

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	64

Interviewee Surname:	Boxer
Forename:	Fred
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	19 June 1920
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

Date of Interview:	10 June 2004
Location of Interview:	West Hagley
Name of Interviewer:	Helen Lloyd
Total Duration (HH:MM):	2 hours and 15 minutes

**REFUGEE VOICES:
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE****INTERVIEW: 64****NAME: FRED BOXER****DATE: 10 JUNE 2004****LOCATION: WEST HAGLEY****INTERVIEWER: HELEN LLOYD****TAPE 1**

HL: This is an interview with Freddie Boxer on the 10th of June 2004 in West Hagley and my name is Helen Lloyd.

HL: Tell me about your father's family.

FB: Very very orthodox Jewish religious in those days from Galizien. In those days... it was part of the Austrian Empire. I don't know much about them because at the time... I visited Poland when I was about 2 or 3 years old. So I didn't see much. I know he had a beard and wore a yarmulke or whatever it's called to wear, and they were orthodox. And that's...my father did serve in the Army. Austrian Empire Army. For a little while anyway, but then he was released because he had a problem with his... stomach. He had to have an operation. That's all I know about...my grandparents I know very little. I'm sorry I never saw much of them because obviously I lost them as well as I lost my parents and I lost my sister. I lost all of my relatives... in the holocaust.

HL: I should have asked you about your name and date of birth, and where you were born, so I'll let you do that now.

FB: I was born in Vienna on the 19th of June, 1920.

HL: And your name?

FB: And my name on my birth certificate is Friedrich Boxer. And now for short – Freddie Boxer.

HL: And tell me what you know about your mother's family?

FB: Very little again. Because in those days I think it was the males who were the dominant part of the family, and... My mother came from a family called Welker: W- E -L- K- E- R. Her Jewish name was Taube Beile. They changed her name to Bertha. When she came to... After she married my father, she came to live in Vienna.

She worked very hard in the coffee house. She changed her name to Bertha. Bertha Boxer. She was born on the 26th of August in 1888. My father was born a year earlier in 1887. I don't know much about my mother's family. All I know is that she had a brother who came visiting from America. He settled in the Bronx in New York. And he visited when I was young. Very young – six or seven, eight years old. He came to visit. I wish we had gone back with him.

Tape 1: 3 minutes 47 seconds

HL: Do you know why your parents came to Vienna?

FB: He – the father had served in the army. He was granted a licence – in those days coffee licences were very rare and difficult to get – but because he served in the army he was granted a licence by the emperor Franz Josef. The fashionable part of coffee houses was - today it still is - Vienna. It's the city of coffee houses. There were more coffee houses in Vienna than anywhere else in the world.

HL: How did your mother come to Vienna?

FB: She got married. I haven't got the marriage certificate. She followed my father because they... I've got a photograph somewhere. They had three children. Oswald was the first one. I was the second one: Friedrich. And then Helene, Helen - the girl, she was last. Oswald was born in 1915. So, in other words it must have been just as the war was starting. He probably was with the Army, you see.

HL: And when you were born were they already running the coffee house?

FB: Yes. Yes.

HL: What are your earliest memories?

FB: What can one remember when one is three, four, or five years old? Not a lot. It was a good life. Very, very, very orthodox. Not ultra-orthodox you know when you get these (he gestures on temples to indicate) locks - I didn't have those. But they were still very religious. A proper Jewish household. All I can remember is - I had to behave. There was no – on a Saturday, no smoking, no lighting. This sort of... It was a religious -in German we call it *frum* – household. And we were a happy family, by and large. I spent my childhood more or less in the park or at school. I did well at school.

Tape 1: 6 minutes 23 seconds

HL: What was your school like?

FB: Just like a primary school. I went to primary school until I was 12 - 10 or 12. And then I went to Gymnasium the middle school in Austria, and then I went to college to be trained in radio mechanics and *Technik*. And then Hitler came - and put an end to everything.

HL: Let's go back to your early memories of the coffee house. Can you describe the coffee house? As much as you can remember?

FB: It was. At first it started out as a very small coffee house. It only had about – to begin with – it only had about 20 tables. But, my father made it – enlarged it, the front and the back. First it was called the Markt Coffee House – I'll show you a picture. Then afterward he called it after our name, Café Boxer.

HL: What street was it in?

FB: Esterhazygasse in the 6th district.... Esterhazy, after Count Esterhazy. And it was very well frequented. We even had a piano there which was being played by a musician weekends. So we had weekend music. Otherwise we had a play room where people played chess and cards. That's how I learned how to play chess. I was a fairly good chess player, believe it or not.

HL: What kind of people came to the coffee house?

Tape 1: 8 minutes 14 seconds

FB: All sorts. But in Vienna it's a standard sort of... you get the same clientele almost daily. People who maybe are not married...I don't know at the time, you see... and come to coffee houses for their breakfast or their lunch. It wasn't a restaurant but we did serve snacks and we did serve alcoholic liqueurs, and beer – in bottles. People come to coffee houses to read newspapers. They don't buy newspapers in Vienna. In coffee houses you are obliged to carry newspapers and then in frames you hang on the wall, then pick up the frame, open it, and read the newspaper. Sometimes people with just a cup of coffee could spend 4 or 5 hours there. But it's all very friendly.

HL: Was it mainly men who came?

FB: No, no, no, but ja - mainly men. Because they played cards, in the back room. Chess.

HL: Were many of the clients Jewish, do you think?

FB: It wasn't – the area we lived in - the sixth - wasn't the Jewish area. The second area in Vienna, they called it the second Bezirk, that was very, very Jewish, I think. Ninety percent Jewish. But in the 6th... The other name for the sixth district was called *Mariahilf* which means "helped by Maria". [Laughs] And there were some Jewish. All sorts of people. People who used to go to work, and come and have a break at lunchtime: office people, shop people.

HL: Would you say that your family was well-to-do?

FB: We were comfortable. I think...My parents were mainly concerned that the kids had... were well clothed, well fed. Besides it cost I think, more to feed a Jewish family than it cost to feed a Christian family because we had to buy kosher food. You have to go to special areas or go to special butchers, special dealers where you could get kosher food. And you pay extra for that pleasure, as in England.

HL: Can you remember those shops and where they were?

Tape 1: 10 minutes 57 seconds

FB: Oh, there were shops in the same road- one or two shops where we lived. I think the meat was being delivered by a kosher butcher, so it was somewhere entirely different. Not in our area. The meat in our area was not kosher so it was not suitable.

HL: Was the food you served in the coffee shop not kosher?

FB: No, no, that wasn't. We didn't really – we didn't serve ham or bacon, but we...you know... I think in the coffee shop people just had fried eggs, boiled eggs – things like that - which is acceptable. And...

HL: What were your father and mother actually doing in the coffee shop? How did they spend their days?

FB: My mother was a very hard working mother. She used to bake special Viennese pastry. Strudel. Apple strudel. And my father was the expert on the coffee. He used to inspect the coffee that it was properly brewed... he had to do it all manually initially. I think only in the later years, just before, I think in 1936 or 1937, he bought an Italian coffee-making machine. And he was so proud of it! It cost a lot of money. So the coffee was much easier. You see? If you buy an espresso machine you don't have to work so hard. But in the past he used to have to use special bags and sieves and put the coffee in and boil it. Oh God. Very complicated. But my mother used to work very hard. I remember... her making... baking strudel. She had to pull the dough over the table.

HL: And what was your father doing?

FB: Oh he was concerned with running the coffee house and such. But I think in those days he also had a little spare occupation. He used to help in a tailor's outfitters in the second district. Initially they were friends and then became part of his past time. And then of course, there were the kids to be looked after. To be brought up.

Tape 1: 13 minutes 33 seconds

HL: So when you were small who did take care of you while your mother was...?

FB: Oh we had a nanny. We had a kitchen maid which was the sister of the nanny and then we had the nanny. Rosa Schogusch [?]. She was mainly concerned to look after my sister and myself who were the younger ones in the family. Because Oswald – he was already, I suppose he was... was five years older than me and six and a half years older than Helen. So he didn't need a nurse, maybe he had a nurse at the beginning. I don't know. Not sure. But we did have a nurse.

HL: Was she Jewish?

FB: No. No she wasn't. But the children didn't have to be Kosher you know? We were allowed to eat ham. If we were not at home. On holiday, you see? Rosa – that was the nanny... She used to take us on holiday down to Austria, down to her relatives. And we ate everything! [Laughs]

HL: Were you part of the Jewish community as you grew up?

FB: Oh yes. There was a synagogue very nearby. Walking distance. I don't remember the name of the road. It doesn't exist any more. I think it was burnt down on the 10th of November. Kristallnacht.

Tape 1: 15 minutes 12 seconds

HL: And what are your memories of the synagogue?

FB: I used to go there. Mainly Friday night. Because my father used to say, "Come on, you have to go." That was the rule. My brother – elder brother - didn't bother too much – he got out of it somehow. I used to go and I used to lay the – what do you call them – tefillin - prayer shawls and all that. I was brought up in a very Jewish manner, even when I emigrated – when I left for Shanghai - he just told me "don't forget to do your prayers" but of course these things... go out. The habit disappears. And what consequently happened to me did my religious belief not a lot of good. Because my parents were so devout, were so religious –yet – as you know... what happened...

