IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Weisser
Forename:	Jacques
Interviewee Sex:	Male
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Interviewee POB:	Antwerp, Belgium

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Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV288

NAME: Jacques Weisser

DATE: 4 December 2023

LOCATION: Radlett

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]

Today is the 4th of December 2023. We're conducting an interview with Mr Jacques Weisser. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in Radlett.

Very much [ph].

Can you please tell me your name?

Salomon Jacques Weisser.

And when and where were you born?

I was born in Antwerp on the 7th of February 1942.

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

My pleasure.

Can you please tell me something about your family background?

My grandfather was from a town outside Kraków called Ropczyce. He subsequently married. And in those days in Poland you could be married religiously and/or civilly. He subsequently divorced and remarried, so there was a daughter called Esther and another lady whose name escapes me for the moment, who both went to Israel and they lived there subsequently for many years. He remarried and had eight other children, amongst them my father, Jacob "Kuba" and they moved from Ropczyce to Kraków, and from Kraków to Antwerp, and that's where the story begins from my point of view. My father in Antwerp met Martha Mandelbaum, soon to become my mother, and they had before the war a child, a girl called Lea, who will feature obviously a bit later in the story. **[00:02:11]** And I was born in 1942 and from there I assume that we will carry on with the story of that part of the war.

So Jacques, I think it's good to ask at the outset, because we're going to talk about your war experience, whether you have any memories of that, or you found out about your own war experiences later?

I have absolutely no memory of any kind whatsoever other than what I have been told, either by family, but most importantly by research done by other people, especially a young man called Reinier Heinsman from Holland who features, if you like, yeah, very much as part of the story that enabled me to find out a lot more about my background which over the years has been adjusted considerably because I as a result of the war, found myself a 'Wandering Jew', literally. Anything that I know is through other sources. There may be a faint glimmer here and there but I'm not sure whether or not it's actual or by virtue of having been told, seeing photos or reading.

So you find yourself in a situation of other child survivors, you know, young child survivors, where you really can't remember the actual war.

I was fortunate, I have to be totally honest, fortunate, lucky, call it what you like, but the aspects of the war for smaller children are very difficult to interpret. **[00:04:08]** You read about it, you see photos, you – there's even films if you like, but you can't actually pinpoint anything specific.

So, let me ask you, when were you aware? First of all, I want to ask you two things. What are your first memories? And second, when were you aware that you were maybe different from other children or that you had gone through the history you had gone through?

A lot later and by that I mean a lot later, probably in the mid-'50s, if not even later, because as I discovered my Jewish background, for want of a better word, it came about due to an aunt and an uncle who I joined here in England in 1951/2 and subsequently when I moved with them to Southern Rhodesia where I had my *bar mitzvah*, where I had discovered a little bit more about my background, but not a lot, truly not. It's only when I joined a youth movement in Southern Rhodesia it was – it is called Betar, it still exists – that I actually was able to identify a lot more with my people, for want of a better word, with the Jewish people during my not – well, I would say probably more my before-formative years there was no Yiddish guide of any kind that I knew of. I'm not saying it wasn't there. I heard my father and members of his family talking to each other in a foreign language which I now know was Yiddish, whereas in – of course in Belgium speak a multitude of languages. My father spoke six, seven languages. **[00:06:01]** I thought it might have been Flemish or German but no, it was Yiddish as I discovered subsequently. So yes, from that point of view there was something but nothing tangible.

And what are your first memories of growing up in Antwerp? So you were in –

None whatsoever. My only memories are subsequent to that because in Antwerp I was – first of all I was a baby literally, six months old before I was actually hidden and, in a hospital and subsequently in a Jewish orphanage. But no, I'm sad and I feel guilty, I have to admit, because I want to but I can't.

Yeah. And as I said, you are not – it's not unusual because [overtalking].

No, I appreciate that, and that's what I hear all around me but it's still extremely frustrating because I've discovered things, I've seen things a lot later of course and I think to myself, why don't I remember? Some people do. I've spoken to the young boy who was with me in hiding

all that time. He doesn't remember, I don't remember. And we talk to each other, we've met since. Physically, last year we all met up again for the first time in eighty years, a bit less. But there are – he has a few glimmers. He was – we were the same – I think he was four months older than me and he does have a few distinct, distant memories. I don't. *Ç'est la vie*.

