IMPORTANT

The Association of Jewish Refugees
2 Dollis Park, London N3 1HF
Tel. 020 8385 3070

ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Archive
Ref. no:	RV311
Interviewee Surname:	Koppel
Forename:	Marion
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	7 February 1924
Interviewee POB:	Krefeld, Germany

Date of Interview:	18 March 2025
Location of Interview:	Slough
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 36 minutes

REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV311

NAME: Marion Koppel

DATE: 18 March 2025

LOCATION: Slough

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is the 18th of March 2025. We'll conduct an interview with Ms Marion Koppel. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in Slough. Can you please tell me your name and where and when you were born?

Sorry?

Can you tell me your name and when and where you were born, please?

My full name, my name is… [Cough] I've got to clear my voice first. My name is Marion Koppel and I was born in Krefeld on the 7th February 1924.

Thank you, Marion, for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

I'm the only child and my parents and I emigrated here in 1939. In Germany, I attended the Lyzeum and didn't really have much more education until I came here, and I attended a commercial college in shorthand typing. As it was wartime, I had to find a job. I was eighteen and I learned while I was working, because I only had six months' training. But in those days, as it was war, it didn't matter so much. **[00:02:04]** And then eventually, I moved from Slough

to London and worked as a secretary in London. And then after fifty years, I left working. I came back to Slough to look after my mother and she died after I'd been here for five months, so it was a considerable change for me. And I managed to find some voluntary work. And there's a college in Slough, or rather in Langley, and where I helped with teaching ethnic minorities who wanted to learn English. I did that for ten years. And then thereafter, the group coordinator of that particular class retired. And then I occupied myself with children and helped them with reading in a local school. I did that for six years. And strangely enough, I had to leave there. I was eighty-five then and the school couldn't insure me any longer while I was on their premises, so I had to give it up. Maybe otherwise, I would still be there [laughs]. And that's about it.

Thank you, Marion. Let's talk a little bit more about Krefeld. What can you remember from growing up in Krefeld? **[00:04:02]** *Tell us a little bit about your parents and grandparents.*

I had quite a secure upbringing. And obviously, my father was working and my father's parents were still alive and my mother's mother was alive. And as I was the only child, I didn't lack friends. I did actually see quite a few – make quite a few friends at school. And I was – I had to leave, my father made me leave the Lyzeum when I was fourteen, because he realised that the Nazis would soon be persecuting Jewish children in the school. And he did this really in time because six months later, well, it was November '38 when the Pogrom started, and Jewish children had to leave the Lyzeum at that time. I had already left and attended a commercial course in Krefeld for six months. And I suppose I took it in my stride. I mean, there were other Jewish children who were much worse off than I was. And then of course, when the Nazis became more predominant, my parents... **[00:06:08]** My – sorry, my father... It was 1938 when the Kristallnacht took place. And my father was taken to Dachau but was released because he needed – was needed to wind up his business. And although he was first reluctant to leave Germany, after that experience, he couldn't get out quickly enough. And he had a Belgian business friend. My mother phoned him, because they lived in Brussels and Krefeld wasn't that far from Belgium. He came over to see my mother and told her he was renting a factory in Slough to produce margarine and could offer my father a job. And after quite some delay, applications had to be made and we had to have a visa. But that's

how we came to Slough because many people usually ask, why Slough? And that was the reason.

And you said – you mentioned the Kristallnacht. Where were you? Do you remember yourself? Where were you on Kristallnacht, the Pogrom, November Pogrom?

Where was…?

Do you remember it? Where were you on the Kristallnacht?

We were at home and we were left alone because my father did quite a lot, had done quite a lot of good in Krefeld. **[00:08:10]** And we were not affected, except that my father was rounded up the next day and taken with other Jewish men to the prison in Germany. And then later, was taken to Dachau where he stayed for four weeks. I was at home and so we were lucky.

Nothing happened to you?

No.

No. And tell me a little bit, so both your parents were born in Krefeld?

Yes, yes.

So how did they get – how did the grandparents get to Krefeld? Or what were the…?

My – I think my grandmother, I can't tell you, her mother was in Krefeld too.

Oh, so a long history?

Yes, it goes back, yes. But my father's grandparents came from Holland. They went to Germany and settled there.

And were there many Jews in Krefeld when you grew up?

There was quite a community, really. I don't know how many, but there were quite a few Jewish people in Krefeld.

And did you go to synagogue at all? Did you go?

I did as a child. Well, I suppose I did until we left Krefeld and of course, synagogue was burned during the Kristallnacht. But it was a sort of duty to go to synagogue and to religious classes. **[00:10:03]** But my parents were not. Well, they attended synagogue on higher holidays, but not really a great deal.

And what sort of friends did your parents have? Were they very integrated in Krefeld?

Yes, but they had Jewish friends and also non-Jewish friends. And my father, in a way, felt more German first and Jewish afterwards. And my father, it's a very strange thing, while he was a representative to sell margarine, he had to visit one or two establishments in London. Amongst them was, oh, dear, what's his first name? Anyway, it was Cohen, Jacob, I think Jacob Cohen and he was the founder of Tesco. He was the Cohen from – TES was his partner. And my father, when he went to sell margarine, he had a small shop in the East End. And he said to my father, 'Well, why all this happened to Jews in Germany? You did not grow a beard, or you were more German than Jewish?' And I've never forgotten that. And from a very small shop, of course, he was, and his partner, was creator of Tesco. So, the Co is Cohen.

[00:12:03] *Okay, I didn't know that. Okay.*

Yes.

So, your father, he had his own business, export-import in…?

In Germany, yes.

With fats and what was it?

Fats for making soaps.

Okay.

And I think one of his clients was Henkel, which is quite a big factory Düusseldorf. And I think it still is, but my father, Henkel was one of his clients.

And do you know how your parents met? Did they know each other from childhood?