HL: Can you remember the name of the synagogue you went to?

FB: No. Oh no.

HL: What do you remember about your parents' friends?

FB: I think... it's strange but they didn't have a lot of...circle of friends. They had the occasional ones. But it was mainly relatives. I had quite a few relatives in Vienna. There was the brother of my father. Then there were cousins... from the mother's side. And we used to go visiting, I suppose. That was the day's outing. "Today we are going to see Uncle Josef or Tante Rosa..." Etc, etc. That was I think, our main... But in the end you see, they were working hard in the coffee house. It really needed a special... A business like that has to be tended to almost permanently because you are vulnerable. You take cash. In those days there were no computers. They'd write down chits...as they – pardon?

HL: Was there time for any social or cultural life?

Tape 1: 17 minutes 51 seconds

FB: I don't think so. It was at home. Social life was: family, family, family, as far as I can remember. Oh yes, my father was a very, very high supporter of Viennese music. So he used to take me to the concerts. And I became very fond of music. It's still there. I used to go to the Opera House. Although maybe we couldn't afford the expensive seats so I used to go up, go high up in the terraces on the fourth floor. Just

stand up for three and four hours... Sometimes you had to queue for an hour or two to get tickets.

HL: Can you remember any of the productions at the opera?

FB: Oh yes. I used to go to lots of opera. 'Aida' was the one which sticks because of... the animals - it was with elephants. When I started at 15 I used to go to concerts on a regular basis. I became an avid autograph collector. So I used to go round the back stage of the Opera House or the theatre and collect autographs. I had a very very good collection of autographs, but I wasn't allowed to take it with me. Because you weren't allowed to take stamps or anything valuable. You had to leave... when you left, or emigrated, the maximum we were allowed was \$10 and no valuables. Anything you took was confiscated.

HL: Can you remember any particularly famous autographs?

Tape 1: 19 minutes 34 seconds

FB: Oh I did. I had the Chancellor, because I used to be in the Scouts and he was the head of the Scouts. Dollfuss - but then he was assassinated. Then there was Richard Tauber. The singer. The composer Franz Lehar I used to go to his house on a regular basis to get an autograph... He let me in. And singers - Jan Kiepura. Marta Ebert. Peter Lorre. The only one I never did get. Now I speak Russian fluently but in those days I couldn't. There was a singer called Chaliapin - he was the greatest, like Caruso or Pavarotti today. I saw him many times outside the opera house and approached him, and he would just say "Go away! Go away!" Don't want to know.

HL: What are your memories of Lehar's house?

FB: Lehar? Franz Lehar? Oh! He just had a flat! I still remember this. I forget the name of the road. No 13. On the first floor. I used to go up. I'd ring the bell. But he was always very kind. He composed lots of operas, you know? 'Land of Smiles'. 'The Merry Widow'. Very kind man. Never refused. But I had a *huge* collection of autographs! That would today be worth a packet.

Tape 1: 21 minutes 20 seconds

HL: You mentioned you were in the scouts. What ages were you in the scouts?

FB: I was in the scouts when I was 10 or 11. For a little while.

HL: Any memories of that?

FB: No. Just going out into the woods - the Vienna Woods. Camping. Oh I had... I had a bit of a talent for cooking, so I was usually the chef in the scouts. I used to make pasta - covered with chocolate sauce [Laughs] - easy, easy. And the kids used to love it.

HL: And any of these organisations like the Scouts or the school you belonged to - were they Jewish?

FB: No. No. No, no, no. They weren't Jewish at all. But they weren't affiliated to any religion.

HL: What was your first school like?

FB: They called it the *Volksschule*...that was primary school. I was good at it. If I wasn't – because we used to be very friendly with the teacher - his name was Baer. If I didn't do well he used to come to our house or to the coffee house and have a cup of coffee and have something and have a chat with my parents to see how I was progressing. I was alright. So I progressed so much that I went into the – they called it in Vienna the secondary school is the *Gymnasium*. The middle school.

HL: Can you remember the names of your schools or where they were?

FB: Yes I do. *Gymnasium* was in the Amerlinggasse. The primary school was in the Kopernikusgasse. That was in the same area – 6th - walking distance. In those days ... there were no cars, no chauffeur. Today our children go to school with transport provided. In those days: walk. Any weather. Whether it was minus 20, minus 19 or plus 15 – we walk. And... the *Gymnasium* was in the Amerlinggasse. It's still a college there now. That's in the 6th district.

Tape 1: 23 minutes 50 seconds

HL: Do you feel you got a good education?

FB: Very fair, but I had to supplement because I dropped out. It was difficult for Jewish people. So I dropped out and went into college.

HL: And in what way was it difficult for you?

FB: Some subjects... I was good at two or three subjects. I was good at maths and I was good at Latin – would you believe it? Languages. Physics and chemistry I was hopeless. Absolutely hopeless. So in the end we had these friends. His name was Goldschmied and he had a radio shop in the 6th – no the 7th district. So he said to my father, "I'd like to give him a job. He's a talented boy, he could learn something there! You don't have to keep him in school, he doesn't do this he doesn't do that. Maybe he'll learn something there!" so I had... I became an apprentice. I had to go to a special college to get further education in wiring... So I became a radio...I've got a certificate to that effect.

HL: At what age did you become an apprentice?

FB: 14? 15?

HL: You said it was difficult for Jewish people already. In what way?

FB: There was always this mumbling of anti-Semitism, you know?

HL: Can you remember any examples?

FB: They just said 'dirty Jew' or this and that.

HL: From teachers as well?

FB: No. No, not from teachers. Although when Hitler came, the teacher that I liked best who taught geography, he appeared on the second day after the Germans marched in in an SS uniform. He came in... Oh he looked really – dressed up like a general. Oh, well... But these are bad memories, really.

HL: When did you go to the commercial college? Was that 1934?

FB: Ja. 1935. 1936.

HL: What was the atmosphere like at that college?

FB: That's - was not too bad, you see. But that was commercial. But then you see, when I was in the *Gymnasium* I didn't attend religious education. In those days Austria was very Catholic. Because I didn't attend, I attended Jewish religious education.

Tape 1: 27 minutes 6 seconds

HL: Was it provided in the school?

FB: Yeah. Special hour after. I think it was after school, more or less.

HL: So everybody knew you were Jewish?

FB: Oh yes.

HL: What about in the commercial college?

FB: No. That was voluntary. That was not obligatory to take religious education. But at the *Gymnasium* religious education was obligatory. I can't remember though... I participated in *Gymnasium* in a choir. Not the Vienna Boys Choir, but we had a nice choir and I had a good voice. I was a soprano somebody told me. I was doing quite a bit of singing. [Laughs] Somehow I never managed to learn an instrument. I would have done but my brother, the older brother. He was taught, or they were trying to teach him how to play the violin but he never really took to it... I would have taken to it but I wasn't given the chance.

HL: Why not?

FB: I don't know. Too busy. It was the family. One has to do this and one has to do something else. I already had got my education sorted out to become a radio mechanic or technician or whatever. Then there was my sister you see. She was going to friends and messing about with the piano. But she didn't get proper lessons.

HL: Can you remember anything else that you did in your spare time? You mentioned scouting and singing...

Tape 1: 28 minutes 55 seconds

FB: A lot of football. A lot of football. In the park. Locally.

HL: Did you belong to a team?

FB: No, no. You sort out – you make your own team. Not everybody's a captain but we are quite enthusiastic football players.

HL: Can you remember the name of the park where you played?

FB: Yes. Esterhazy Park. Esterhazy was the street and Esterhazy was the park.

HL: And then talk about your time working in radio.

Tape 1: 29 minutes 32 seconds

FB: It was a very good radio store. Like today – as far as Vienna was concerned it was classified. It was well-known like Woolworth's. Not Marks and Spencer. But there was one. We only had one. But it was Jewish. And I worked out what I had to..it was difficult.... whatever you did you had to work very hard you see and there was no transport but the bus sometimes. I had to demonstrate the radio. The radio used to weigh about 30kg. Tremendous radio. Not earphones but loudspeaker. And to demonstrate, we had to go out into the country. Somebody wants to buy a radio you had to come around and show... you had to demonstrate it. You had to carry it.

HL: On the bus?

FB: Whatever. On the bus. You had to carry it. On the train. Good train service in Vienna. Ja.

Tape 1: 30 minutes 40 seconds

HL: Can you remember what your customers were like?

FB: Same as today. Wanted to make sure you were doing... I had to make sure everything was done correctly because I had a supervisor at the shop. "How did it go?" I says... If I effected the sale, that was good, but if I mess about so then I didn't effect a sale. It wasn't problematic. I got a certificate to show that I did a reasonably good job. So even when the Jewish firm was taken over by Christians, which was obligatory, you know? They called it '*arisiert*'. That means: the Jewish people - the shop has to be taken over. They get no compensation. Like they took ours, but ours was shut – the coffee house. But Goldschmied was taken over by a firm called Spaedeke... he was *Sudetendeutsch* from the Sudeten part of Czechoslovakia. Do you know what that is?

HL: You mentioned just mutterings about ‘dirty Jews’ among fellow pupils. What are any of your memories of anything more serious than that?

FB: I didn’t get into any... besides I wasn’t Jewish looking. No, you know? I was light blond. Very light blond. And... I got on all right with my mates. I think. It’s only when Hitler came, that’s when things became... worse.