But you could also say that that in a way protects you from –

Oh, I'm sure it must have, yes. I suppose you could say that the – the influences of the various parts of my life that have come from meeting people, from the adjustment one makes by hearing things, and not necessarily understanding them, but certainly being able to identify with, all the- no memories to go- and put it into a tangible format. **[00:08:25]**

And a question which is related to this slightly, which we can come back to, is the question of being a Holocaust survivor. So, you are a survivor, do you consider yourself a survivor? And was it a journey in your life to consider yourself a survivor?

I've come to consider myself a survivor but very late in life, I would say probably in the last decade or so only because life was what life was. I took it on the chin, whatever I had, I had. Maybe it's the wrong attitude to have, I don't know. Can you say let bygones be bygones? Yes, possibly. No, because the influences of what happened because of the war, because of the atrocities, because of everything that took place and the results that emanated from the people who survived telling their stories and being able to influence us. And that's why I'm so keen on trying to educate because to me the most important thing is to educate. But how can I educate when I can't actually explain to people what I probably – no, obviously went through but don't remember. How do you tell that story? You can only tell the story of what you know happened through the mouth of others.

Yeah. So, did you pick up anything about when you grew up and the memories you have that – about your father's survival? Did he talk about it at all?

No, absolutely not. **[00:10:06]** The first I knew about it was a lot later in life and I managed to extrapolate his deposition, if you like, which was made in 1956 and it was *grosso modo*, it

wasn't as detailed as it could or should have been. And I have to admit, and to my shame I suppose, that I should have delved much more into it, asking questions when I did see him because I – most of the time I was not with him or my stepmother anyhow. But yeah, I should have done a lot more. And talking about it as I am doing now, highlights the lack of me doing what I could or should have probably done. But who can say that it was the right thing to do or not? The few times we did try, my cousins, my brothers, sister, they got the same response. It was what it was, we survived – his words, by the way – and we made a life for ourselves. And although he always explained to them because they obviously lived with him a lot longer than I did – and mine was sporadic – he would tell them that he – in French they say *cauchemar* – he had horrible dreams and he would react to certain noises or whatever. But he again in his story explains that he was fortunate, he was lucky in the various places where he was, he was able to survive for one reason or another which I explain when I start to tell the story of my background as opposed to what he said and where the two might dovetail in one way or another, and he always said it was always who you knew and luck, or vice versa. **[00:12:08]**

Yeah, and we'll come to his story. But it is interesting because obviously if you were a child and then your parent, you father, doesn't talk about it that means you also can't, or you won't have the knowledge either.

No.

So it's –

But he wouldn't have known what I went through either, whatever it may have been because what –

He wasn't with you.

He wasn't with me and I wasn't with him. So, I have the benefit in a way of knowing because he did tell some parts of his story a few times. But he did refuse to do the interviews that the Spielberg Foundation did.

The Shoah Foundation?

The Shoah Foundation. Did not – did not want to. I asked him several times because an aunt of mine who had come to live in England after the war, she did give her story. Actually, I must listen to it again. And the funny part of it, if one can put it, is he was willing to do it in '56 and he did it subsequently obviously in French but he wouldn't do that one and I have never been able to understand why he would not do it for the Shoah Foundation. Maybe being on camera wasn't his thing, I don't know.

Okay, Jacques. So let's go back to the beginning, to your life, and tell us what you subsequently found out about after you were born.

