakes and they're like this." And she had bought a packet from somewhere to show us what cornflakes looked like. And I thought, "Oh, this is very interesting." But... that's all I remember about that.

*And you said your mother went to Frankfurt, to the British Embassy.*

Yes.

*And do you know who gave you the visa, or do you know the details of that?*

No. But it would be in her book, of which I can give you a copy.

*Ok. So, we know that she got a domestic visa for herself?*

Sorry?

*She got a domestic for herself?*

Yes, for herself and for her two children - and her mother!

*And did the mother also have a domestic visa, or...?*

I don't know if it was a separate visa or if she just got together somehow.

*How old was her mother at the time of emigration?*

...Must have been sixty-something.

*So, it's quite amazing that she managed to get a visa for the- for all of you.*

Yes.

*Quite extraordinary. ...We'll check in her book later. Yeah. So let's go back to the journey. So you left by train...*

We left by train. We got a...

*So, you said one person waved goodbye. Did you remember saying goodbye to any other people?*

No.

*No. And what- what were you allowed to take? The watch, obviously you wanted to take. And I see there lots of watches here, so that must have been important for you?*

[Mr. Willer laughs]

Yes, well...

*Any other things?*

No, I don't remember. I don't remember. Just- just personal luggage.

*And your mother, what could she take?*

I suppose just as clothes she needed.

*Did they have property? I mean, you said they were in a university flat, so did...?*

I think that was all left behind or put in storage. I - I can't remember.

*So, you took the train to Holland...*

[00:28:36]

We took the train to Holland and we embarked at the Hook of Holland to the overnight ferry. Which was for a little boy, a grand adventure. I always remember in the morning... ..We were greeted in the morning with a cup of tea served by a - a maid with a white... hat on. And my mother said this was an English custom. So, after that, eventually we came to Harwich where we disembarked. Got on a train, and were met in Liverpool Street by my Uncle Otto, who had been in England for about four years already.

*Was this your mother's brother?*

Sorry?

*Your mother's brother?*

----

Yes. ...My mother's brother. And we - we left for his house in Highgate. Where we

immediately had to be disbanded, because there was no room for everybody. And I, at that time, was put in a house with the family Attlee - the future Prime Minister. And of course, I didn't know he was going to be a politician or was going to be Prime Minister. I was just in a big house with a family, four children. There was. The boy Martin and the three girls- Janet, Felicity and Alison and we played happily in their garden. I knew not a single word of English and that they knew no German. And we had to communicate in Latin because I did know that. And so did the middle daughter Felicity. So haltingly we made communications through this method and I always remember they were trying to teach me how to play English how not to play cricket and I knew no English. So, they, they showed me a dictionary and they said the when you see the ball you must hit it. And the word "see" in the dictionary was described as to discover, so Martin was going to ball to me and he was sort of hitting the ball up and down in his hand and I said "Well, I discovered it." I hit it straight away and I went to attack him to get the ball. A great misunderstanding of course but we - in due course I learned English- took no more than six weeks and I attended a local primary school which taught me a few things.

*Where did they live?*

They lived... in a large house called Heywood in the- a district called Stanmore, Stanmore Middlesex. Mrs. Attlee was a very stern sort of mother. Mr. Attlee was very kind and they used to play golf together and we children used to hang out behind them.

[00:32:42]

*How did you get to them?*

I don't know. I think there must have been an association of Quakers. But I can't confirm that. Anyway, I was placed with them and Peter, my brother, was placed with another family also in Stanmore called Preston. It was my mother told me later much later that the Prestons wanted to take Peter in permanently, adopt him. But she wasn't prepared to let him go. Anyway, I lived with the Attlees for some three months. I attended their church. Church of England.

*Was that different from what you were used to?*

Slightly different but the hymns were familiar. It was it was quite pleasant.

*What were you your first impressions-just to go back a little bit- of England as a boy?*

What do you remember? What was different?

The cars drove on the left.

I don't remember much else.

*So, you stayed with the Attlees for three months?*

About three months it. It was very interesting. The first morning when I got up, Martin the boy pointed me in the direction of the bathroom and he filled the bath with cold water and to my horror- got in, completely indulged himself in this cold bath. And then he- he pointed to me and said "You get in!" How horrible. This was Easter Monday. So, I thought this must be some strange English custom for Easter. So, I got in. That wasn't all that bad. But to my horror-this event took place every morning thereafter.

[00:35:17]

Nothing to do with Easter at all! What other memories?

*Food, what about food?*

Food was very pleasant. They had they had a cook and a servant. The meals were provided and always very good pleasant. Mr Attlee had a habit of sitting at the table of holding up pennies, old pennies so that the face of the king or queen was pointed towards us children and we had to guess what the date of that coin was based on the information we should have had about King and Queen. There was on the front. I didn't get any right of course but the children succeeded. It was a happy fun family atmosphere was the amount of time.

*And was he a member of parliament?*

Yes. He was a member of parliament and important politician. He used to get mounds of post but I didn't know what was all this about at the time.