No, my father and my uncle, they both were caught up during the 1914 war. And I'm really not sure whether they knew each other before then. And through my uncle, my mother met my father. But they were both in Krefeld. In fact, there was a small town called Bochum, which was near Krefeld and that's where my great-grandparents lived. And there is one footpath called *Goldsteinweg* in Bochum.

Okay, and that's after the…?

Yes.

And what were they called, the great-grandparents? Goldberg?

Goldstein.

Goldstein?

Yes.

That's your mother's family?

Yes.

Yeah.

But my grandfather was quite well known in that village called Bochum. **[00:14:02]** So after the war, there is a sign, *Goldsteinweg.*

And what did the grandparents, the grandfathers, what did they do professionally?

They were butchers, actually.

In – where? In Bochum or in Krefeld?

My grandfather, my great-grandfather was in Bochum and afterwards in Krefeld. They had a business in Krefeld.

Butcher, butcher business?

Yes.

Interesting. Marion, anything else from Bochum? Do you remember any of your friends? Who were your friends in Bochum? In, sorry, in Krefeld?

I had quite a few friends from school and not just Jewish friends, non-Jewish friends, quite a few. But one friend one day said to me, 'I can't see – my father doesn't want me to be your friend any longer', because he worked for a steel factory in Germany. So that was the end of that. So, but I had another non-Jewish friend. She was my friend to the end. I had some German Jewish friends, of course, but I had a mixture of friends. It didn't matter to me.

And how was it for you? I mean, you left in '39, so you had from '33 to '39, you were already a teenager, more or less. How did it – was it a sudden change? Or how did it feel that time, '33 to '39?

I think I took it – not '32, I was too young. **[00:16:07]** It was the '39 period, of which that was 1938. I suppose I took it in my stride like we had to, really. And I had to accept that I had no – that I had to leave the high school. And the year after, we emigrated in '39, two months before the war.

And do you know, did your parents consider sending you on a Kindertransport? Or by yourself?

No, they –

Or was it they wanted to stay together?

No, we – as I said, we went to Hook of Holland, that's my parents, myself and the dog.

Okay, we'll get to the dog, we'll get to the dog in a second. Can you describe a bit Krefeld? What was it like as a city? What do you remember? Krefeld as a city, as a – I guess, as a small –

Well, it was a very nice town, actually. It was very pretty and we lived outside the centre, near a very nice park. It was a pretty town.

What was your address? Where did you live?

We – the address was Richard-Wagner-Straße, which wasn't far from the park called Stadtwald. And that was a very pretty area, with a pond where you could row. And I was, as a child, I was quite happy in Krefeld, so were my parents.

And did you do some sports, or did you…?

[00:18:03] Sport?

Mm.

Not really [laughs]. I learned how to play table tennis, that's the sport. And while I was at school, I did gymnastics, but not really otherwise.

And in your school, in the Lyzeum, were there other Jewish children as well?

In school, yes, quite a few. I think you interviewed Lore Lindenbaum, Lore Lucas.

Lore Lucas?

She was in the AJR.

Okay.

Yeah, she had a profile in the AJR two months ago.

Okay, and she was in your…?

Yeah, she came up from Krefeld and she's 105.

Okay.

And she was at the same school. And quite a few of my friends and parents emigrated to the United States. And otherwise, I really got to know more people when I joined the Hyphen.

That's after the war in England?

That's after the war, yes.

Tell me, you said that your father was taken to Dachau?

Yes.

So, did you know where he was taken to? Did your mother know what happened to him in that time? And where did they…?

That is a bit hazy. My father wrote a few – he was allowed to send my mother a censored letter that she should do everything possible to get out of Germany, to contact friends, some friend in Belgium. **[00:20:05]** But in those days, the – he managed to get out of Dachau because the bank wanted him there to dissolve his business. So, he was released after months, but he never talked about his time there.

Did he look different when he came back?

Yes, I'm afraid so. He had his head shaved and he'd lost a lot of weight. But he never talked about it. I think quite a few people didn't talk about it.

But you said he then knew he wanted to emigrate after that?

Yes. Even while he was there, my mother got that censored letter and that's how she contacted my father's Belgian client in Brussels. And it's due to him that we are here.

That you're here in Slough?

Yes, that's right.

Yeah, and what was his name? Do you remember his name?

He was Roman [ph] Algoet, A-l-g-o-e-t, Algoet Roman [ph], and they lived in Brussels.

And did your parents stay in touch with them even later on? Did they stay in touch with them later on as well?

Sorry?

Did your parents stay in touch with them or afterwards? Or he, your father –

Oh, we were still in contact. And of course, it was his business here. And after the war they came over from Belgium quite frequently and my father had to go to Brussels occasionally. **[00:22:02]** But they were really responsible other- for our stay here.

But it took – you said, your father was released, I guess, in December? You said in December '38, he was released from Dachau? And it took six months…?

It must have been December.

And then it took six months to organise the papers, more or less?

A bit more, really. It was '38, it took almost a year. But we also had applications. We applied; my parents applied to emigrate to Holland as well. And happily, the application got lost, because if they had agreed, we would, I think, prefer to go to Holland to England. And fate was kind to us there, because my – one or two of my family did actually emigrate to Holland. And my uncle survived because his wife was not Jewish and she did quite a few things. I can't quite remember, but they stayed, they were allowed to stay in Holland, not taken to concentration camps. So, they were lucky. And I've still got two cousins in Holland. They're much younger than me and one will be ninety. The other one is seventy-nine and – but we're still in touch.

And you said they had to get a guarantor here to get the British visa? You needed also a guarantor?

[00:24:05] That's right, yes, and a visa. So, it wasn't like people nowadays who come to Britain just without any applications or any visa. They can just enter.

And who do you think found the guarantor? How did they – do you know?

I cannot quite remember who the guarantor – how he was found. That, I cannot quite remember.