Tape 1: 32 minutes 37 seconds

HL: And what are your memories of that?

FB: Terrible. I mean a boy I went to school with. We used to be quite friendly. We went on holiday. To the Wörthersee and whatnot... Used to be close pals. And near the 10th of November, after...he came around to the coffee house. Or it was before then. I had to come out and I had to paint “Jew” on the floor and on the window and the Star of David. You know?

HL: And your friend did that?

FB: Ja!

Tape 1: 33 minutes 19 seconds

HL: Did anyone employ him to do that?

FB: Oh no. He had volunteered. He had already the uniform on with the swastika. They volunteered for this. To go Jew-baiting.

HL: And can you remember speaking to him?

FB: Yeah! I was proud. I wasn’t ashamed. I said “What else do you want me to do?” But I didn’t want to argue too much because otherwise you could get a hiding as well.

HL: What else happened?

FB: What?

HL: After Hitler came in?

FB: Well, I met another friend of mine...it was just a sheer – that’s why I think it’s a miracle that I’m still here – it was just by coincidence. I met him in the road because we tried to emigrate. Anywhere. But nobody would let the Jews in... so I met somebody called Bamberger. I played football with him. He said ‘Fritzl, do you know?’ (He used to call me ‘Fritzl’) ‘You can get, for 100 dollars. You can go to the Intourist and buy a ticket and go to Shanghai. You don’t need a visa, nothing. Just go there.’ I went home to my father and said ‘Look, I don’t want to go through this all the time.’ I’m going to Shanghai. My mother broke down in tears. It was awful but they saw that I was determined. So, they scraped together what they could. Sold what they could because everything was taken over. The bank account was closed; the coffee house was taken away. I think they also locked our apartment. Ja. For a period.

Had to be thrown out and move into somebody else's... There were lots of, no not lots – there were five or six Jewish families living in the same block of flats and we were crammed together for a while. So it took some effort to get 100 American dollars together, you know. But they got it together. And then I got 10 dollars for going-away money. And I went to the Intourist in Vienna on the Ringstrasse and bought a ticket to Shanghai. 100 American dollars. And that incorporated everything. The train fare via the Trans Siberian Express. And food - whilst in Russia. No food outside Russia. So...

Tape 1: 36 minutes 20 seconds

HL: Did they have any thoughts of emigrating themselves, your parents?

FB: Well I was hoping to get them out you see. But I had a job also in Shanghai. It was a lot of money in those days, 100 American dollars. I thought I would raise it. But I would have had to raise \$300. And it was difficult. You couldn't get it. And then the war broke out. And the door shut.

HL: What did your parents do after the coffee house was closed?

FB: Nothing. They just sat and moped. What could they do? And hopefully, nothing happened. My sister was helpful because my mother fell ill. She had an ongoing cancer or something. But she had jaundice... all the time yellow, yellow, yellow. Nothing much could be done. No doctors, you know. But my younger sister was an - an angel. Very helpful and she wouldn't leave mother. You see, maybe she could have gone and saved herself. But she would not leave her mother.

Tape 1: 37 minutes 36 seconds

HL: Can you remember where they were living after your flat was taken?

FB: No...After about a month later, they opened up again and go back in. Some things... any valuables in there were gone – they were missing but there was the bed linen which was still there. And that's it... I remember.

HL: Did you know other people who were getting out at that time?

FB: Well I went to Shanghai. And I think that was about...not from Vienna but all together in Shanghai there was about 20,000 European Jews arrived during that period.

HL: Did your family come to say goodbye to you?

FB: Well I said goodbye to my mother and my mother was - she was in a terrible state. She used to go like this (rocks back and forth) just cry, cry, cry. Oh yes, my brother at the time was already arrested. He'd tried to cross the border to France. And they arrested him near Saarbrücken near the border and he came back. But I helped...When I was in Shanghai I kept writing to my uncle in New York in the Bronx at least to help my brother to get him out. So he sent him a visa... and on that visa he got... he sent him some papers that told him he could get to America. But he

has to wait, so for the period that he has to wait he was allowed to come to England. Oswald, you see? And he came to England and the war broke out and then he was taken to Canada and to a camp... But he came back to England afterwards and spent his years here during the war.

Tape 1: 39 minutes 35 seconds

HL: What year did Oswald get out of Vienna?

FB: 19...Beginning 193... just before the war broke out.

HL: And what month and what year did you leave Vienna?

FB: I left on the 17th of November. I was arrested on the 10th together with my father to go to Dachau concentration camp. We were lined up. In a yard. All Jews, and communists, and there was shouting going on. And I already had my paper that I was emigrating to Shanghai. That was standard...From there they would be taken with lorries to Dachau. So... I already thought 'this is it'. We were arrested on the street. We were just going to visit somebody who was going to help advise us... somebody in Germany who would help me along to go to Poland and from there on to Shanghai. So as we came out there were two SS men, who said 'Come! Into the yard'. So they were standing up at attention, so I came up to one of those Nazis and I says, 'Look, what do you want from me? Dachau, whatever, concentration camp. Where I'm going is much worse than a concentration camp. I've just had cholera, typhus, all the injections - smallpox - because they've got all those illnesses where I'm going.' So I showed him the papers. And they said 'Moment.' And after about 5 minutes somebody shouted out 'Boxer!' So I came out. There was somebody sitting there. I said 'There are my papers. I'm going to Shanghai next week.' That was on the 10th. Blah blah.blah: they took and looked at the paper. 'Out! You can go.'...I said, 'No no I can't go - my father's still in there.' 'What's the name?' 'Heinrich Boxer!' 'Are you also going to Shanghai?' And I kicked my father - I still remember that - underneath and he said, 'Ja'. 'Ja ja!' so he realised. The fellows who were sitting there knew our coffee house. He says, 'I know your coffee house, you know.' We said 'It's no longer our coffee house. It's been taken away'.

HL: Where was this yard that you were all taken to?

FB: The 9th or 10th district. It was near the hospital where I went for inoculations. And I went there and then I went to see somebody to try and help with some record, who knew someone in Berlin...and from Warsaw to Russia - on to Moscow. It was a long journey. Three weeks, four weeks.

HL: When you were arrested with your father. Was that in November 1938?

Tape 1: 43 minutes 0 second

FB: That's right. On the 10th. That was the day when a lot of Jewish people got killed and got sent to concentration... That was what they call the 'Crystal Night'.

HL: Did you hear what happened to any of the other people who were left behind in the yard?

FB: Nobody ever heard anything what happened to them. They were taken. They didn't come back. Nobody. It was a miracle that I got away. If I hadn't met that friend who told me to go to Intourist. If I hadn't had the ticket on me at the time... I would be only a number now, of millions. That's why I say, you know, you look back and I think 'Why am I still here?' Maybe there is a reason for it. Maybe my children, they are the reason for it...

HL: And you left?

Tape 1: 44 minutes 15 seconds

FB: I left on the 17th November. Westbahnhof – that's the railway station, and from there on to Berlin. From Berlin we had to get off and on the following day we stayed in the railway station. And then on to the train to go to Poland and from Poland to get onto the Russian...I kissed the floor when I crossed the border, believe you me...That I remember! It was in a place called Negrovolye(?) at the Polish-Russian border.

HL: You were 18 years old and you didn't speak Polish or Russian?

FB: I didn't speak anything. Not English, Russian. Only knew German. But on the train – I must have had a talent - I learnt a few Russian words like 'spassiba'... And now I'm fluent in Russian. Because I lived with a Russian family in Shanghai, the one where I used to work - in a nightclub. I stayed with them.

HL: Tell me more about the journey. Get us to Shanghai.

Tape 1: 45 minutes 30 seconds

FB: Oh! It was two weeks to reach Moscow first. Via Siberia. Omsk. Tomsk. Novosibirsk and all these places... I mean you look out the window and it's all frozen. Steppes. Snow and ice. Nothing else. It was so cold that even the screws inside the train you could see it was all frozen. I was already on the train for a week. I had to get some fresh air. Just opened the door and I tried to get out of the train. And I did. I jumped out. Everyone was with clothes and furs and everything. And within seconds. I think it was 30 seconds, my eyes, my ears, my nose everything froze! Instantly! I think I only just managed to run from one end of the wagon to the next to get back into the train. What a sensation. You cannot imagine that. Apparently the temperature – the stewardess on the train, she spoke some German - she said, 'minus 50 centigrade.' That's chilly.

HL: Did you meet any other Jewish people on the train?

FB: Yes there was a whole party of about 20 of us who also went to Shanghai.

HL: Did you have any contacts in Shanghai?

FB: No. Nobody. One of them, a fellow called Klingsberg he used to come to our coffee house. So he was on the train. He was very helpful to me later – years later. Because we kept in touch... But when we came to Shanghai there were Jewish organisations for refugees. Especially one man, he could have helped a lot, but he didn't. He helped to some extent. I tried to get money to get my parents out...hah... but no fear. He didn't. His name was Sir Victor Sassoon. Very famous man. He was knighted here in England. Big horse, lots of horses. Sir Victor Sassoon. He owned half of Shanghai. Jewish. And he was running sort of...offices to help refugees. Some people, when they wanted to open a shop or something if they had professions managed to get a little financial help. But I...I was too young. I was only 18.