*Was politics discussed at the table?*

No.

*And what do you think why did they take you in. What do you think?*

[00:36:48] I have no idea. I later presumed it was to do with the Quakers but I've got no proof of that.

*Are you in touch with the children?*

No. I, I did try later. Had I had a correspondence when I was at my next school but it didn't flourish.

*So, after three months what happened?*

After three months I was sent to my, what I call primary school. It's really secondary school, Mourne Grange in Northern Ireland where I was introduced to the very strict rigors of a typical Irish prep school complete with canings.

*So why, why were you sent there?*

[00:37:49]

Well, it's quite it's quite interesting. Being German I used to roll my R's. In the word to "hear" in Latin or "*audare*". I used to say "audarre". The headmaster couldn't stand it. He was appalled at this "rolling of Rs" and he caned me mercifully- mercilessly: Tried to make me not roll my "Rs". No, I couldn't do it. Now if somebody had explained to me that by putting the tip of your tongue at the top of the mouth you would say "oh- daree" not "odarré", then I would have of course immediately been able to do it but nobody did that. So, I suffered it for some time.

*So which school was that?*

It was Mourne Grange. Northern Ireland, was a private school.

*But why did you why were you sent there?*

Again,

I don't know but I presume interest by the virtue of the Quakers.

*Who paid for this?*

No idea.

*It was a private school?*

It was a private school. Everybody else paid for it. But I didn't. So, I thought it must be the Quakers. I learnt much later That everybody paid for it. It was quite expensive too.

*And quite far away. What happened to your mother and grandmother in the meantime?*

My mother by then was working at St. Charlotte's Hospital as a nurse and later as a midwife. My grandmother stayed with her son, my uncle in Highgate. Throughout the war.

*And what was he doing?*

He was a doctor. He was a GP.

*So, it was a very medical family?*

Oh yes. Everybody in my family was a doctor of some sort, except me. My mother laughingly said I was a doctor of zips.

*And what was his name? the uncle.*

Otto, Menasse.

*And he was a GP?*

He was a GP in the area and much respected.

[00:40:22]

*Did he have to retrain or could he just, he...*

I suppose so. When. When war broke out. All aliens had to go to the Isle of Man as an internment camp. And when he went to report to the local police station the police said "Oh not you doctor you'll be OK."

*And was he?*

Yes. Just said - just stayed there. Carrying on with his doctoring.

*So your grandmother stayed with him?*

Yes.

*And your mother?*

She lived

in a Charl- Prince Charlotte's.

*So was she a domestic first? Did she have a domestic job?*

No, she was a nurse.

*Yes. From the beginning?*

Yes.

*OK so maybe she got special nursing visa. I'm curious what visa she got. Maybe we'll... it should be in that book. We'll find out.*

Sorry, I don't understand.

*What visa she had because you said- whether she had a domestic job first and then became a nurse?*

No, I don't think so. She was straight into Queen Charlotte's as a nurse.

*That was her first position?*

Yes.

*Was she happy that you went off to Northern Ireland because that...*

She was happy I was in- with the Attlees. But when I went to Northern, Northern Ireland we lost touch completely until about... two years later when the headmaster invited her over. This was during the war and she stayed at the school as her- as the headmaster's guest for two weeks. And we got to know each other again.

*So, there was the same headmaster who tried to get rid of your "Rs"?*

Yes.

*And how was that...I mean it is almost a second migration. You just arrived in England and then you have to go again to a strange place. How did you think about it?*

[00:42:30]

Me? Well with the flexibility of youth you could you get used to anything. It was very weird. For instance, one of the teachers at mealtimes used to let us hear the news which during the war was always very interesting and we all sat at the dining tables after a meal carefully listening to the news. And when the news had finished, we all had to stand up and say “Thanks awfully, Sir.”

*But you managed to adapt to this in this prep school? Irish prep school?*

Yes.

*And what apart from the caning, what else? Was it quite harsh? Was it...*

No, it wasn't harsh. It was regimental, chapel every morning. Build- a separate building with an organ and pews and everything. We all had to file in there every morning for a, a short service. Twice on Sundays. Cricket on its own cricket field, rugby in the winter, soccer in the Easer term. I always remember rugby. It was a brutal game being a little boy as I was then. You were encouraged to tackle the big boys, you know, throw yourself at the legs to get them down. It was not pleasant but I survived.

*Yes, you managed. And was there camaraderie with other children? What with other children- did they understand that you were from Germany? Did you try [inaudible].*

Oh yes. There was nothing- there was no antagonism of any sort. I later learned much later when I went to reunions that my fellow pupils at the time were all from very well-off families, owners of mills and such things. I didn't know that at the time.

*And until today you don't know, who paid for this?*

[00:45:00]

No.

*Interesting, interesting. The school must know somehow it must be some record somewhere?*

Yes, but it doesn't. The school doesn't exist anymore, no. It was... it was disbanded and sold to... the Steiner Institute.