Well, I was born, first of all as I said, in '42, in September of '42. I lived in Antwerp and there's a story that leads up to it obviously. And what I do know, that in September of – er, late August, beginning of September '42 there were various *rafles* [raid] in Antwerp where the Jews were assembled and taken away to Auschwitz and my mother was in the second one. **[00:14:00]** And on the 12th of September she was deported from Malines in Belgium in convoy number nine and never came back. So, from the family point of view, she was one of the first to be murdered by the Nazis. Somehow or another, I don't know how, somebody or a group of people possibly, took me to a home and it was called the *Meisjeshuis*, which in Flemish actually means the house for girls. It was sort of a girls' orphanage. There were boys there as well. And there I was. It was probably Catholic, from everything I understand. And from there because they were expecting to be – the Jewish children who were there – to be taken, I was hidden away in a hospital and there I was hidden for eighteen months. But there I was actually hidden, as against looked after. I discovered subsequently that I was there eighteen months in hiding together with a few others obviously. One of the boys who was with me survived the war and we've been in touch, only a couple of years ago, again through the story which was researched by a young man from Holland who wrote a book about the children. The reasons that we survived are quite bizarre in many ways but maybe we can come back to that. The eighteen months passed, the Germans finally found the Jews in the hospital, although according to Bill, this young man, he remembers we were hidden in

cupboards and under laundry bags and whatever. **[00:16:05]** Somehow he has glimmers of that. I don't. And –

What does it mean? So, hidden. Were you kept in a special –

We were kept in this hospital.

[Both talking at once] In a special room or –

Yeah, we were supposed to be – no, I don't remember. He doesn't either. We were patients.

Patients.

Yes, that's – and there were patients. It was a proper hospital, looked after by nurses and nuns as far as I can tell, because there are photos, believe it or not, that have been found and that Bill found and that Reinier, this young man from Holland, this researcher.

So in a sort of paediatric ward or something like that.

Can't say. It would appear that it was, yes. We were around and the photos actually show us playing even in the grounds of the hospital. It shows us with nurses. It's [overtalking].

And the name of the hospital?

I beg your pardon?

What was the name of the hospital?

I knew you'd say that and [laughs] suddenly it's slipped my mind [laughs]. It will come back to me. I apologise. Anyway, we were there eighteen months until we were captured by the Germans. The Germans sent us to the Gestapo headquarters in Brussels. We were there overnight. That is actually factual because there are records which again this Reinier found.

We were there overnight and then we were put in – him and I, that we can identify, but possibly others, we were put into a Jewish orphanage. And I emphasise the word Jewish because people say, how can you have a Jewish orphanage during the war? Why weren't all the children sent off to Auschwitz? Well, an edict of the Germans, which I can't pronounce – it's in the book – we can always add it later if necessary – the edict said that any children, I think it was under three years old, who did not have living parents, would not be sent to Auschwitz. **[00:18:01]** Whereas babies of whatever, six months, were sent, we were not. An unbelievable edict that most people cannot understand.

Yeah, I saw it. It said "Alleinstehende Kinder".

Perfectly said [laughs]. It's not of that [inaudible]. Yes. And the lone – I think in the equivalent is lone children. The funny thing is – funny – wrong word. The bizarre thing is, they obviously did not know my father was still alive, whereas my mother wasn't. My mother had been murdered in Auschwitz on arrival, so she would have probably died around I would imagine 13th, 14th, maybe 15th of September.

'42?

Oh, '42, because obviously, she was on the convoy which left Malines [Flemish: Mechelen] on the 12th, so about a couple of days I presume to get to Auschwitz, whatever, and on arrival sent to the gas chambers.

And is the assumption that she – you were left with a neighbour or you were left somewhere or –

There's an assumption which was erroneous and which Reinier absolutely said is not true, because his research showed that I was sent to the *Meisjeshuis* within a few days of her being deported. So, if she was captured- if she was taken, let's say a couple of days before the 12th of September, where was I? So, I must have been somewhere. So, either somebody took me in for a while and then took me to the *Meisjeshuis*, nobody knows. But he said I was in the

Meisjeshuis I think he said from about late September, October- it's mine, sorry, er, October of '42 and that he's got records. Oh, sorry, he found the records that I was at –

So there is a gap basically.

There is a gap, it's a blank. **[00:20:01]**

Where you don't know and you won't be able to –

No, there's no way of finding out because that hospital got bombed out anyway during the war at some stage.

So basically somebody saved your life, that's [overtalking].

Yes, and that's all we know.