Tape 1: 48 minutes 29 seconds

HL: Did you go to see him?

FB: Oh yes but, no consequence... 'Work your way'. Oh ja, I didn't tell you that! That's not all. The most important part was when I got to Moscow, we got off. All of us. And we were taken to the Metropole for lunch... a very nice lunch – nothing like in Vienna. I still remember all those waiters. In those days the waiters had to be absolutely shaven clean. And then we went on through north China - Manchuria ... we went through a town called Harbin. And there was a committee already, meeting the new refugees. 'What's your name? What's your name?' 'Boxer' 'Boxer? We have a Boxer here in Harbin!' And would you believe it there was a family Boxer. Same surname. Could have been related. So they said, 'Come off.' Very rich. They gave me a fantastic time. He was a furrier. He was a famous furrier in Harbin. They invited me and this and that. They clubbed together and they made an evening for all the refugees. And at one time I thought they were going to try and keep me there. I wouldn't have minded. Somebody looked. Young boy- good looking. I wouldn't have minded. Fix me up, get him married. I said, 'Whatever.' But the Japanese would not allow it. It was already occupied by the Japanese by then. The visa said 'Shanghai', Shanghai he goes. If he wants to come back he can apply, but he has to have good reasons. But now, he goes to Shanghai. But the Boxers had some family in Shanghai too and they were very nice to me too. So I stayed with them. His granddaughter I think or daughter.

HL: So you had somewhere to stay when you arrived?

FB: No, I stayed in a camp, my dear. When we first arrived – it was a hostel. We stayed in a hostel. Three, four, five people in a room. OK? And later on I could stay with the Boxers in Shanghai. But I wasn't one to impose, you know, on too many people. I was always self-sufficient.

Tape 1: 51 minutes 27 seconds

HL: Can you remember what your aims or expectations were at that stage?

FB: Nothing. I thought I'd get a job, most important. And I did get a job for a little while. I got a job in a restaurant as a waiter because I grew up in a coffee house and I knew what to do. And there was this restaurant called 'Fiaker'. *Fiaker* is a name for a horse and carriage in Vienna. That's a nickname. And it was a very smart

restaurant; believe you me, very smart. Sir Victor Sassoon used to come there. And General MacArthur. He won the war for the Americans in the Far East or something to that effect. It was very exclusive. I had a job! And then, somebody saw me working there. There was a bar – a nightclub and restaurant - across the road. That was called ‘American Bar’. He...kept talking to me in Yiddish. ‘Freddy, are you happy there?’ ‘No, not too happy. But...it’s a job.’ ‘Why aren’t you happy?’ ‘Oh because the chef is a bit of a homosexual. He keeps nagging, nagging, and I don’t like that.’ He said, ‘You come and work for us.’ So he gave me a job in the nightclub. In the bar. And I worked like that for quite a little while, you know? But then the war came. Pearl Harbour. When Pearl Harbour came we had to go back into the camp – back into internment.

Tape 1: 53 minutes 30 seconds

HL: When you say back into internment?

FB: I was in the beginning under the Japanese staying in that camp. But then I came out and got a job and so on. But that camp was kept open for refugees. But then the Japs took over the running of this camp. And there was a fellow who called himself the King of the Jews. His name was Goya. He said ‘I am the King of the Jews! Stand to attention!’ He used to sit there, you know? But at least they did not exterminate. The Germans wanted those Japanese people who were in charge of the camp to start something similar to what they had in Auschwitz or whatnot. The Japanese didn’t...I had heard of some punishments meted out by Goya, the King of Jews. Like, there was a bunker outside the camp. It was just sectioned. Open air in winter. So, for punishment sometimes they kept...they made you stay there for punishment. You had to spend a week there. And I think one or two elderly people died there out of cold or something.

HL: When you arrived at that camp, had it been run by Chinese people?

FB: No it was run by ourselves. We ran it. The refugees. We – somebody - was put in charge... there was a kitchen. Then there was washing up. We had to look after ourselves. You had to fend for yourself. But I think the money came in from abroad, from America, I think, to finance medicines, ...food, etc. But we had people working there – we ourselves had to work there. To clean, you had to make your bed, etc. It was just a camp.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 40 seconds

HL: So when the Japanese took over they obviously fortified it?

FB: You were only allowed with special, special permission. They had to give you special passports. You had to give a special reason why you want to come to Shanghai – to come out. For little while I did, but I wasn’t a good prisoner. I...I absconded for a few days and then somebody found out about it and they put me back in, they put me in a cell for a little while, you know... That’s - that was the camp in Shanghai, and we only were let out after the 8th of August 1945.

HL: When you absconded, was that quite early on?

FB: No, I had a girlfriend, you see. And she put me up for a little while. I married her in the end. She was Russian.

HL: How did you get out of the camp?

Tape 1: 56 minutes 48 seconds

FB: Well, I got it on the... You had to renew it, you see? But they give you a big...sort of a picture and they say you are allowed to work. And I didn't come back in. For a little while. Not much. I had a little bit of freedom. It was sweet. That was my first wife, then, you see?

TAPE 2

HL: Can you tell me how you met your wife in Shanghai?

FB: Well, as I said I started to work in this nightclub, or restaurant, when I left this Fiaker restaurant because of being molested. I was a young boy then. I didn't like the man always insinuating, you know, and his associates I did not like either. His name was Fritz. He used to be a comedian on stage in Vienna... Named Fritz Strehlen. So I quit and went there to work. And one day, a young lady was there in the restaurant. They were having a little birthday party and they said 'Come and sit with us!' I had a dance with her. And it started an ... acquaintance I would say, in those days. And as I was already in a camp – I was only out on permission to go and work. Yes. It was 1941. After Pearl Harbour. We became acquainted and it developed from there. And we – you know - we became closer and closer until I moved in with her for a little while. Although that was very secretive because I was supposed to be in the camp. Not out. But that was my get-out. Otherwise I would have had to go back into the camp night time. So I stayed away until somebody, we don't know who...But there were a lot of spies around, you know? People who were looking around to see what you were doing - at the time. Although, at that time because I was working with that Russian emigrant family. His name was Georg Sulmit - not a Russian name, but there you are – Jewish. They were talking in Russian all the time and I gradually picked up the Russian language. And now thank God I speak it fluently and I read it. Because when war broke out and the Russians declared war, the only newspaper that was available in Shanghai was a Russian newspaper. So. And, the young lady that I met, she couldn't speak English either. Very little. So we conversed in Russian. So I pretended to be a Russian for a little while until somebody and they went and told somebody.... and they came and arrested me and took me...took me to prison for a little while. That was – that was a bad time. Because "...I was in a cell with five or six people and they were all ridden with lice and lice carry the illness that I caught – typhoid, or typhus, as it's called. And that's a very dangerous illness. They put me in a hospital ward – it wasn't a hospital - it was a special ward for a little while. On the floor. My first wife, in those days. She managed to get... bribe a doctor to come and have a look at me. He gave me some medication. And the doctor said, 'He has got very little chance of survival. He's not very strong, this boy. But, we'll do our best...besides he has been...there has been alcohol in his system.' Because I had been working in a nightclub and it was part of my profession to drink with people. Anyway, cut a long story short. He said, 'If he survives this,' (because you get a very

high temperature with typhus, 42 or something), 'If you survive this, it kills all known germs.' And that's what it did. I survived. Apparently every bad system I had in my body, after all this, it was eliminated with the high fever. So, after I served my – I can't remember – it was two-three or four weeks in a cell: back into the camp.

Tape 2: 5 minutes 10 seconds

HL: Was the cell part of the camp?

FB: Yes, as far as I know.

HL: And was the hospital ward part of the camp?

FB: It wasn't a hospital ward.

HL: The ward, was that...?

FB: It was just a big room. Sick people were on the floor. They were either dying or living. One or the other. But it was nearby.

HL: How was your wife able to get a doctor into the camp?

FB: Bribery. You know. Secret. I don't know. Bribery.

HL: How did she get to hear that you were ill?

FB: Oh, I was communicating.

HL: How?

FB: Sent notes.

HL: Was that allowed?

FB: I don't know... I think... No, she came visiting – didn't she? Once I was taken as a prisoner because I didn't go back into the camp. We were allowed visitors once a month or once a week – I don't know. Anyway she did...She was a good woman. Saved my life I suppose. In those days.

Tape 2: 6 minutes 17 seconds

HL: You haven't told me when you got married. What happened?

FB: Oh then we didn't get married until one day after the atomic bomb. You see? Otherwise she would have had to go to a camp too.

HL: Was that why you didn't get married before then?

FB: That's right. I got married on the 11th of August 1945. I remember it now. 11th or 12th. Ja. The atomic bomb was dropped on the 8th of August, 1945. That's when the war ended. And the Japanese disappeared into thin air.

HL: How many years were you in the camp?

FB: Well it must have been two and a half – nearly three years.

HL: Can you describe how you spent your time?

FB: Working in the kitchen. I was a kitchen boy, sort of. Helping to clean up. Help with the cooking - to clean potatoes. The kitchen! Because there were a lot of people in the camp – maybe 1,000 or 800. Only one camp. A long queue.

HL: What are your memories of the other people? What kind of people?

Tape 2: 7 minutes 39 seconds

FB: Refugees. All sorts. German Jews. All Jews. That's for sure.