*So, you said for two years you didn't have that much contact with your mother?*

Oh no.

Apart from that fortnight.

*How come? Was it not possible to correspond or?*

Well, yes but indeed we did correspond in fact every Sunday night compulsorily. All the pupils had to write a letter home. I was- I remember writing my letter which was of course in German then. And the teacher who would read our letters first said "I can't understand a word, write in English next week." And the letters back from my mother were always marked "open by censor" -a wartime situation.

*So – by the sound of it -not unhappy years, you've managed to adapt?*

Yes, it was alright. I did.

*But then were you pleased when your mother came?*

It was, it was a happy reunion for a couple of weeks. She's used to sit and knit and watch us playing cricket, it was quite good.

*And your brother?*

He was at that time...in different peoples' homes also in Northern Ireland. During which time his epilepsy was noticed.

*How did the foster families deal with that?*

Well, it was wartime. There was nothing to be done.

*So that didn't start in Germany, started here?*

Yes.

*He didn't go to prep school. He stayed just with a family, with families?*

Yes.

*So how come he was in Northern Ireland?*

[00:47:43]

*It was chance?*

I think it was chance, yes.

*Your mother couldn't have any children with her because was a nurse, so she stayed in the accommodation?*

Oh yes, she was she was living in.

*Yeah.*

*And then what happened after- how long did you stay there?*

*In the prep school?*

From '39 to '42.

[00:48:21] *And what happened next?*

Next, I went to a school in Sutton Valence, Kent, which was a specialist school. I learned-

later learned for unsettled naughty children. The reason I went there was because my Uncle Otto had already sent my brother Peter there on account of his epilepsy. Thinking that that school might somehow assist him in that particular illness. So, I went there although I had nothing wrong with myself in order to help him but I didn't know that at the time. I just went there and it was a school for...for children who had been in difficult families or who were naturally naughty, who were... unable to fit into their present communities for one reason or another. It was the absolute opposite of the very rigorous school I had in Northern Ireland. I always remember the first meal we had didn't come on China like in Northern Ireland. It was tin plates, all very rough. Everybody could do what they liked. It was a school of complete liberty. The headmaster called Otto Shaw decreed that you could either go to lessons or not. You could smoke or not. You could do what you liked. And people did. In the end you got so bored you eventually did go to lessons because there was nothing else to do. And in that atmosphere of utter liberty, I proceeded through the next four years.

*But did you like it or not like it?*

I thought was great...yes. There was, there were about thirty-five children including girls!

*So quite small.*

Yes.

*And was this, this private or state?*

[00:50:52]

It was private a private school. My mother by then was earning some money so she could- she could afford to pay for me. I'm not sure about Peter. Presumably she paid for both. Then they wanted you to be together?

Yes.

*And what was your relationship like with your brother because you've been apart and...*

Well, he, he didn't bother me- bother with me very much and I-although I tried to look, out look out for him- we had our separate friends and didn't have much to do with each other.

*And how did he manage with his epilepsy at school?*

Really, he had, he had shakes and one day, we- were raking grass in- from a field at the bottom of the garden. And at that time a V1 Doodlebug came over- on the way to London. This was the time when they first began and while everybody was looking up to look watch this, watch this Doodlebug. To my horror Peter appeared to faint totally. This was no coincidence at all. I don't think, no, it wasn't a coincidence. It was simply this was his first epileptic fit- complete with a crumbling tongue biting and so forth. And Otto Shaw, the headmaster, said "you've just seen your first epileptic fit". The Doodlebugs continued for many weeks every, every night we could see them. With the tails apparently on fire but that was actually the exhaust gases from the, [00:53:01] from the rotors.

*But in your area- they didn't bomb, where you were?*

No, no.

*What sort of friends did you make there? Do you remember any people... from that time?*

Well, I made quite a few good friends but it didn't, it didn't last. After school although that, that school has a website now and I've often searched it... to various friends I made have all vanished from it.

*Did you learn- how did you did you... There was a lot of liberties... so?*

I didn't learn much. I mean there... was a very good English teacher called Ivor Holland who was very strong on punctuation. He was insisting on the right place for commas and semicolons. I learned that. There was a math teacher called... Doesn't really matter- who taught me maths but not well enough because I failed. I failed my exam in Algebra. There was a- quite good geography teacher. There was a secretary called... I can't remember her name- who taught me shorthand and that was handy, typing

*And that time when war was going on- were you worried about your father and the grandparents in Germany?*

No, I wasn't worried about my father. I'd forgotten about him altogether. My grandparents in Danzig, I worried about them. The father died first. And the grandmother died just after the war.

*So, they stayed in Danzig?*

Yes.

[00:55:23]

*Did you ever have to suffer anti- sort of anti-German sentiment or... by then?*

No.

*At that point did you, did people notice you are refugees or your German....*

No. No. No. I was just another boy who by now knew how to pronounce his Rs.