And Marion, in that time, so your parents had time to prepare everything? So, did they ship the furniture? Did they?

Yeah.

How did that happen?

Well, I think eventually when we got permission, when we got the permit to come to England, my parents, I was – I can't remember. I mean, it wasn't up to me to arrange that. But we were allowed to take all the furniture except jewellery and silver couldn't be taken. They had to be left behind. But because my mother had a sister in Holland who was married to a Dutchman, her son and wife, it wasn't very far, Krefeld from Holland. They came to visit us and they took quite a bit of jewellery to Amsterdam. She wore my mother's rings and so on. So, we got a bit out. But that was just fortuitous.

So, is – that bookcase behind you is from Germany, is from Krefeld?

Yes, my parents'.

And did…?

[00:26:00] All the furniture is my parents' furniture, except… Even these are the original chairs.

From Germany?

Yes, not the settee, but these are. And the table, of course. But the furniture is too big for this room. We had bigger rooms.

Yes. But did you take also – could you bring your own items? Do you remember anything you shipped for yourself? Anything of your personal things?

Well, that's – as a child, I think my parents saw to that.

Yeah.

Well, the furniture, my bedroom had my German – my bedroom was first – my German bedroom was really established in the bedroom here. And because I lived in London, then I used my London furniture. But I changed it, the same as the room that's changed in the conservatory.

And did the furniture arrive after you arrived in England? Or before?

Very punctual, yes, in a big crate. And it's very strange, it had big letters, Krefeld. And the next day we were here, a young woman knocked on the door and introduced herself and said she was from Düsseldorf, married to a teacher, English teacher. And her husband saw Krefeld, so he told her. So, she came and introduced herself the next day and we became friends after that.

[00:28:06] *So tell me, Marion, about the – when you actually left. What do you remember of the journey, leaving Krefeld, coming to England?*

What…?

What do you remember of the journey when you actually left Krefeld in July? You said –

What do I…?

What do you remember?

Well, actually, it was pretty sad because I had to say goodbye to my grandparents. And obviously, knowing properly, although they weren't too old at that time, that I knew I wouldn't see them again. And that was quite sad. Then we broke the journey in Holland because my uncle was there. My mother's brother, they lived in a small town called Amstelveen, which was near Amsterdam. So, we spent one day and one night there before we travelled to Hook of Holland to cross over to Harwich. And my uncle managed to stay in Holland. As I said, I've got two cousins and we've kept in touch, which is quite something really.

So how long did you stay there? So, you left Krefeld by train?

Yes.

And Krefeld from Holland, as you probably know, wasn't very far. And then afterwards, we travelled from Amstelveen via Amsterdam, to Hook of Holland, to Harwich.

[00:30:01] *And you also took your dog?*

Yes [laughs].

Tell us about the dog, please.

The dog was a wire-haired fox terrier, about four years old. My parents didn't want to leave him behind and he came with us on the train, and we had no idea that we needed papers for the dog to enter Britain. And then we got to Hook of Holland and my parents were asked for the papers, and they didn't have any. And my mother knew just a little English, not a great deal. And so, when my parents were told they had to get papers for the dog, and otherwise he would have to be put in a kennel and my mother understood channel, there was great

consternation until it was clarified [laughs]. Anyway, my parents did apply for papers and for some reason they were issued very quickly and transferred to Holland. And the dog came over in a crate two days later and was quarantined in Watford in kennels for six months.

Which you had to pay for?

For which my parents had to pay. And at that time, it was one pound and six shillings and that was quite a lot. But the dog stayed and was released after six months.

[00:32:02] *So the dog, you left the dog in Holland, basically, when you arrived in...?*

Well, yes, he came with us.

Yes.

And we would have come with him if he hadn't been stopped before we boarded the ship.

What was his name, the dog?

Sorry?

What was his name?

Pitt.

And were you close to that dog, or was it more your parents' dog? Or were you…? Was it your dog? Your dog?

Well, it was a family dog. It wasn't exactly my dog as well. But he was thirteen when he died, so he was here for a long time.

And how – did he adapt himself?

He adapted himself pretty quickly. First of all, my father was very offended, because when he was going to pick up the dog and the keeper there opened the gate, wherever he was, he jumped up at the keeper, not at my father [laughs]. In a way, it was a good sign. So, he had been well looked after. But when he came here, it didn't take him long to recognise us and settle down quite quickly.

It's extraordinary. As I said to you before, I don't think we've ever come across a dog, anyone who brought a pet dog from Germany.

I've got a photo there.

Okay, we're going to look at the dog. Anything else, Marion, you remember from the journey? So, once you got to Hook of Holland, you had to change to the boat?

Any…?

Anything else you remember from the journey, from the crossing?

Not – yes, one thing I remember [laughs]. I was very seasick and so was my mother. My father wasn't, but I was so seasick and that's the first I've experienced that. **[00:34:09]** Well, of course, once we were on land it adjusted itself, but it was a horrible feeling.

And Marion, what were your first impressions arriving in England? Your first impressions, do you remember?

I don't know, I think I just took it in my stride. We came here and it was a nice country lane here. I took a photograph of my father and the dog in the middle of the road. My father was walking in the middle of the road, and I stood in the middle of the road, which nowadays it's a racetrack.

Yes, but what was the accommodation you stayed in when you arrived? Where did you go to?

We – there was a hotel in the centre of Slough, opposite Slough Station, that's now been replaced by another building, and we stayed there for two weeks until we found other accommodation. It was this house, but it took about two weeks. And I'm not sure where the furniture was stored in that time. I cannot tell you.

But you knew you were coming to Slough because of the factory?

Correct.

Yeah.

Yes. So many people ask why Slough, because it – I mean, it was a much more attractive town when we came. Now it's changed 100 per cent, not for the better.

And were there any other refugees here at that time?