HL: It was an entirely Jewish camp?

FB: Ja. Well it was a camp for Jewish emigrants.

HL: And what was your relationship with the Japanese people?

FB: I did not have a relationship with the Japanese people... I mean... You had to do what you were told. If you were naughty they... they used to beat people. If somebody was smoking they had to hold out their hands and they used to get a stick – not lightly, but properly. But otherwise, at least they didn't kill us, you see? You survived.

HL: Was there enough food?

FB: Yes, well, not really, but it was sufficient. Not meat. Vegetable. Rice. Sometimes the rice was infested with maggots. Yeah. You eat those as well. You know? When you're in that state you eat anything. You didn't pick them out. You don't look, you just swallow. A lot of... there were always maggots in the rice for some reason. I don't know why...

HL: Did you lose weight during that time?

FB: For some reason I was always skinny in those day. I was about nine stone. Nine and a half – ten stone. Later on I got up to ten stone. Since 30 or 40 years back I'm always 10 and a half stone.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 45 seconds

HL: Did you have any leisure time in the camp?

FB: No. No. We played football.

HL: Music?

FB: No. No, it wasn't a camp like you see in the pictures today that you have a theatre, chauffeur. Nothing. You had to survive. That was... That was the...the leisure. You tried to survive and stay put.

HL: Did you have any friends in the camp?

FB: One or two. Nothing spectacular. I was more worried about trying to get out. About the war to end. That was a relief when it did come.

HL: What are your memories of that?

FB: The atom bomb.

HL: How did you hear about it?

Tape 2: 10 minutes 50 seconds

FB: It came...They said, 'The Japanese are all disappearing. All disappearing! They're not there any more. They're not guarding anything.' They all packed up their things and went. Because they were going to be prosecuted - especially Goya. He was a bit of a cruel so-and so. He was worried in case he was going to be prosecuted as a war criminal, but he didn't do all that bad. He didn't do any good - but he didn't kill anybody. He got away with it. But the major Japanese war criminals were prosecuted. They were executed. Tojo, the General. That one who was in charge of the camps in Singapore and other places. Because Japan, did a lot of... they did a lot of winning, a lot of fighting and took over a lot of countries didn't they? But we weren't... I was young. I was more concerned about finishing, whatever there was.

HL: What did you do when you heard that the Japanese guards were no longer guarding?

FB: Packed my few belongings and went to see Jenny.

HL: Was she still working?

FB: Yes, she was there. And they knew of course because they had radio. No television but there was radio there. But they knew what had happened. There was a period when they were a bit anxious because the American forces were even bombing Shanghai at that time.....because it was occupied by the Japanese, you see? Parts of Shanghai. Hanchau, I think it was.

HL: Did you experience any bombing?

Tape 2: 13 minutes 0 second

FB: I heard the bangs. Nothing. I didn't experience any bombing. But, all I waited for the war to finish... that was another prayer that must have been answered. I know hundreds of thousands died when they dropped the atom bomb. But at least peace came there and then I came back to the American bar. To the restaurant. Which...By that time he had transformed it into a proper Russian nightclub. And he called it Scheherazade. And he had a very famous chansonnier. You know the chansonnier? Chansons? Singer. On stage there. And his name was Vertinsky. And that is a big story. I'll tell you that. Alexander Vertinsky. He was a very very famous singer. He came from Paris. He worked in Paris in a place called Balalaika, I believe. And he came to live in Shanghai. He was adored there. The women swooned and fainted, when he sang. I was working there evenings, just as a waiter. Maitre d'... better than a waiter. And I became- he became very friendly with me. He gave me a Russian name, not Fritz. Fredya, he called me. Fedor. But he used to like a big glass of vodka most of the time, when he was on stage. So I used to look after him. I used to serve him whatever food there was to be brought. So night after night the same punters, same songs. And in the end I spoke already very good Russian, at the time, and I'm musical. So...I listened to his songs and I learned the songs, or most of them. And when I had one or two vodkas myself we had a bit of a giggle and I started to imitate him. I had a pianist who played the music and I was singing Russian songs. And the boss, he was very impressed. Very impressed. And there was one day... or more than one day, because he sometimes he'd drink a bit too much. He didn't come to work or he wasn't able to perform and he didn't come and he didn't come to work or he didn't want to work. And they said Fred – Fredya – you go. Try to go on stage and sing his songs. And his name was 'Vertinsky'. And they put outside, 'Today 'Vertunski' is Singing!' (laughter) I was accepted. They give me a name. And do you know he wrote for the - he became very famous. A very good... He became a very patriotic Russian. Especially for the Soviets, because in those days it was the Soviet Union. He wrote in a Soviet sponsored newspaper in Shanghai. In the end he married a young woman. He was about 77 when he married a 21 year old. Mila. And went back to Russia, to the Soviet Union. Moscow. And there he died at a later stage, but they had two daughters. Alexander Vertinsky and Mila they had two daughters. And they are starlets today in Russia – in Moscow. So he went back but he later died ...and he is buried...This comes something else- I used to go to Russia a lot after, when the war was over. He was buried on the same cemetery as famous Russians like Khrushchev... ex-president. Not far. There is Vertinsky and there is Khrushchev.

HL: Can you remember any of the songs you sang?

FB: Oh, yes! I've got records! I can.

HL: You can't sing a bit of one?

Tape 2: 17 minutes 40 seconds

FB: Well, I'd like a bit of accompaniment. [Sings] You don't have to have a...Because it's a chanson. You see, it's more spoken than sung (sings a verse of Russian chanson) I used to sing a lot of Russian songs.

HL: Did all the women swoon for you as well?

FB: I was very popular. Believe you me, I was very popular. And then I came back to England.

Tape 2: 18 minutes 22 seconds

HL: We still haven't really heard about your wedding?

FB: Ah it wasn't a big wedding. The wedding was in those days, you went to Shanghai Law, you got a solicitor and you register. Finito.

HL: And then why did you choose England to come to?

FB: Because my brother came to England. But, I told you didn't I? I asked my uncle to help him to get out. And he had a waiting period in England before he could go on to America. They called it an affidavit. So he stayed in England and he got married here. He never had children... and in the end, while I was in Shanghai still, he put a search through the Red Cross to find out where Frederick Boxer is. And they found ... The Red Cross found me and they gave me the letter. So we decided to... I decided to come back to Europe because in those days after the war we were entitled to be re-patriated. You know what that means? Back to the home country. So I got on a troop ship, together with Jenny, because she was now an Austrian. After she married me they gave me back my passport didn't they? Long time. Under Hitler they'd taken away all my papers. So I came back to Vienna. They put us up in some 3rd or 4th rate - grade hotels for the time being until they found alternative accommodation. I kept communicating and talking to my brother here. And I also had a cousin here who had a match factory. Near London.

Tape 2: 20 minutes 22 seconds

HL: Before we get to England, how long were you in Vienna? In 1945?

FB: No it was '47 darling. Forty-five the war finished but I still stayed on in Shanghai. At that time I was still occupied to work in the nightclub and... I became a real Russian, you see... Really. I never learned...I never had a Russian lesson in my life. I never had an English lesson in my life. But I think my Russian is... very appropriate. So I stayed in Shanghai until 1947. Until the repatriation scheme started with the Americans. Troop ships. 300, 400 or 500 refugees. Back. Where you came from.

HL: And where were you living with your wife from '45 to '47?

FB: We had a little flat. Not flat. A little room. We had what we could afford. You see I was working in a nightclub. And we were living together in a little room and then we got married and still had a little room.

HL: And then back to Vienna. What was it like to come back to Vienna?

FB: Ah! Bombed out... Europe. A wreck! And I came back and started to look for my parents, first and foremost. And when I came to the Jewish Association which had already started to function. They found some documents or papers – I've got a copy of

it - telling me what happened. That they were transported to Theresienstadt - that is pre-concentration camp ghetto.

HL: In which year?

FB: On the – I'm worried about this – on the 17th of July 1942.

HL: Where did they go from Theresienstadt?

FB: Mother and sister to Auschwitz. Father to Treblinka. Which is another...all very cruel death camps.

Tape 2: 22 minutes 55 seconds

HL: Do you know when they died?

FB: No. All that one can hope is that they didn't suffer too much. Gas chambers, right? Gas chambers, you see?

HL: And already there was a functioning organisation in Vienna tracing...?

FB: Yes, tracing, yeah. They found records, to some extent.

HL: Did you go back to see the coffee house?

FB: Yes. It was ruined. Dishevelled. Somebody turned it into a pet shop I think. It was shut.

HL: How did you feel returning to Vienna and the people who had treated you as they did?

FB: Well I didn't meet any of those people that mistreated us. I didn't meet the fellow who was taking over the coffee house, who was head of the SS. The super-Nazi... It was clear that he was taken prisoner in Russia. His name was... I remember his name was Heinz Schucking. He was ... I wanted to confront him and ask why he was such a rogue and a good for nothing. How he enjoyed the criminality and became an associate of that. But I think he was... I think he died in a... in captivity. But I made enquiries and they said, 'Schucking? Oh, we know about him. He is still prisoner of war in the Soviet Union.' Even when I left. I left Vienna in 1947.

Tape 2: 25 minutes 0 second

HL: How long were you back in Vienna?