*That's what I mean. You didn't have to tell anyone?*

No.

*How long did you stay there?*

Until 1946.

*Until after the war?*

Yeah. Yeah.

*You remember the end of the war, was something...?*

Yes, I remember very well there was huge celebrations everywhere. And we did our part of that. I don't remember anything specific except- oh yes. It's a minor detail but by then I was beginning to take a paper, her daily, daily paper, The Telegraph. And 'The Telegraph' ran a competition as to what was going to happen to the pre- the Nazi- German hierarchy. They ran a competition, you had to put across whether Hitler would commit suicide, whether Göring would escape to Argentina, whether Göbbels would commit suicide. You had to put a cross by these thing. I thought that's a great thing to celebrate the Nazis. But by the- by the question of how they would meet the end.

*And did you do it?*

Oh yeah.

*What did you fill in?*

Can't remember. I thought it was very amusing.

[00:57:31]

*And at that point did you have any desire. Did you think you'd go back to Germany or you, you felt quite British then?*

I felt quite British. And it didn't... I wasn't homesick for Würzburg particularly.

*And when did you become naturalised?*

My mother naturalised the three of us in- I think...1947. I've got a certificate upstairs. I could look it up but I believe it is was 1947.

*Was it important to you?*

Sorry.

*Was that important to you to have that passport?*

At the time was a sort of... nod to normality.

*And your mother and her career? So first she was a nurse and then...*

She was by then after the war a midwife first in Wakefield and then in Leeds. She has many stories of delivering babies and so on which will be in the book of which I can show you. And then she, she...moved a bit later to Sedgefield where she after passing the correct exam became a doctor again.

*So, she basically studied? She studied here? Because she hadn't, she wasn't a doctor in Germany?*

Oh yes, she was. But she had to re-sit the exam. Okay that's for sure. That's why she only was able to be a nurse in the first place.

*So what doctor was she in Germany? What was she?*

Medicine.

*Did she work in Germany?*

For a brief time.

*So, she then resat the exams- here?*

Yes.

*And what sort of doctor, what did she do in England?*

She was a physician.

*In a hospital?*

Yes.

*Until when? How did she work?*

She worked until the age of sixty-two and then having had to retire, [01:00:05] she carried on working as a... as a doctor examining children for any possible flaws.

*Where did she actually study in Germany- medicine? Where did she study, your mother?*

In Würzburg, briefly. And in Schweinfurt also.

*That's interesting and how... how did your mother see her emigration. I mean did she... How did you feel about it?*

She felt, she felt in the first case that it was an absolute necessity. My grandmother didn't want to go. She said," Oh we'll be all right." And my mother said," no, we won't! You see you've already lost your flat."

*Your mother was the driving force?*

Yes.

*To get everyone out.*

*And how did she see it in hindsight towards the end of her life and her career here in England?*

I don't understand.

*Was she bitter? Did she- I want to find out how- you know- how she felt about her own life and her immigration, her forced emigration.*

Oh, she was very happy that it all occurred.

*She was happy to be here?*

Yeah.

*And after the war did anyone get in touch with your father. Did you have any contact?*

Well, there is a story which I haven't had confirmed that my father's brother, Herbert, through various medical connections, wrote her a letter.

Asking for money or help or both. We presumed it could have been on behalf of my father but we don't know that. Anyway, she said I want nothing further to do with him. So, I sent him a letter to that effect.

*There was no contact?*

No.

*And with his family or his children. Did he have children?*

Who?

*Your father.*

[01:02:46]

Oh no. Yes, he had children. I only met them this year. No. Last year for the first time, but until then there was no contact whatsoever.

*Let's speak about it a bit later. So, what, what, what were your ambitions when you finished school?*

Sorry?

*What were your ambitions when you finished school?*

I had no ambition. I was totally useless and without any ambition- whatsoever. So, my uncle Otto said, you're going. He knew, knew a well-off family by the name of Koppel who had a factory in South Wales and he said you're going to be a toolmaker. I said, a toolmaker? What's that. You put handles on tools. No, he said. And he sent me off to a school near Cardiff where I was embarked upon a career of tool making which was more than putting the handles on devices. I had to learn the whole thing of machining and filing and getting things put right. One day when I accidentally... cut a groove the full length of a milling machine. They thought it better that I'd be transferred to the drawing office on account of any errors I made could be erased. So, from then on for the next almost ten years I was in the drawing office, drawing zips and production methods. How to make zips and every conceivable object connected with the zip fasteners. It was a very happy slow- going, even lazy existence, which I quite enjoyed.

*What was the name of the company?*

Aero Zipp fasteners [company started by Joachim Koppel, a refugee from Nazi Germany]

*Near Cardiff?*

[01:05:21]

Yes.

*Was it the Welsh family – who were the owners?*

The owner was a chap called Koppel. As I told you earlier.

*Yes. And where was he from?*

He was from London.

*So, there were refugees? That's what I wanted to find out.*

Yes.