Yes, there were quite a few from Austria, but again we... **[00:36:07]** And also, a refugee from Berlin, she was taken in by an English family as an au pair and that's how she managed to get to Slough. And there was a sort of club in Slough, a refugee club. Don't ask me how it was founded. And one of them met others and one was called Paula Klappholz, rather nice name, and she worked as an au pair with a family in Langley Road. And so, we got to know more people through her. And it was a small refugee club and Austrians. And quite a few, they all came here and congregated here, so we got to know quite a few. And then later on, they dispersed.

But at the time, so there were other people here? There were other refugees in this area? Did you know – did your parents have anything to do with Bloomsbury House or with any of the institutions, the refugee organisations?

I'm so sorry.

Did your parents or you have to do with any of the refugee organisations at Bloomsbury House?

No, no, no. We just – these people just, we met them through this club. But then later on, how I really got to London was through somebody who worked for a newspaper. **[00:38:14]** And he lived in Farnham Common, which isn't far from here, and he was teaching at a club in London. It was the Linguists' Club, I don't know if you ever heard of that.

What was it called?

Linguists' Club.

Linguists' Club, yeah.

Hyde Park Corner. You've heard of that?

I think I have, funny enough, yeah.

And it was really due to him that I got to London. He said to my parents, you know, 'She'll never meet anyone if she stays in Slough.' And from then onwards, I went by coach every Saturday afternoon to Hyde Park Corner with Greenland Coach, and there I got to know quite a few people, also refugee people. And I – at least half a dozen people and one of them got to know about The Hyphen and she told me about it, so she and I made up our minds to meet wherever it was to be introduced to The Hyphen. You've heard of Peter Tonson, have you?

Peter Tonson?

Johnson.

Johnson, yes.

You must have.

Yes.

He was one of the founding members of The Hyphen.

And where did it meet, The Hyphen? Where did it meet? Where did they meet?

In various places, really. I think there was – I can't remember, in London, in Finchley and then there were various venues.

[00:40:17] *And tell us a bit, what was the idea of The Hyphen? What was the idea of The Hyphen?*

Hyphen, why it's called a hyphen, or used to be called The Hyphen, is it was a connection between refugees who came from Europe and say, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Austria, and who came here. And it was a sort of tie between those people, that's why it's called The Hyphen.

Ah, not to the – I always thought it's to do with – between the refugees and British culture.

No, it was refugees. There were no British – one or two British people were there. They were all German, Jewish, from Austria. Quite a few from Austria, Germany, quite a few from – quite a lot from Berlin, actually, more from Berlin than any other town. And one member was not Jewish, and she was also one of the founder members, because she was a friend of Peter Johnson, who met – there was another club called Overseas Club in London. And those two met and they had the idea of creating The Hyphen.

[00:42:06] *And what was the age group there of The Hyphen?*

Well, I was in my twenties. I think most of them were in their twenties, early twenties, mid-twenties.

And lots of people met there? It was a social club?

Yes, and it attracted – I think they advertised it in the Jewish Chronicle or something. There were quite a lot of members. And I met quite a lot of – I made quite a lot of friends in The Hyphen.

So, it was important for you?

Well, I suppose so, especially later. I moved to London, which was easier for me. I lived in Slough first, and I was thirty-two when I moved to London from Slough and had a flat in London. And stayed in London for – in this flat I stayed for twenty-six years.

And where in London? Where did you live?
Maida Vale. Near Maida Vale Station, actually. Then I came back here to look after my mother.

Yeah. Marion, when you – just to come back to when you arrived in the UK, what about speaking English? Did your parents speak Eng – did you speak any English?

We had lessons in Germany, but I had one year at school. I didn't learn a great deal, but we had private lessons afterwards. **[00:44:02]** And it was not, I mean, my English was very bad. I remember I was sent next door to our neighbours to ask them how to light a fire in the fireplace [laughs]. We had no idea, and she came over and showed us what to do. And so, I was sent and I had to use my English, but our neighbours were pretty helpful and they had children my age. And well, then of course, I started my first job, and my English was not terribly good, but...

What was your first job?

Yeah, I carried on.

What was your first job, Marion?

It was in a – it was not commercial. It was Eton Rural District Council, and I was a short-hand typist.

Because when you came here you didn't continue your schooling?

No.

No, so you went to a commercial college here?

Yes.

In Slough?

I didn't – my parents didn't insist, I was immature. I mean, I was quite pleased not to go to school and my parents didn't have a great deal of money. And of course, two years later I bitterly regretted it and my parents were short-sighted. And I'm afraid I did reproach them later, but it was a bit later [laughs].

You think they should have insisted that you went – that you continued to…?

That's right, but I went to evening classes later. **[00:46:06]** I learned French and Spanish and... Anyway.

Yeah, but you started working as a secretary?

Yes. Well, first of all, as a short-hand typist, that was wartime.

Yes, so during the wartime, tell us a little bit about what happened during the wartime here. Your father was interned?

That's correct, on the Isle of Man and he later joined the Pioneer Corps. And that's how he left the Isle of Man. He was in the Pioneer Corps for quite a time, until the end of the war.

And how did he feel about being interned?

Well, I don't think anyone liked that [laughs], especially being Jewish German and to be regarded as an enemy alien in those times. Well, I think the government lost their heads, because it was so critical at that time. And obviously, all people from Germany were regarded the same, until later on they relented.

Yeah. And do you remember the camp where he was in the Isle of Man? The camp, the name of the camp where he was?

No. He later on – no, it was just Isle of Man and later on he was in Kettering, in – when he joined the Pioneer Corps. No, it was just Isle of Man, I can't remember the name.

Yeah. And you stayed with your mother?

[00:48:00] Yes, and we got some people here who rented a room upstairs to get us some money.

Yeah? And who did you rent it to? Who were the people you rented to?

Well, actually it was a refugee couple from Austria. They had my room and I was allocated the small room in this house. And they stayed with us for a while, but not for long.