FB: Six months or eight months. When I came back to Vienna Jenny became ill. She had some infection on her chest. And her asthma. So she had to go into hospital. And she stayed in hospital for 4 or 5 months and I was there... stayed with her. And then, my brother, ja, talked to this cousin who had this match factory. You couldn't... Even then you couldn't come to England without a permit. So he arranged for a labour

permit. I came here as an industrial chemist. I had certificates of being a radio mechanic and whatnot... I could get away with it.

HL: Had you managed to do any paid work in your months in Vienna?

FB: No. In Vienna. No. There were no jobs.

Tape 2: 26 minutes 6 seconds

HL: How did you survive there?

FB: There was the Jewish Association... Besides, we had a little bit saved up... Jenny and I when we were still in Shanghai. I had some money saved up and I thought, you know, 'Do something with it'. And stupidly instead of... if I would have brought a suitcase full of cigarettes I would have opened three times the size of restaurant! That was worth a fortune. I didn't, you know. I brought food with me instead. Tins of sardines, and the people said 'Ah. We don't want that rubbish!' The Viennese. 'We only eat good food!' [Laughs]

HL: Did you in your months in Vienna, did you meet anybody that you had known before the war?

FB: Oh yes. There was Viennese restaurants. From the war, there were not. Only from Shanghai.

HL: But you didn't meet anybody that you'd known pre-war?

FB: I went to visit my nanny. You start searching. I found you know you go to different offices and find addresses. I found her address... She was alright. She could have helped, but she didn't. They say if they would have helped anybody they would have been taken to prison just like everyone else. That's the excuse. Besides they say, 'Russians this and Russians that. They came here and they raped women.'

HL: So they felt they had suffered too?

FB: They think so. That's right. They don't know what suffering is.

HL: But you didn't bump into any old school friends?

FB: No. No, school friends went to China. Weinberger went to Tiensin. The one that – he saved my life by telling me what to do. I haven't heard from him since. Some people died, some people survived. Some people became associated... Shanghai was a difficult place with drugs. You know? There was a young fellow. He was really nice. I thought he would be a good friend, but he died of an overdose of heroin or something. He met a girl who was into those sorts of things. The wrong company. At least I was lucky, I never did it. I never smoked dope. I saw it happening. But I wouldn't. I didn't. I smoked cigarettes. Bad enough.

HL: Did you consider staying in Vienna after the war?

Tape 2: 28 minutes 58 seconds

FB: Very little.. no, not really. For a little while I did, because the Russians offered me a job.. you see because I spoke a little Russian. And the Russians, they had a radio station... propoganda, there.. And they said, 'We can give you a job. Blah, blah...' But then I thought about it. ' It was already the beginning of The Cold War, you know. And so I thought better of it. One can get involved in things and suffer for it. Those are difficult days like 'The Third Man'. You know? Did you see the film 'The Third Man'? I could have got involved. I steered clear. Low profile.

HL: Do you know of any Jewish people who settled back in Vienna?

FB: Oh yes... I don't know them, but. People who had a restaurant. The partner – the fellow at Fiaker. He opened a little coffee... sort of a bar. I went to visit him there. Just one bar and a few chairs in front. But they made a living, I suppose.

HL: Did you go back to see what had happened to the Synagogue?

FB: No, no. It was all destroyed. Everything was burned out. I couldn't find anything really. I went to the second district. I was mainly concerned to look for relatives and I couldn't find any. Uncles, anybody who was...in Vienna...related to Boxers.....they were all exterminated. And people, grandparents and people like this in Poland, they were also... vanished. How can you find them?

HL: And talk about your journey to England...

FB: Quite straightforward. Train and then a boat. Come to...Arrived in London. Cousin met me. He was already well to do and he had a match factory in Sheen, near Richmond. So he gave me a job. I think I worked for about... I worked 10 or 11 hours a day, or more, for £13 per week and I was in charge... [Laughs]

Tape 2: 31 minutes 45 seconds

HL: Did your wife work?

FB: No. She worked for a little while in an office as a bookkeeper. But she had to...She was still...Her English was all right. Better, better, better.

HL: How was your English?

FB: Mine? Well, I have a talent for languages, you see? Because I even spoke Chinese for a little while I was in Shanghai. That was the only good subject I was at school. Latin and Maths. I could count the shekels and could speak the language. [Laughs]

HL: Where did you live while you were working in the match factory?

FB: With two English elderly ladies. Landladies. Near – very near the match factory. Walking distance. Because she was a forelady in the match factory. We used to make matches by hand. I made matches by hand. She used to dip them, then hang them to

dry , then fold them, then put them in folders. Then the girls would take them...Press up pedal and the stitch would come down. I've got the memory. Then, my cousin bought an American machine, or hired it. We were experimenting - 'Look what I got'- and...He stitched my finger... [Laughs] as it was going around. That's ok. That's a memory from the match factory. But, oh ja, ja. That wasn't all of it. Then the big thing came. Somebody at the match factory – they were not allowed to smoke, but somebody - had a slight smoke. We don't know who, but somebody did. And the whole blinking joint caught alight and went up in flames – 30ft high flames. The whole match factory burnt down in half an hour. It's all very inflammable, you know. Didn't explode, but it burned down.

HL: Were you there?

Tape 2: 34 minutes 0 second

FB: Ja. There. I told the girls 'Get out! Quickly! Just save your skin. Don't stay. Don't wait.' Open the door, then out, out, out! Then shut the door. To keep the flames in - all inflammable stuff. So, we had no matches. I used to sell as well, not only make matches.

HL: Where did you sell them?

FB: Well, in those days we used to sell them to Tesco's. Tesco was only small. In those days Tesco only had one small shop. I remember, in Twickenham. I think they only turned over £500 a week. And '. My cousin was quite friendly with Jack Cohen, the owner of Tesco. And they said to start something, something. So they started to import matches – because they couldn't make them any more - from Russia. And Jack Cohen was a small partner but in the end he said 'Ah! I don't want to bother with this rubbish!' You see? And we brought in matches from Russia... But in the end... One day they had a problem. The consignment was either faulty or didn't arrive. And Joe, who was the boss of the factory said, 'Get on the phone to the Russian agent. Maybe he can help.' And I got on the phone and I started to talk in Russian. And when I started to talk in Russian with the delegate, twenty minutes later, from Highgate, he was at Milbank, embracing and saying 'Who?! What?!' Who spoke Russian in those days? Nobody in 1947, 1948. So we became very friendly in those days. In the end I became the main negotiator between the Russians and match factory owner. And he was taken over by a public company Peabody... So they made me sales manager and buyer. I had a good job for a little while. I was just buying and selling matches for the company. Then one day... I used to sell them to Superdrug...They're all labelled matches. So the fellow at Superdrug says, 'Fred you go to Russia a lot.' 'Yes, I do, I says.' (because I had to go out there to negotiate, buy, deliveries...) 'Why don't you find something else you can buy from them?' Because the winter in England was very severe some times. He says, 'We could do with some hot water bottles. Surely the Russians must have hot water bottles to sell.' And I went to Moscow and I talked to this and I talked to that. And I started my own little business to bring in hot water bottles... and from there the business grew and became quite a substantial business, at one time..

Tape 2: 37 minutes 22 seconds

HL: And this is your own business now, and not the match company?

FB: Yes. Boxer. Freddy Boxer. Yeah. I left the match people and I started hot water bottles. I've got a catalogue there.

HL: What year did you start in your own business?

FB: Oh, it was some time in 1970?

HL: 1970?

FB: Ja.

HL: So you worked 20 years for the match factory?

FB: Yeah. I worked in selling and buying matches for a long long time. Because we had... I can't remember. Yes, Henry was born, wasn't he? Yes. 1950. So I started another job maybe 1955, 1957. Besides the match factory, I worked in a rubber factory where they made tyres. Firestones. I worked there. Great Western Road. I worked there mainly daytime and that was night time. So I had two jobs.

HL: Were most of the employees of the match factory owner Jewish?

FB: No, nobody was Jewish. That's another story. I was just about the only Jew there then. And would you believe it? I don't know how many years I worked there – 5, 6 or 7 years...And... because I was a bit of a talker and a politician. I was elected shop steward! And this was the first foreign Jewish shop steward that had ever been heard of at Firestones.

HL: Which union was it?

FB: Transport and General Workers. I almost became a convener. You know. Because I used to go to meetings. I was firm but I was fair. I used to negotiate work rates with the management and representing the workers. I remember I was fair because there used to be a lot of cheating going on... most of the time they came there on the clock and then they gave this rate. They used to be very lazy. I could see that sometimes they made silly things. Worked extra slow and then when the rates came out they earned themselves a fortune.. So one day a fellow comes up to me and says 'You bloody foreign Jew! I'm gonna knife you if I see you one day. Bloody foreign Jew.' But I wasn't afraid. At all. 'You shouldn't sign that rate! You shouldn't sign that! One day I'll do you!'

Tape 2: 40 minutes 25 seconds

HL: Were you a member of any political party?

FB: No. I was maybe slightly sympathetic, because of my Russian relationship. I was probably... Besides, I was classified as a communist when they were going to send me to the concentration camp in Dachau. I was - obviously when I was in Shanghai

we were praying for Stalin to win the war against the Nazis. Couldn't have been anything else would I?

HL: Why were you classified as a communist when you were first taken...?