*There were German Jewish refugees? Were they from Germany or...?*

No. They were from Czechoslovakia.

*OK so were.... It was a Jewish company?*

Of a sort. Yes.

*Yeah. But the Jewish owners had no... connection with me being the...*

No.

*But a lot of, you know, refugee business people...*

Yes.

*...were started in Wales.*

Yes.

*So, they try to attract people, people there. So that is interesting. And you were happy to live there?*

*Yes. It was all right. I had a succession of... digs with different families, different places until I finally got married in 1956.*

*How did you meet your future wife?*

*At that company, she was a secretary, I was a draftsman.*

*But you also said- did you go to college at all?*

In between there was a college. There's a college for mechanical engineering which I attended one day a week for years. I didn't get very far. It was a- there was an exam called S1

which I passed. It was an exam called S2 which I failed. I passed it again the second time. Then there was a- exam called higher...some things are difficult which I failed miserably. And didn't resit.

[01:07:30]

*Because you didn't need to- you were- had a job?*

I had a job and I was happy in my job. I didn't know why I should be going to all these technical things.

*And it was all to do with zips?*

Zips and machines to do with that.

*Did the company then export zips to all...*

Oh yes. We had quite a bit good business including Australia. At that time after the war you have to remember there was no unemployment. Everybody had a job. So there was no pressure of that sort.

*You wrote a book about your zips?*

I did. Joanna, I can give you a copy.

*What was it? What did you write about, what...?*

Oh. Everything.

*What was- you what were you most proud of- what do you feel...? What was the fascinating thing about zips from a technical point of view?*

Well, how they, how they work, how they zip, how they have changed from metal zips to

nylon zips and the mistakes that were made. I always remember, I was a draftsman...ending-nearly ending his 10th year on the drawing board and I was summoned to the office of the managing director whose name was Wagner. Whose office I had never been in before in ten years. And Mr. Wagner explained that a customer in deepest Scotland had complained about the, the, the locking mechanism of our zips. And needed urgent attention. And would I, a technical advert- a technical expert- go to Kirriemuir – was that place- Kirriemuir the next day certain in order to placate this, this dangerous customer. So, I thought go to Kirriemuir. What's this. Am I now a technical rep, will I get a car perhaps? Anyway, the tire, that the journey to carrying was ageless. I seem to remember having a train to a ...some distant port and then a bus to Kirriemuir. And then I've eventually found this customer and the customer's name was- forgotten down for a moment.

*Don't worry.*

[01:10:56]

The name is important... because I earn- I search for this name and found it eventually and said “Well, where is this- where are all these faulty? The lady assistant showed me one and I said “Well is that all?” She said “Yes”. And I said, “I better examine this.“ I looked, I looked at it. The fasten- the zip had come undone. I thought, well that is easy, I can put it right because I've been learning on, on, on this endless journey to Kirriemuir how to put zip fasteners together. So, I whipped off the broken zip and with a dext turn put my new zip fastener, that I've been practicing on, back in. And the zip was done. But looking at the second fastener I see that it had letter “L” plastered all over it. So, in other words I had put an arrow zip, zip onto a light- lightning zip faster set, [01:12:30] a system that couldn't possibly be considered satisfactory. So, I, I quickly put the zips together and exited from the zip- from the assistant. Sorting only out the fact that I could have 10 percent discount for, for this now unfamiliar duel of zips and left with that. Back to the customer at Aero Zipp. At which point nobody was any longer interested. Because by now they had a second problem. The zip, the zip at the far distant DNH Cohen of Glasgow demanded an urgent electrically operated machinery which would close zip fasteners at the bottom stop. And I didn't have one of these so I had to figure out a way of doing it. And I did this by going to another manufacturer in Whitby where I remember the tide was just coming in. And I said to the lady at the- at the address. “Where are all these zips going in- going wrong in the in the distance?” And she pointed me downstairs to an alarming sight of flooding blues, flooding box sets of beautifully

put together...arm...put together wooden sets. "It's down there somewhere but I wouldn't bother about it because Lightning is going to get this business very shortly anyway." So, I thought "Oh well, what's that." I went back and I reported. But by then they already said "Oh, you can send it to DNH of Glasgow. I know they're in bad need of this." So, from then on, I became a technical representative and went from strength to strength in that field. I remember quite well being a technical rep at Marks and Spencer who at that time insisted on seeing every zip fastener matched perfectly to the male colour of the skirt or dresses or whatever it fits to. [01:15:47] And I was most upset when advising a particular woman that a set of perfectly good navy was good enough for that particular dress. And she said "Sorry this won't do. Lightning will have to have this." And I said "But Lightning is my customer." And she said that Lightning is our supplier. So indeed, I had to give in. Much later I learned that they had in fact given the whole set to Flex Fasteners. Another-another supplier on the grounds that it had the better matching... of all the three requirements of her apparent perfection.

*Did you travel a lot?*

Yes. But mainly at that time around the London office. Occasionally from further affair-further afield.