And you don't –

Somebody, a group of people – somebody said it's the neighbours. Well, it may have been. I don't know. In reality, one could ask how did my mother leave me, wherever she left me, at the house, wherever, in Van den Nestlei, in Antwerp, which is where they lived. And she was taken in the street. So, the question is, who was I with during that period? Although one again can only assume that those people are the ones who looked after me for a few days before putting me in this *Meisjeshuis*. So it's a blank for everybody basically. Nobody can tell, nobody knows. There's nobody to ask any more. There are no records.

Yeah, maybe the neighbours who lived in that house [overtalking].

That – and that's what I say because I can't think of anything else to say, to be honest. If she went out shopping to get a loaf of bread or whatever and was taken, I must have been somewhere.

And Jacques, at that time where was your father? At that –

At that time he was in- working for the Todt Organisation, T-O-D-T, on the Atlantic Wall because the Germans promised that – they were forced labourers basically – promised the Jews who were willing to go and work and were able to – my father was a big guy, he was 6'2", 6'3", something like that, he was a solid person – that the families would not be hurt, so on that score he said he willingly became a worker on the Atlantic Wall, you know, the pillboxes, the concrete in placements that they put up all over Belgium and France, primarily France. **[00:22:15]**

Yeah, Organisation Todt.

Yeah, the Organisation Todt.

Yeah. But what do you know about your parents' situation? You said they had a child. And what happened once Germany occupied Belgium up until that point, at that time?

Well, when Germany occupied Belgium, my father and mother went to the south of France and that's where that part of the story, if you like, emanates again from, but my father – that they went to the south of France ahead of the Germans. France was not yet fully occupied. There was part of it occupied, the rest was Vichy France, as it became. And he worked for various organisations whilst he was there. My mother was taken and sent to a camp, a *camp de rassemblement*, which would be more of a concen – not a concentration, an assembly camp. And that's where she fell ill and so did my sister, so they took – because it was still not under German occupation, they took her to the hospital in Mâcon and my father heard – again in those days, how did they hear, God only knows – and came down, escaped from wherever he was, forced labour. He escaped a few times from various places, my father. In that respect I must take my hat off to him. He was extremely versatile at escaping, considering that he was a big guy. Anyway, he came – he got to Mâcon and soon after my sister, Lea, died of meningitis which she caught, so he says in his deposition, in the camp. **[00:24:13]** Now, the – after that they decided to go back to Belgium which they did, and I was – they – she died in '41 and they went back to Belgium and I was born in '42, when they – he was in Belgium.

What was the name of that – it was like an internment camp?

It was an internment camp.

What was it called?

I think it was called Gurs. I'll have to –

Gurs, yeah?

Yeah, G-U-R-S, Gurs.

Gurs, yeah?

Yeah. I'm not quite sure of its pronunciation. It's a big internment camp. Not a lot is known, for me anyway, about Gurs. But my understanding is that this, as this was, if you like, the French – the French were known to be collaborators for many, many years and they did – what they did to their – to "their" Jews is pretty dire as well, never mind what happened in Paris with Vélodrome d'Hiver, I mean you probably heard about, but everywhere.

Spell it.

Le Vel' d'Hiv', as it was called much later in Paris, the Jews of Paris were taken and I think in their thousands in this cycling track/stadium in Paris and – before being sent off from Drancy in again just outside Paris. And from what I understand, it was a horrible, horrible situation for them. And the French were complicit in so many ways, the *gendarmerie* were- how can I put it as diplomatically as possible- they actually picked up Jews that they didn't need to. **[00:26:04]** It was their "privilege" to be able to do so. Their anti-Semitism dating back to Dreyfus and even before, knew no bounds.

Jacques, but do you know what made your parents decide to go back to Belgium?

I don't actually know but I suspect that it would have been because what was there for them in France? Also, from what I understand, my father thought he could work and there were – promises were made, if you did – the Germans were extremely good at that, as is well-documented. If you helped them to do this, they would ensure that you, you know, the family would be as safe as possible but – so they went back. And I'm sure they regret – well, of course it was regret- regrettable for them that they did go back. But on the other hand, would I have been born? Who knows? Would my story, would their story, would – have developed the way it did? Me or there? Who knows? It's the way life is in- it developed in the way it did and as my father said subsequently, 'you can't bring back the past, you can't change it, it is what it is, you can commemorate, you can remember, there were the good times, there were the awful times, but that's it.' Whatever life there was carries on.