And was there any bombing in this area in Slough?

Any…?

Was there any bombing? Did you have to go to a shelter?

No. There were some scares and we had some incendiary bombs. But Slough somehow was not bombed properly. And my – our next-door neighbours, they had a shelter in the garden. And when there was an air raid, they allowed us to use the shelter while they stayed in bed [laughs]. Which was a joke, really. And there were some incendiary bombs. And then my mother said about four o'clock in the morning, 'Oh, we must have a look whether there are near the house.' And then somebody said, 'Well, if there had been, the house would be on fire by now.' So that's about all we had. We were not affected really, in Slough, which was lucky.

You didn't – so, you didn't think that you should leave or go to the countryside, or...?

No, no, no, no. **[00:50:00]** I think that applied more to the bigger towns. Slough at that time was a very small town. Insignificant, really.

But your father then throughout the war stayed with the Pioneer Corps and the British Army, throughout…?

He was in the Pioneer Corps. And for about two years, I think, until the factory where my father worked, they applied for him to return. So, he returned eventually.

And could he return to his old job?

Yes, he did.

And Marion, did you face any discrimination being German or Jewish or…? In England?

No, not as far as I know. I didn't either when I started my job as a short-hand typist, I was accepted and I settled down. I took it in my stride, really.

Yeah, how did you feel, I mean, coming to England? And how were you – was it – were you…?

I really think I simply accepted it. It took some time to settle down, but my parents were here. And so, the only thing I regretted, I couldn't see my grandparents anymore. That – we knew that was pretty hard, but otherwise...

Yeah. And when did you find out what had happened, what happened to the grandparents?

That was after the war. We couldn't find out during the war. **[00:52:00]** We heard, but we didn't know at that time.

And how did your parents feel in England at the beginning?

Well, they found it very difficult to settle, especially… My father didn't care how badly he spoke. He didn't mind whether he didn't know English too well, he had no inhibitions. Whereas I think I had more inhibitions and of course, when I started work, and English people in those days were very narrow-minded because they didn't know many foreigners, it was really an island population, and it took some time until I got accepted in the office, quite frankly, and they opened up to me. That was more difficult than anything else, because I was regarded, to start with, as an outsider. And I was eighteen at the time, so it did affect me somehow. But I stayed four years in the first job before I went to the next job, so that's how it went.

So, what sort of jobs did you have?

Short-hand typist.

Was it in different companies?

Yes. And so, yes, so we settled in England, and I was accepted, happily accepted by neighbours as well.

But was it important to have some contact with other refugees as a support system, to support each other?

You mean in London or…?

In Slough at the beginning.

[00:54:00] I wouldn't say they supported me. They visited, but quite a few were au pairs. That's how they came. They had to accept au pair jobs and –

Yeah, domestics.

Domestic jobs, yes. And that's how they managed to come to England. That didn't apply to us because my father had work. And we got to know quite a few, because this was more or less like a centre afterwards. And one or two then managed to buy houses as well and settled in Slough.

And Marion, after the war, did your parents ever consider returning to Germany or emigrating elsewhere?

My mother went once, but I – after my parents died, I still had a cousin in Krefeld and I travelled every year. I visited Krefeld every year, actually, 'till about ten years ago my cousin died. And once she died, I didn't go anymore. She survived because her father was non-Jewish. Her mother was Jewish and unfortunately died in Theresienstadt, which is… The tragic part was that she survived. When the Russians liberated Theresienstadt, she was liberated. Then Typhoid broke out. She helped and died of typhoid three days after the liberation. That was so tragic. And she was the mother of my cousin.

[00:56:04] *But the cousin stayed in Krefeld?*

Yes.

And you visited her?

Yes, every year.

And when was the first time you went back to Krefeld?

Well, it's a strange thing. I had not been in touch with her, but a mutual friend who lived in the States, they were very close as children, she – they went on holiday. Then I got an e-mail saying that – they were both called Ilse, actually, that they were on holiday in Austria and they thought they should meet me. So, I replied, would Ilse still be interested after all these years to hear from me? And she said yes, and that's how we got in touch and we stayed in touch for years. She came here once or twice, and I met her. And she died, as I said, about ten years ago and I haven't been back.

And what was it like for you to go back to Krefeld?

I felt like a tourist. Really, I did. I recognised everything, of course. It was bombed as well. But it just affected me as a tourist.

Did you meet any of your other friends there?

No. One friend, my school friend, didn't live there anymore. So, I didn't meet anyone else.

And do you remember, what did you feel at the time towards Germany?

What, when I went for the first time?

Yeah, what were your feelings?

[00:58.00] I just said it felt like a tourist. I did not feel sad to go back. It was just… I just accepted it. And I spoke German there, of course, that I hadn't forgotten. And my cousin was the main reason, for me to see her. And I stayed with her in Krefeld, in her house and this went on for at least ten years. We became very close again. But since then, I haven't been back. I've still got friends in Germany and they've been over here.

Yeah, and did you continue to speak German to your parents? When you spoke to your parents, which language did you speak?

To begin with, my mother, I spoke German with her on purpose. I didn't – the language can't be blamed for what happened and I spoke German with her. And I also, I had children in the neighbourhood, Indians. And when they had children, they – I gave them German lessons. I still know quite a bit of German, actually.

Yeah. And to your father, also German?

My father spoke, I mean, he made an effort to speak English, but they still played – they still spoke German. And my mother too. **[01:00:00]** But I just didn't – I spoke German with my – because my cousin was in Germany, I spoke German quite well, because she spoke a bit of English. But when I was in Krefeld, I spoke German.

And did your parents receive any restitution in the fifties? Did – restitution, did they apply for restitution?

Sorry?

Did your parents apply for restitution from the German government?