*So, did you move to London?*

I've moved from that point we moved to Cuffley which is quite a long way away near Enfield. And we would drive in and out in those days. No tax. Free of tax.

*Where did you have children? [01:17:47]*

We had moved eventually to Ware near Cardiff- near Hertford. We had three children. Joanna was the oldest, then Judy and lastly Jacqueline.

*Where did they grow up?*

Oh, various nearby- various nearby schools.

*But in Hertfordshire?*

Yes,

*So, you travelled from there?*

We did.

*And did you stay with the same company?*

I stayed with them, with Aero Zip until 1976. I then moved to Lightning in 1967. And shortly afterwards to Optilon which was the same firm as Lightning under a different name at the north-eastern place called Peterlee. My mother by then had a little bungalow in the village of Sedgfield. So, we were not far from each other.

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

Identity. Well, they always were and regard themselves rightly as British.

*Did you talk to them about your past at all?*

Not really. But now and then- conversationally.

*Did you- for example- what happened to German?*

I completely forgot it. Even now, I only speak Kinder-Deutsch [the level of a child].

*With your mother- you spoke English?*

[01:20:03]

Yes.

*You didn't speak German to anyone?*

No.

*Can you read the book?*

No.

*Could you understand the book?*

No. If somebody gives me an extract from a book from a paper, I would struggle with that. I might pick out the odd bird but I would probably get it wrong.

*In terms of your identity today how would you define yourself. Describe yourself?*

Oh, totally British.

*Is there something from your background which is- what is important- which is important to you?*

How far back do you want to go?

*Let's say from Würzburg?*

No. No. The only thing is important to me from Würzburg are my more recently found relatives.

*Tell us about this, please.*

Well, I was delighted to learn the existence of my half-brother, brother of my father that is.

*Son of your father – do you mean?*

I mean, yes, yes, son of my father. Of which I knew nothing. Unfortunately, I only knew him for a few months 'cause he died quite recently. And he, he has children. Of which Jo knows

more than I. And it was a fairly happy relationship in those recent years.

*How did it come about? How did this come about?*

It came about because a distant relative- Christian, a son of Heinrich who was an... a son of my... grandparents nearby in, in Zoppot [present day Sopot, Poland]. And Christian was playing about with internet things and searches and came upon the name of Menashe and then the name of Willer.

[01:22:39]

And from there it all snowballed and we had a reunion then.

*Where?*

In Königsberg [Königstein], near Frankfurt- of Heinrich and his son. And from there we went to, oh yes, and from there we met or re-met, Gabriele from Saarbrücken- a cousin. And we travelled from there by car to Würzburg and then the whole story of my...father's son.

*When was he born, your half-brother?*

I believe it was Mannheim.

I'm not sure.

*Was he born after the war?*

Yes, I've got a feeling.

Nineteen-thirty... Nineteen forty -six it could have been and so what.

*So, what do you know about your father? It's through him now?*

Sorry?

*Now. What you know now about what happened to your father. Is it because of him?*

Yes. Yes, yes.

*What did he tell you? What happened to your father during the war for example?*

Well, he was a practicing Nazi but not in a terrible way. He was... he was, engaged in was engaged in...he was engaged in resuscitating prisoners of war, from the Russian front. So, he would be involved in returning them to the front for whatever reason.

*Did he work as a doctor?*

[01:25:24]

Yes.

*So, he was in the army?*

Yes.

*Then post-war, what did he do?*

Well, post-war he was a pathologist.

*But you said he died in the 60s?*

He died in 66 or 67 by committing suicide. Apparently, he made a mess of it because he cut his arteries but he didn't die. So, he had to finish himself off ... by means of a gas oven and his son, my half-brother, found him there.

*And did he, did your half-brother think it was related partly to his history of – I don't know, of leaving your mother?*

Oh, yes. I would say he was very troubled by his... for his part in his first family of which he

never really recovered. Never revealed anything about it.

*To... this son did know but you?*

No.

*So, he kept it a secret?*

Yes. And my grandmother from Danzig- during the war she was by then living in... Danzig. And it was during the war that the Russians had that... territory. So during a snow snowy-snowy night... she made the trek- some two and a half miles through the snow storm to deliver a ring. [01:27:56] That she had particularly kept for me and my brother. She delivered that ring to Heinrich and his son... and she then made the trek- the treacherous trek through the snow back to Danzig where two miles later she died. And that's the ring which Christian delivered to my- into my hands from my grandmother which I duly gave to my eldest daughter Joanna. And she wears it now.

*Ring from your grandparents*

Indeed.

*Was it important for you to receive that?*

Well, it was... I didn't know it existed. I had no idea so it wasn't- it was important in its in its status of what it belong to.

*So, was Heinrich your father's brother?*

I have to think to work it out.

*Heinrich, yes. And Christian?*

Was Heinrich's brother. No! Son.

*Right. Your half- brother was called?*

Jorg.

*And surname?*

Willer!

*Same surname. And when did you meet him?*

Last year.