FB: No, no. Everybody was classified by the Nazis. They said to communists and Jews: concentration camp. They put them in the same category, so to speak. But I did rather well in the end didn't I?

HL: Can we just clarify the years? Roughly what years were you at the match factory?

FB: From 1948 (because I came to England in the end of 1947) till we had this fire, I think in 1951. Three years.

Tape 2: 41 minutes 48 seconds

HL: And by then you had already started working at Firestones as well?

FB: Well not when I was in the factory. When the factory burned down and they started to import matches from Russia. So that was a piece of cake and I was in an office, daytime, sorting out telephone.. How many boxes of matches you want, how many cases. So I could find another job night time. This was another job. Daytime.

HL: And how many years were you at Firestone?

FB: I would have to look that up. A long time. 7 or 8 years.

HL: Were you part of any Jewish community during those periods?

FB: No. no, no. I wasn't inclined to be very Jewish, believe you me. I had such an orthodox religious Jewish family - all of it. Father, grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunts and everything. And look what happened to them. Why? To my sister. Why do things like that? You're religious, you're really religious, you know and you believe and want to do everything that's right. And...For God to let things like that happen? I wasn't very forgiving. But now I've mellowed a bit. But I wouldn't say I'm religious. The tradition as you see it on Fiddler on the Roof is still there. It's ingrained, you know?. You don't forget. You don't forget old traditional meals, sitting down together and celebrating a holiday. You've got to have something to fall back on.

Tape 2: 43 minutes 43 seconds

HL: Did you have any objects or possessions from your childhood with you in England?

FB: I told you. I wasn't allowed...I had a stamp collection. I had an autograph collection which was to me most important whatever... I wasn't allowed to take that. That was confiscated, you see?

HL: Family pictures or anything?

FB: Well, I got family pictures in the end from my uncle. I wasn't allowed to take anything. I went with a small attaché case. Coat. One pair change of clothes until I came to Shanghai and then they helped us out with some clothing and whatnot. Nothing... Pair of shoes. It was pretty cold in Moscow, believe you me.

HL: You said you eventually got some pictures through your uncle?

FB: Ja. And I've got them. He died later in the Bronx. And he had some pictures from the coffee houses. Pictures going back to 1921, 1922. That's on the.. bring it down here... Oh and then father, and... When I was in Shanghai, my father sent me a picture and my sister sent me a picture. But I'll have a look upstairs.. (gets up but sits down again, referring to filming) I'm not gonna have a look right now. Oh dear did I spoil it now? Ja.

HL: We'll carry on.. You were now travelling to and from Russia regularly. And... What were you doing before you started your business in 1970? Were you still working...?

FB: I was Firestone... Firestone and match...salesman for the match importers. But in the end the Russians said, 'Maybe we could do with such a talented fellow?' I said, 'I don't know'. And...My brother helped me with a bit of finance at the beginning. I borrowed a thousand, two thousand pounds from the bank and brought in a consignment of hot water bottles. Which I did. And they came in so they went just like that. Sold it to Superdrug. Made a profit. And then another one and another one. So that gradually it evolved, and it developed from there. And the company that was selling me the hot water bottles, then did other things, from rubber. So I did rubber mats for motor cars. I brought those in. Then I brought in garden tools. I'll show you a catalogue later on.

HL: Were there many people trading with Russia?

FB: No. No. I used to exhibit at the NEC or in Earls Court and they used to call me the 'Russian connection'. Other importers. I was very proud to deal with Russia at the time. But then, things went wrong. I took on a manager and I let him... Sometimes you get good managers and sometimes... I got a very bad manager. He did some very naughty things. He ruined the business...nearly ruined me, but. He did some very dirty business behind my back. Amongst other things he copied... but I was responsible because I was the boss. And anyone does naughty things... and you're the boss, you're responsible.

Tape 2: 47 minutes 43 seconds

HL: What did he copy?

FB: He copied a barbeque from B & Q. And they took me to the court. They took me to the cleaners and they got £200,000 damages and £100,000 solicitors' fees or more. That was one thing. And besides that, he imported furniture from... Italy. I didn't get the profit. He got the profit.. Not only did he get the profit but he also took whole consignments and put them in another warehouse. You see? It went down to Boxer

and Company. I paid heavily for all that. But Sarah wasn't with me at the time. She came only later, when I chucked him out. We had a big quarrel. I found out that he wanted to do other things which I wouldn't let him do. And she was there and she said 'You shouldn't listen to him.' So Sarah helped me more to continue with the business, but it wasn't the same. Too much. Because one time my business was worth two million pounds at least.

HL: Backtrack a little bit. Where were you living all this time in the 1950s and 1960s?

FB: Well I was living in Richmond – Twickenham, sorry.

HL: Did you have your own house?

FB: Yes. Once I started to do business I went to the bank. I got my own house. I...I helped my son a little bit.

Tape 2: 49 minutes 32 seconds

HL: Where did your son go to school?

FB: Hampton. Hampton Court, near Richmond. Can I be excused for a minute or two?

HL: While you were working for the match factory owner, and for Firestones, what was your wife doing?

FB: First she was working a small job for DER that was the television people. Heard of DER? And then she got herself a job at British Airways. That was at Heathrow in the accounts department... so we were all really working quite happily. And Henry was growing up, slowly, slowly. He did well. He went to Hampton Grammar. And I, my business grew. Really at a fast pace, you know...If I hadn't taken this manager I wouldn't have met Sarah.. I wouldn't have my children. I would have a big company worth maybe 10 million pounds, easily, maybe more. I still think I'm richer now than I was. All the millions cannot buy me what I have got.

HL: I'll get you to explain how all that came about, but can you tell me first about your first wife. What happened to her?

FB: She had TB in Shanghai. They took half a lung away during the operation in Vienna.. She went into hospital. In Vienna. I told you when we went back to Vienna; they call that a primathorax. She had the operation and " Things...from that you don't recover.. She had asthma, as well, on top of it. So she got weaker and weaker and weaker. And then, one day... I don't remember the date now... 18th December or January...

Tape 2: 51 minutes 54 seconds

HL: Round about which year?

FB: In 1988... '87. She was ill for some time... ailing you know, all the time.. Henry was good. He looked after his mother. I couldn't do both. I was travelling a great deal. Backwards and forwards to Russia but not only to Russia. In those days I developed a connection with all the communist block countries, so I was going to Romania, to Poland, to China. Everywhere. And mainly Russia. So when I was away she died...

HL: Which year was it? How old were you when she died?

FB: I was already 70-something. Ja... I haven't got it all in my head now. You see I try also to obliterate some memories, because it doesn't really do. Although Henry is very good. He looks after her grave and gravestone where she is buried, near Richmond. Besides, this fellow ruined my business. I couldn't really afford any more... I was deeply in debt after this manager did his dirty work.

Tape 2: 53 minutes 40 seconds

TAPE 3

HL: Can you tell me what happened after your wife died in 1987?

FB: I was working, always working. We were already separated, sort of, prior to her death. I think 6 months or 8 months. And I was very busy travelling business-wise around Europe and China. And one of those trips. No it wasn't a trip it was when I was exhibiting at the NEC... my wares – the Russian connection and all other goods from Italy - I met Sarah briefly through somebody. She came to the show and I think I was dumbstruck when I first saw her. And we talked and we talked and talked. And I said will you come again, have a look? Then I found out what she was doing in hotel management.....I said I don't do anything like that but if you want to you can help me manage my affairs here. She had a talent for languages. At the time. German. So she commenced working with me. But she didn't like the manager at all. She forewarned me. I said, 'He's settled in. I'm not one just to bring people in and throw them out.' Besides at the time he was beginning to raise a family. And he was a very very clever, scheming fellow. He used to tell me that I'm more like a father to him than his own father. But... I don't know if religion comes in to this or not. Shall I put this in? He's a Muslim. Of course I don't want to be classified as a being racially – because I suffered myself prejudice ... Because somebody said, 'How can you, a Jew, employ...?' I said, 'Oh, he's all right.' But as things developed... I used to go... I really started to...My wife at that time... she was very ill. Maybe not in hospital but she was getting worse and worse and worse. But I took Sarah on one of my trips to Russia and then I took her on another trip to Romania and I took her on another trip to Poland. And we came closer and closer and closer together. And it developed such that...And then my wife passed away while I was away. Henry was upset because I wasn't back but I said I didn't anticipate, you see? We knew that she was ill. We anticipated for ten years that she would pass away, but she kept going on and going on. And then, when did I marry, Sarah? The 22nd of February, 1999, I think. I've got a certificate. 'When did we marry, Schnuckel? Hallo!' I know the date. I don't know the year. 'Which year did we get married?' 'Which year did we get married?'

Tape 3: 4 minutes 46 seconds

Sarah: 22nd of February 1995.

FB: Thank you. 1995. I know the date. 22nd of February.

HL: 1995. And had your business gone bust by then?

FB: No, no, no, no. It was still functioning slowly. But we had bitter arguments with the manager. She had a hell of a row with him. And she said to me, 'You should get rid of him, you know?' I said 'Difficult.' How do you get rid of a manager just like that? You have to go to court and this and that. So we went to court. I didn't know what was happening behind my back. I thought he could fiddle a few pounds here and a few pounds there...but I didn't know there was any 'major' dishonesty. It was major dishonesty... major, major. Whole consignments came in and they went to another address and they went out through the back door. He signed for it as manager, and I am responsible and I had to pay – oh – to the tune of a quarter of a million pounds. And today he's running a company. He's taken all the papers with him, suppliers, customers and whatnot, etc. He calls it Emir and Company.