Yes, my mother did in particular. My father did as well, because I think that helped them to make a living here. And I think they didn't stop it until my mother died, actually. So that was a great help to them. And of course, living in this house was a help to the rent, it was reasonable. But as I think I mentioned, they sold the house to us and we bought the house. And my parents did one good thing at the time, they bought the house in my name, not in their name. So that was a great help.

Yeah. Were you close to your parents, Marion? Were you very close to your parents?

Well, I wouldn't say very close. I mean, I was closer to my mother than to my father, but the relationship was sometimes a bit strange.

[01:02:09] *In which way?*

Well, my mother and I didn't always see eye to eye [laughs].

On what issues?

I can happen, can't it?

Yes, on what issues?

Well, difficult to say. On various subjects, we didn't always agree.

Yeah. So, when you moved to London, then you moved to Maida Vale, you said?

I moved to Maida Vale. I lived there for twenty-six years.

Yeah, and what was that like? Did you enjoy it, living there?

Yes, I did enjoy it and it was a very nice flat, actually. And not far from Maida Road Station.

The mansion, in the mansion building?

That's right.

The mansion flats.

Yes, it was in a block of flats on the corner of Maida Vale and Edgware Road.

Okay.

Not far from Maida Vale Station.

Right.

So about five minutes' walk, which was quite useful.

And what – where did you work at the time when you moved? Where did you – what...?

I worked in Victoria Street. And then eventually, I worked for another company who – it was a company who dealt in sales of export of meat near Smithfield, actually. And there I stayed for eight years before the company was taken over. So, I had to move, and then eventually I came back here.

[01:04:18] *And then started volunteering in the school, you said?*

After my mother died, yes, because I'd only been here five months when my mother died, so it was another change.

Yes, and your father was still alive?

No, no. My father died in '78, before my mother died. And as I said, then I did voluntary work for quite a long time, which I enjoyed. And one of the men of the AJR came to see me because there was another refugee in Slough. She was Austrian, she lived on her own. And they asked me, would I like to go and see her? So, I did that for two years and then she died. And I was still teaching children with – helping children with reading. So, I was quite busy.

And you mentioned the AJR. Did your parents join the AJR?

My mother did. She got the AJR journal and that's when I took over after she stopped.

And do you go to events? Do you go to things? Do you ever go to events they organise, or the AJR?

Not – to begin with, they had lunch in Hertfordshire and that's when I drove there.

Okay.

[01:06:04] But that's a long time ago and nobody else – there were still friends who went. And I'm afraid we've lost a lot of friends.

Yeah, yeah. So now there is no group? There was a Hertfordshire group, AJR group?

Sorry?

Was there a Hertfordshire AJR group or meetings in Hertfordshire?

They did – they moved. I mean, they had lunches for many years.

Right.

And I did go, but my friends are not there anymore.

Yeah. What about, but you joined the synagogue, Maidenhead Synagogue, you said?

The Maidenhead Synagogue I joined, but I don't go actually [laughs]. It's –

Why did you join then?

Well, I think, it's like an insurance policy for burial, quite frankly.

Yeah. Did your parents join there?

My mother didn't join. The rabbi was, you may have even come across his name, Romain, Jonathan Romain.

Yes, yes.

He was the – and he came to see my mother when he was first – when he first came, they had talks together. But I didn't go and he didn't come and see me. I was in touch, but I didn't go to service.

So, you've been actually in this house since 1939?

Correct.

Where we're sitting here?

Correct.

That's quite a lot of years.

[01:08:00] Ninety-eight. This house is ninety-eight years old.

So how do you feel today? Do you feel you're – how do you feel about Slough? Do you consider this your home?

I'm used to it, that's all I can say [laughs]. The good thing about Slough is Windsor. Windsor's only four miles from here.

Uh-huh. I see you have a picture there of King Charles and Camilla.

Yes, that was last year.

They sent you – for your 100th birthday?

Yes.

Yeah.

And the second one, there are two there, the second one was rather unexpected because I sent a short letter thanking them for the card. And in the letter, I put, 'And I'm taking this opportunity, King Charles, to wish – to convey my best wishes for speedy recovery.' And then I forgot all about this and then I got an acknowledgement again.

That's nice.

So, somebody said, 'Well, now you should send another letter.' Well, that was a joke, of course.

Yeah, yeah. So, Marion, how would you consider yourself in terms of your identity? In terms of your identity, how would you describe yourself?

What do you mean?

Your identity. Do you see yourself as British? As…?

Well, I've lived here for so long, I suppose I feel British and I accepted that okay. The only thing is some people, I play bridge quite a lot, but some people would probably still say I've got an accent. And you know, sometimes I'm asked where I come from. **[01:10:10]** But not lately. That doesn't worry me.

So, you're still very active? You play bridge?

Yes.

And you drive? You still drive?

Yes, still. I could say I drive – I'm a better driver than a walker. I've got great difficulties walking, because I have got arthritic knees and had one or two other problems lately. And I'm still quite good at driving, quite frankly. And I used to drive to London, but quite a lot of my friends are not there anymore. I drive locally and I have no problems.

And Marion, how do you think has the emigration affected you, that you had to – that you were a refugee? How do you think has it affected your life, that you had to escape from Germany?

I found it difficult, first of all, to get used to it. But I sort of took things [coughs], sorry, my voice. I took things in my stride. It – my parents were here, so I was lucky. **[01:12:00]** Many children were not that lucky. So, I think I appreciated that and I made friends quite quickly. And eventually, I was accepted in my place of work. As I said, that took some time but I didn't find it difficult.

And do you sometimes think what would have happened to you if you hadn't been forced to emigrate? If there wasn't Hitler, do you sometimes think what your life would have been?

Sorry?

Do you sometimes think what your life would have been if you stayed in Krefeld? If, I mean –

No, when I went to Krefeld, as I said, it left me cold. And if it hadn't been for my cousin, I wouldn't have really visited at all. There was a reason for me to go, not because it was Krefeld, but because it was her. And we went on one or two excursions when I was in Germany. We visited Düsseldorf, which of course, is not far. And I spent one holiday with her. When she drove, we went to the lyceum, as far as the lyceum. We spent a week away, which, I was a tourist, didn't really affect me otherwise. I'd been living here for so long.