*And was it the first time you went back to...*

[01:30:20]

No, I'd been back to Würzburg several times. But I had no, no knowledge whatsoever of that particular part of the family. So, from that point it was the first time.

*So, when was the first time you went back to Würzburg for the first time?*

First time ever was '56.

*And what was that like for you?*

Well, I was the proud possessor of a Vespa and my wife and I went everywhere on a Vespa. It belonged to a Vespa club and we travelled the... Vespa by road. And we stayed with my mother's old friends who, who I had known of. I visited ... different places. It was still very much bombed.

*What did you feel like going back there?*

Not very much. I visited my old schools but no particular pangs.

*Is there something you missed today from Germany or Würzburg...?*

Oh, I miss the wine. I miss the town...the views. It's a lovely old town

*And for example – did they do Stolpersteine in Würzburg? For your grandfather's memorial or anything?*

No, no, there was a gravestone which was transferred to Strasbourg.

*Your grandfather's gravestone?*

Yes. And when she died, she was- she was... cremated, I think, alongside him or buried by him, yes. Also, in Strasbourg. [01:32:32]

*But your grandmother didn't, she died in England?*

No, this was after the war, she was by then back in Saarbrücken with, with my cousin Angelika. She would...

*She went back?*

She ran to and fro between England and Saarbrücken.

*Your grandmother?*

Yes, every six months she was to and fro.

*Yes. And so, when she died, she was cremated and buried in Strasbourg?*

Yes.

*I think we should take a break and continue a little bit more after the break.*

OK

*You were talking about the meeting you had with your half-brother in Germany. So, what was it actually like. What was it like for him? You said he didn't know about you.*

It was a complete surprise when we turned up on his doorstep. I expected somebody like me instead there was this tall skeletal figure smiling from his doorway of his little house. But when we got in there it wasn't that little of course. Amongst other things it was a grand piano. And apparently, he played every night and his wife sang. We've got acquainted in no time. We had a bottle of Franken wine and promised to stay in touch but of course we couldn't because he died not long after.

*And did you speak English or German? How did you manage that?*

He had once been a professor in South- South Africa. I've forgotten what to do with. So, he spoke a little English but he'd forgotten most of it and I knew little German so we got on quite well.

*What was his view of your father?*

He didn't present any particular view but he did say that he never spoke of his first marriage.

*And this was in Würzburg? He lived in Würzburg?*

[01:35:08]

He lives in nearby, about quarter of an hour away.

*And now are you in touch with- does he have children?*

He has children and Joanna is in touch with many of them.

*Right.*

I am not.

*Right. And in a way was it important- in the way it takes you back?*

It was, it was important.

*And you said you're going back next month or in two months' time?*

At Easter time. Yes.

*What are you going to do in Würzburg?*

Meet up with as much of the family as Joanna can gather.

*Are there more people?*

Judy is coming with her family and Jacqueline with her family. So, there's quite a- quite a crowd.

*They're very interested?*

Yes, and they like the old town.

*Do you find that you talk about it more now? Not that the children... Are they children grandchildren interested in your story?*

Yes, but... they are interested in my past but also in the town as it now is.

*You said you went back to your old school...*

Just look at it.

*Yes. What have you been back in any official way?*

No.

*No. Are you interested in that aspect of things?*

No, not particularly.

*How do you think your immigration, your forced immigration has shaped your life?*

If I think deeply about it- there would be many worthwhile stepping stones. In a word I think the immigration assisted in my becoming a proud Englishman

*What do you think would have happened to you if you'd stayed in Germany?*

[01:37:32]

Oh, I would undoubtedly have died on the Russian front.

*Do you think you would have become a doctor in Germany?*

I think my mother tried very hard by bullying me all the time to, to learn about many things but I never got very far. So, I don't think I would have become a doctor.

*So, medicine wasn't for you?*

No... I always wanted to be a farmer. But having learned since what hardships they suffer, it would have been a bad choice. So, I would have preferred my next choice to be a lorry driver.

*And what I didn't ask you - did your mother... Your mother was not very religious- you said she- I don't know whether she was Protestant or not. Did she join – when she was in England – did she join a church?*

No.

*And you, how did you raise your children?*

How what?

*How did you raise your children?*

*Which religion?*

They just went to normal English churches Sunday school and so on.

*Anglican?*

Yeah.

*And...If you think about the future. What is it you think should be known from...Is there any message that you have based on your experiences?*

Message for who?

*For anyone with watch this tape.*

Live for the moment because life is too short. And if I'm speaking to our children; don't quarrel.

*I just want to come back to something you said briefly before you said you didn't stay in touch with the Attlees, the children?*

No, no.

*Also, after the war?*

I regretted it. I wish, I wish I would have done so but somehow- the opportunity never rose or the other more important things.

[01:40:02]

*What did you feel when he became prime minister post-war? I mean you must have been...?*

Well, I was quite in awe of him because I at my young age I never knew he was anybody.