HL: Tell me about when your children were born, your second family.

FB: Well the first one was born in 1990. That is Reggie. 'Gissie' was born in 1992. And Byron was born in 1995. Henry was born in 1950. He's got a son. Don't know how, but he has a son, so I have a grandson as well.

HL: What has your older son Henry done?

FB: Oh he's doing rather well. He's a very eminent consultant on New Art - Outsiders Art. You know? Art Brut. You know that expression? I think they had an exhibition there some time ago, together with somebody at the Jewish Museum.

Tape 3: 7 minutes 47 seconds

HL: When did your business finally collapse?

FB: [Whistles] About 5 or 6 years back. Yeah. 1999.

HL: How did you cope with a family after that?

FB: Well, I have to carry on. I have a pension. I paid a pension scheme. It was a shame it collapsed but I said to myself.. If I hadn't done what have done I wouldn't have what I have got, you see? It's all circumstantial, isn't it? People say, 'Freddy, why did you shut your business down?' I says, 'I know. I've exchanged my business for my family.' Basically that's what it comes down to. If I hadn't done what I have done. I wouldn't have Sarah, I wouldn't have my kids. I would have a business. Big deal. With lots and lots and lots of... I was offered – Touche Ross was the accountant – I was offered over just over one and a half million pound – I didn't take it- at the time... because I didn't want to be disloyal to my employees...You see they would have lost their jobs. So I carried on and carried on until the accountants came and say 'You've got more money owing than you've got coming in.' Because the man signed

so many contracts and brought in so many goods. But that goes down in history. Like some other things. I mean, I sold the space station from the Russian Space Centre. It is a copy of the space station, to a European theme park for \$90,000... and 10% the Russians were... But in those days we trusted the Russians, we signed contracts. We made business, business, business. Nothing ever went wrong. But now that they're no longer communist, things have gone drastically wrong, and that's right. I was forewarned and told, if you're going to push and ask them for your money it's too dangerous. Because they're no longer communists. Today in Russia, for five thousand dollars you can get anything. You can get somebody bumped off. [Laughs] So I had to wave goodbye to that one. But I'm a survivor. I'm a survivor? I must be, because I'm still here. If I was arrested in 1938 to go on a transport to the concentration camp, and been to Shanghai and been in a camp and suffered typhus and typhoid and survived that and I'm still here.

HL: Have you talked to your children about your history?

Tape 3: 11 minutes 4 seconds

FB: Not a lot. You see, I don't want to upset them too much. They know, vaguely. But if you upset them talking about gas chambers and this and that. I don't know whether it's a good thing or not. But now that we're doing this, maybe they'll come to London, and if there's going to be a story or a film about this. Maybe then Sarah will explain to them not to take it too seriously or too drastic.

HL: Have you passed on any kind of Jewish identity to your children?

FB: Oh yes. We have Passover here. And, at the beginning. Henry and this lot here... Because I used to talk a little bit of Yiddish when Henry was there and he understood a few words. With Greg, Byron and Giselle, not so much. Although Giselle is very proud that she's half-Jewish. Because she's got some friends now that are Jewish or half-Jewish, at King Edwards. They talk about their religion, when they celebrate Passover, when they celebrate other holidays. I bring my kids up to respect everybody. But to make not a point too much about...yes?

HL: How do you regard your own identity? Would you call yourself Austrian, Jewish, British? How would you describe yourself?

FB: Jewish, first? I can't...The Austrians have done so much harm that it's – you know – it's difficult. I like the Austrian culture, the music. That suits me fine. The people themselves – some are, some are not. But I cannot really get emotional with... At one time I used to be very emotional about Vienna. You see we always thought Vienna was a nationality. Not like Austrian. The Viennese is like the cockneys in England. 'He's not an Englishman, he's a cockney.' You see? I'm Viennese, I'm not an Austrian! Do me a favour! So...

HL: Have you taken your young children back to Vienna?

FB: Not to Vienna, to Austria. We've been to Mayrhofen two or three times. We're going again this year to Tyrol, in the autumn. You get cheap deals there.

HL: Have you been back in recent years to see the coffee house?

Tape 3: 13 minutes 58 seconds

FB: No, no. Last time, 7, 8 years. Its not there. There is no coffee house. The Austrians wouldn't even give me our licence back. I asked for the licence because you can't open a coffee house without a license. I thought I take the license back and either I sell the license. Or I give it to Sarah. And I've got all kinds of correspondence with those people in charge. But now I'm too old. And she doesn't qualify.. She would have to go to a special school to qualify to get a license. So I'm not too friendly with the Austrians. Now they are trying to make good. How can they make good what they have done?

HL: Do you think of yourself as British?

FB: English, ja. I'm gonna wave the flag on Sunday. [Laughs] Football fanatic. All my family.

HL: Which team do you support? Locally?

FB: Chelsea. They've got a Russian buyer. Locally? Birmingham City because Byron has got an academy. He's signed up for Birmingham City. I'm looking for a sponsor to help him along.

HL: Have you any message from your lifetime's experience for anyone who watches this film?

FB: That a very good question. You see I'm tolerant towards any religion. But when some people... when they become violent, it's very difficult. When you see something like September 11, you see - when they killed thousands of people for no reason but ' religion... It's very difficult, but I like to think... I bring my kids up to be tolerant, to be understanding with any religion and to forgive. But it's very difficult. I can't forgive the Nazis for what they did. I can't. Not with the best will in the world. But there we are.

Tape 3: 16 minutes 37 seconds

Tape 3: 17 minutes 10 seconds

(Pictures and documents being shown)

FB: Here you are. This is my family. That little fellow there with the curly hair that's me. That's my older brother Oswald. And that's Helene - Hellie - the one who did all the drawings, all the pictures. There's my mother and my father. Here you are. I'd say this picture was probably taken in 1921... Ja.

HL: Where?

FB: 1921.

HL: Where?

FB: In Vienna. There's the Kuckhof photograph. [Laughs] And this is the coffee house, here. With the family. And this here is just my father and my mother. I think this is an engagement photograph also taken in Vienna. And this I would say was taken somewhere around 1914.

HL: When was the photo of the coffee house taken?

FB: The photo in the coffee house was taken in 1921. For sure, because my mother's carrying me on her arm. I was just about one year old. And I was born 1920 so it's got to be 1921. And this was my sister when she was just a few months old. In a pram. That's outside the coffee house in the 6th district, Esterhazy Street. But that's the coffee house, how it used to be then, a long long time ago.

Tape 3: 19 minutes 0 second

FB: Here you can see some pictures which were drawn by my talented darling sister who perished in 1942. That she's no longer - it's their loss as well as mine.

HL: Can you say who they are?

FB: This is the fellow who used to work in the restaurant who took the pictures for safekeeping. If he hadn't done so I wouldn't have them today. He was a waiter in our coffee house. And this is a drawing of Greta Garbo who was at that time, a well known film star and I believe they're lovely pictures and well executed. Is there something on the back there? No.

I myself emigrated as I told you before in November, 1938. And I believe these pictures were done sometime in 1939. She was obviously a very very talented girl to be able to do this without any previous teaching. Without any previous experience. Just a natural, natural talent. The loss to me is obviously huge, but the loss to the Austrians is also there.

HL: What were these drawings for?

FB: I believe she may have done these drawings to get a little surplus money or food for my parents who she was supporting, at the time.

HL: Would she have been allowed to work?

FB: Not officially. Not officially.

Tape 3: 21 minutes 24 seconds

FB: Here's a picture of my son from my first marriage. Henry Boxer with my grandson, James. I believe this was taken sometime in 1980. And here is a picture of my family now. The young family. New family. Who I love very much. There's my darling wife Sarah. Giselle. Byron - not a Lord. And Gregory. Two sporty fellows and myself on the side there.

HL: When was that taken?

FB: This was taken in...1997.

HL: And where were those two photos taken?

FB: This was taken in Warwick – the family photograph. And this – because my son lives in Richmond, Surrey. So it was taken there – either in Richmond or Twickenham.

Tape 3: 22 minutes 22 seconds

FB: This is a certificate where I was working for a radio company in Vienna. A firm called Goldschmied. A Jewish firm which was later taken over by the Nazis. The fellow who came and took - threw Goldschmied out - and took over. I've got a certificate somewhere as well from the other one. Just repeating the same thing. A job I held for a little while before I went to Shanghai. The radio business. OK. Here's a certificate of my school. I wasn't a brilliant scholar. But...Here it says Satisfactory. Satisfactory. Satisfactory. And here it says, Good, Good, Good. This is one - it's better. This is the letter, so I improved here. Religion Good. German Good.

HL: And those were in Vienna in which years?

FB: That was taken in 1932 or '33. Vienna. This was big money then. Austrian schillings. Long way back. And this goes back to 1930.

HL: What is it?

FB: No? 1935. It is just a statement of turnover and tax... like VAT...paid to the state.

HL: Turnover of what?

FB: The coffee house business.

Tape 3: 24 minutes 30 seconds

Tape 3: 24 minutes 47 seconds

END OF TAPE