Yeah, you don't feel a nostalgia or a sense of...? You don't feel a connection or a strong connection to Germany?

Not really. The one thing is, when on one of my trips to Germany, my cousin did this behind my back. She was in touch with my former grammar school. **[01:14:02]** And I went to see my cousin, and she said, 'Oh, we've got an invitation to go to the lyceum.' I said, 'Oh, fine.' And that was a very strange feeling, to go back to the school, which had not been bombed. And the building was exactly the same as when I was there. No change whatsoever, so it's quite familiar. And then this teacher opened the door and said, 'I'd like you to talk to some of my pupils.' I said, 'Oh, I wasn't aware of that.' So, there were about sixteen young people, seventeen or sixteen, staring at me. So, I said, so they asked me questions and happily, I answered them well. And later on, that conversation was published in the German Westfälische paper. And so, I said – it was a bit of a surprise. I had no warning. So, she said, 'Well, would it have made a difference if I had warned you? I thought it was better that way.' And that was quite interesting and they had a journalist there. And as I said, it appeared in the German paper.

Did you enjoy talking to the children?

Well, eventually, I got used to it. But to me, it was a great surprise to be faced with all these people. And I've got a copy of that talk, actually. **[01:16:10]** Anyway, so many of our acqu – my parents' friends emigrated to the States and I think I'm quite happy to be in this country. I've visited the States, but I'm happy to be here.

You're happy that you came to the UK?

Yes, that's right.

Do you have any regrets or anything you feel you should have done?

Sorry?

Regrets, do you have any regrets for yourself?

About what?

I don't know.

No. I think it's fate, really, which plays a big part in one's life. No, I have no regrets. The only regret I had was that I didn't go to school and then that was a bit too late, then. And in a way, my parents made a mistake and that couldn't be rectified. So, I had to put up with that.

Marion, anything else I haven't asked you, you think you want…? Anything else which we haven't discussed which you'd like to mention? Maybe tell us what...

[BA] Actually, I was thinking, you've been very fortunate with your...

That is correct. Being in Slough, I am, of course, in a non-Jewish community, which doesn't worry me. And I – two doors next door – neighbours are pretty good. But two doors, I've got Indian neighbours who are absolutely fantastic. **[01:18:03]** They've helped me a great deal. And they're friends really, more than… There's a picture. They've created that birthday card for me and I'm very fortunate.

Yeah, around – did you have a nice…?

And then I've also got a Muslim friend who I have... She was one of my students when I was at Langley College and we've become friends. I've known her for over twenty years.

[FS] She phones her every day.

Barbara's met her too. And she's Muslim, I'm Jewish. We don't talk about politics [laughs], but apart from that we are great friends, really. It doesn't make much –

[FS] Very supportive.

So, you have a nice, supportive...?

Yeah, and she knows most of my friends. And she always asks me, 'Have you had any telephone calls or something?'

[FS] But she phones you every day.

Yes.

[FS] Which is good. It gives her reassurance that she knows that somebody... And also, former neighbours have kept in contact. You've been very fortunate. Your former neighbours have all kept in contact.

Yes.

[FS] And even...

Oh, yes. They had been living next door for twenty-nine years. And the family, they knew my parents. And they've got four children who are now in their fifties and I've stayed in touch, stayed in touch with them. But it's quite unusual really, so…

[01:20:00] [FS] You're fortunate you've got a good... Even when it was her birthday recently, they – you know, a party was organised for her for about twenty-

Yes, yes.

[FS] This year and last, you know, sort of…

That's nice.

[FS] In fact, you're rarely on your own. You're rarely on your own.

Well, sometimes, especially... I couldn't go to a bridge yesterday, I've got a problem.

But Marion, tell us, so what's your advice? You are now at the age of 101. What is your advice?

I am still independent, so that is quite good.

[FS] You're thankful. Yeah, this is the main thing. You live on your own, look after yourself.

Yeah.

I've got a stair lift.

And what is your advice, how to get to this?

[FS] What's your advice?

To other people, what would your advice be for anyone who…?

[FS] Have you got any advice?

Well, I think it's difficult because everybody's different. And so far, I've been extremely fortunate that I can still look after myself. I've got to live from day to day, one doesn't know.

[FS] Also, the one thing you've enjoyed is your garden.

Yes, I've enjoyed it, but I can't do any more gardening [laughs].

[FS] But she – until recently, she did her own garden.

I have been.

Yes, you have a gardener?

[FS] She did enjoy it.

I've got a gardening help, yes. But until last year, I still did quite a few things. But unfortunately, my arthritis got worse, so I can't do much now.

And Marion, how do you feel about the political developments? Are you worried about the current political situation all over the world? Or is that something that worries you?

Well, I can't – I'm interested in what's going on, but what can I do about it? Whether it's – if we are worried, what difference can it make? **[01:22:02]** What's going on now is horrific, I think. And in Israel, things still haven't settled. And what's going on with Putin and Trump, it's… One can talk about it, but we cannot change anything, can we?

Marion, have you got a message for anyone who might watch this interview in the future? Have you got a message based on your life experience?

Well, it's difficult because everybody's different. I think I do accept things. I'm not a coward or anything, but I just accept things. I'm not squeamish or nervous as far as that's concerned.

Yes, you said you took things in your stride.

Well, that's how –

What helped you to do that?

Yes.

What helped you to do that, do you think?

No particular reason. I mean, some people don't do that and I'm happy I can do that. And otherwise, you can't live from day to day if you don't. And I mean, you have to accept a

certain amount of help, of course. **[01:24:00]** I've got a cleaner and I've got a gardener. My cleaner comes every two weeks, but I still do –

That's not a lot [laughs].