*Because when you came, he was the leader of the Labour- of the Labour Party.*

No doubt, yes.

*But then you didn't realise it then?*

No, I didn't realise it. And if I had realised it I wouldn't have known how important it was.

*And in the 50s when he became Prime Minister, you didn't try to get back in touch?*

No.

*Because it's quite extraordinary. I don't know, is it known that he took you in. Is that a known historical fact?*

I doubt it. I mean who in history would regard that as important.

*Well, not everyone took in refugee children. I think it's interesting. That's interesting. Is there anything else we haven't discussed? I didn't ask you what you'd like to add.*

No, I think it's been a very full...commentary.

*And where- maybe just to find out- where, where would you say is your home? Where do you feel at home?*

You mean at the present time?

*Yeah.*

Here is my home! I'm surrounded by my clocks.

*Tell us about your clocks then.*

It's a collection. I like them.

*When did you start collecting?*

About 40 years ago.

*And why do you collect them?*

I just like the look of them and it's something... they appeal to my mechanical instincts.

*How many have you got?*

I haven't counted them lately. About 20 I suppose.

*And for how long have you been living herein Gloucestershire?*

About 27 years.

*And why did you move here?*

[01:42:24]

We moved here because my wife at that time preferred this part of the country.

*And you're happy to be here?*

Yeah.

*And your wife recently passed away?*

Yes.

*You manage, you think you'll manage here?*

I beg your pardon.

*Your plan to stay here?*

Oh yes.

*And did you talk to your wife about your past?*

[01:42:59]

Oh, she knows most of it but we never had lengthy discussions about that. We, we tended to look to the future and to the well-being of our daughters.

*Do you think it had an impact on your daughters at all?*

Do I think what?

*Your history? Do you think it had any impact on your children?*

No. They're making their own way through life very successfully.

*But are they interested? They are interested?*

Oh yes.

*And how do you feel... Something I didn't ask you- how do you feel towards Germany today?*

Politically?

*Or...*

I'm, I'm not well enough established to comment on that except that I regard the activities of Angela Merkel... as strange in the sense that she's now inviting immigrants into the country almost as if to make on- make amends for the years when they did the opposite.

*And you are an example where politics really invaded private lives.*

Yes.

*In that sense...So how, how do you feel about your father today?*

My father?... I have no feelings.

He's been neutralised out of my life.

[01:45:02]

*It seems... not difficult to understand.*

*But you know that within one family you have somebody- you know- somebody who is a Nazi and married to a Jewish woman?*

*Is there anything else- I asked you whether your members of any organisation relevant?*

I used to belong to a tennis club but I've given that up now.

*What about Judaism? Is it something you, you were never interested in?*

Sorry?

*Judaism.*

No.

*No, would you consider yourself Jewish at all?*

No.

*No. And your mother? How did she see herself here in England?*

English. Anglican.

*Also not interested in that part?*

*Ok, I think we have covered many different themes.*

*If there's anything else?*

Who will have access to this film?

*So, anyone who will go to where, to a repository sort of The Wiener Library or other places.  
And who wants to do some research. This is mainly for research...for somebody*

Is it limited?

*The access?*

Yes.

*I'll tell you. I can talk you through and we can discuss it.*

*And you tell me what you'd like to do in terms of access.*

*So, in the meantime I would say, Mr. Willer, thank you so much for sharing your story with us. And we're going to look at some of your photographs now.*

It is a pleasure. You've been very professional about this all. Who employs you?

*The AJR is running this project.*

Who?

*The Association of Jewish Refugees.*

Aha. Are you the only one in the UK?

*Well, we have a team doing the interviews.*

Is that well-paid?

*No [laughs]*

### **Photographs**

The elderly lady in the back is my grandmother.

[01:47:41]

There were two boys, Otto and Richard and two girls Mariella and Franziska on the right.

*When was it taken- when roughly? Turn of the century maybe?*

1905.

This is my grandfather with his medical colleagues at the University of Würzburg.

This is my mother with her future husband, my father.

*When?*

1927

*Thank you.*

This is me. Hans Paul Willer in 1928.

*With who?*

With my mother.

This would be about 1936. Mariana's...the children of Mariana who's a sister of my mother playing together in the garden... Peter, Christoph, and myself.

My mother, Franziska, my brother Peter and myself, Hans Paul 1943.

*In where?*

No idea.

*Which country?*

England.

My three daughters and wife.

The daughters' names of Joanna, Judith and Jacqueline 1943 in Hertfordshire.

*Must be after the war. This must be after the war.*

Sorry. Just in I mean 19' sorry start again. Myself, my wife and three children Joanna, Judith and Jacqueline in Hertfordshire, 1969.

[01:50:09]

*Thank you.*

1972

*Who is on this picture?*

OK here we go again- daughters Joanna, Judith and Jacqueline, Hertfordshire 1972.

*Mr. Willer, I'd like to thank you again for this interview.*

**[01:50:24]**

**[End of photographs]**