I still do certain things.

Yeah, yeah.

And otherwise, you don't know what's going to happen.

Okay, Marion, is there – unless – anything else you'd like to add? Anything else you'd like to add?

I don't think so.

I know you were – it wasn't your idea to do the interview. It was Barbara's idea. So how do you feel about it now that you've done it?

Well, it was interesting. And I mean, the one thing is, I watched Lore Luca's video and she's 105 now. You know her, do you? Did you…?

I didn't do it, no. It's not my interview.

No, it was your colleague who interviewed her.

Yeah.

No, I just... I suppose I'm lucky I can still do things, which... Until when? Nobody knows.

But you're not somebody who kind of lives in the past? For you, the past is the past?

Well, it's... The past is the past. You can't change things and my father put... In Germany, there was the custom, you had to book a *Poesie* – I don't know what you'd say.

Poesiealbum?

[01:26:00] Yes.

Autograph book, it's an autograph book.

And my father put in it, 'Life is a battle, you have to overcome it. You've got to win.'

In your poesiealbum?

Yes. 'Life is a battle, you have to win.' I don't even know where I've got it [laughs], but I shall –

And do you agree with it?

Yes, I think so. Don't you?

Yeah, I guess so, yeah.

Well, life is a battle. And if you don't accept it, if you don't win, where does it get you?

Okay, I think that's a good note to end this interview. Life is a battle and you've got to win.

I think I've lost my voice completely [laughs].

Well, you've spoken for a long time. So, I want to say thank you, Marion, for this interview.

And you have not had any coffee.

No, but we can have coffee now. Just one moment, we're just...

Sorry?

We can have coffee now, we have a little break. But we're just finishing filming for one moment. So, one moment.

Right.

[Pause]

[01:28:26] *Yes, please, Marion, what can we see on…?*

I have to put my glasses on.

Yes, please.

When I was... Sorry, I've lost it. That's my parents, myself, in 1950.

1926.

Oh [laughs], I was going to say, 19 – do I have to say it again? My parents, myself, 1926.

Thank you.

This was my grandmother, 1928.

'26.

'26.

Thank you.

This is me with my mother and grandmother in 1927.

That's my father's car and it's my mother, my father, my grandmother, and a friend of my father's, in 1928. Oh, God help me [laughs].

And this picture, it's with my two grandmothers, my parents in 1929. That's me, but I'm not sure who took it, in 19 –

[01:30:03] *Yeah, it's good, yeah.*

I'm saying it in German. *Das bin ich mit meiner Schultüte in-*

That's good.

[In German] 1930.

Super, thank you.

I don't know why –

Yes, please.

I'm at the back, at my primary school, 1932.

[MS] *So Marion is standing on the left-hand end of the line, dressed in white, with another child with her arm around her. Yes, please.*

In my gym class in 1938.

This is me, my father and our dog in 1938.

Where? Where? In Krefeld? In Krefeld?

In Krefeld. Yes, I suppose so.

[MS] *And your dog's name?*

Pit. And this is...?

Pit? Pit?

Pit, the name is Pit.

Yes, it's the photo where your father came back from Dachau. Yes, Marion.

My father came back from Dachau and that was 1938.

And who else is in the picture? Your mother and yourself?

It's – and my cousin and his wife.

[MS] *Yes, please. What do we see here?*

[01:32:03] Sorry?

[MS] *What do we see here?*

A collection of the interior of our house and one of the exterior. And this was in 1938.

And who photographed it? Did you take those photos?

Yes.

Why did you take them?

Sorry?

Why did you take those photos?

Well, that was before we were leaving, so that shows you how old this is. I'm not sure, the bookcase I think is – I'm not sure if the bookcase is in there or not.

You wanted to show what it looked like before?

Yes.

Thank you.

This was taken at the back of our house in 1939 with friends who were living with us until their quota came up to emigrate to the United States.

[MS] *And this was taken in Slough?*

It's taken at the back of our house.

[MS] *Of this house?*

Yes.

In 1939?

Yes, I did say that, I think.

Yeah.

That picture is taken in our garden at the back of the house, with my mother, myself and the dog.

When?

1930.

1940.

1940. **[01:34:00]**

Yes, this is my father and our dog. My father was in the Pioneer Corps and was taken in my garden in 1943.

[MS] *Yes. Yes, please.*

It was... I think it was 19… In the seventies.

No, I think it must be in the forties, probably. No? But what do we see? It's you at work?

Yes, but may I just have a…?

It doesn't matter, Marion. What do we see on the picture? You working? Yes.

[MS] *What do we see here?*

This is the factory producing margarine when my father worked.

This is on VE Day in 1945, I think, taken in Piccadilly Circus.

And do you remember it, VE Day? You remember going?

Yes.

And what were you feeling?

By train, I think. Sorry?

And what – how did you feel at the time, on VE Day?

I don't know. I suppose we were all overjoyed that war had ended.

Not sure what year that was.

[01:36:04] [MS] *Who do we see in this picture?*

Yeah, I'm not sure what year.

[FS] No, no…

It doesn't matter.

[MS] *It doesn't matter. Who do we see in the picture, then?*

This is the Algoet family.

[FS] He's the man that was instrumental... Oh, sorry, sorry.

[MS] *Tell us.*

This is the Algoet family who had rented a factory in Slough and it was taken in Knokke in 19...

'47.

‘47.

[MS] *And what is significant about this family?*

The family rented a factory in the Slough Trading Estate and helped my father to get out of Germany. And he had – he was offered a job in the factory in Slough. This was taken... No, this was given to me on my 100th birthday and collated by my Indian neighbours.

For your – last year?

Last year.

Marion, thank you so much for sharing your story and showing us your photographs.

Well, thank you so much for your patience and for coming and for doing all this.

We enjoyed meeting you. Thank you.

Same here. And who's going to be the next person?

[End of transcript]