So did your father know what happened? Did he know that his wife was deported, that you were put in an orphanage?

He knew that subsequently because he- wherever he went to work following that- he discovered that his wife, my mother – that my mother had been taken, had been sent to Malines and again, luck and a miracle, he somehow got a letter from her saying that – and that's part of his deposition – that she had been taken and in Malines had actually – and when she was in Malines, she actually found her brother and sister there. **[00:28:27]** What we don't know, and for some unknown reason my father actually never wrote about it, never spoke about it, and again I'm as guilty as the next person, in not trying to establish her side of the story, her father, her mother. We know that obviously her sister and brother were sent to Auschwitz either before or after her and they perished. That is documented. And that was found by my brother some time ago and he got not so long ago the proof of it from the archives in Bad Arolsen – I'm sure you know that, about Bad Arolsen – which was opened a few years ago for researchers. And there we were able to find a little bit of proof of the fact that a) they were taken there. So that is part of the history which I am not very familiar – no, not familiar with at all. But in any event, he got that letter from my mother and that – so he knew that she had been taken to Malines and obviously subsequently knew that she had been

taken to Auschwitz. But after – anything other than that, he wouldn't have known because his own story then goes on from there.

But did she say about you what had happened, that you were not with –

Oh, no, she would – I'm assuming that she would have said that I wasn't with her. **[00:30:08]** She wouldn't have known what would have happened to me 'cos she was taken first. She wouldn't have known that I had been taken by the neighbours or whoever to *Meisjeshuis* or anything subsequent, no, she wouldn't have.

So my other question is about your name. Did people know who you were when you arrived at the Meisjeshuis? What was your given name?

There, my understanding is that it would have – it would be Salomon Weisser. Subsequently the Jacques became my *nom de guerre* but it would – but subsequently and when I was taken to the *pouponnière* to the Jewish orphanage, they misspelt my name and that's why they couldn't find me there, but they did ultimately. Because they misspelt my name and got the date of my birth wrong by a few days. And that in itself is quite interesting because later in the story, the lady who bought the house that I mentioned to you, a Spanish lawyer who bought the house where we were hidden, found some and made it her mission, if you like – she's got a wonderful story of her own – decided that she wanted to find out more about the children that had lived there. And through her own research found the cards, the file cards, of the children who were there and my name was there but misspelt and with the wrong date. And finally extending that, she did find yours truly and that other boy, Bill, that I mentioned, and a few others. **[00:32:02]** And we finally got those who survived together last year in that house in Brussels. Absolutely amazing. And ITN came with us. They decided there was a story that they wanted to put together, so they sent a camera crew and one of their reporters, a lovely young lady called Emma. Emma actually came to the – I'm digressing, aren't I? – came to Hyde Park, if you remember, last year for the anniversary of the AJR planting all the trees all over England and these other stories came about of ITN putting that story through the AJR.

So, Jacques, what was your name misspelt or what –

It was Weissner, as against Weisser and it – they had Salomon right, the Jacques came later, but the date of birth was not the 7th, it was a few days earlier. And as you know, all German records were all so meticulous and so [sighs] administratively punctilious, if I can put it that way, that date of birth, location of birth started things going. And that's how researchers have had sometimes tremendous problems.

But it means that people who put you in the first orphanage knew your name.

Oh, they must have. And that's what brings me to the thought that they could – it could only have been neighbours. I can think of nobody else. There was no family, that's for certain, so it must have been neighbours.

Because it means throughout you were identifiable because if you hadn't been, your father couldn't have found you.

Exactly. Absolutely.

And there must be other children in that – who were [overtalking].

Who were. Oh, no, absolutely no doubt. **[00:34:03]** And the fact that in Belgium certainly – I can't say, you know, and other countries obviously – a lot – there were a lot of children that were somehow saved in one shape, form or another because even Yvonne, my stepmother's parents, were involved in saving Jews in one shape, form or another, not necessarily children but certainly, so there's connections there. And there was quite a decent underground and of course the underground in Europe, a lot of them were communists, Jewish communists, including my uncle, I hasten to add. My father's brother was in the underground and that's how he survived. He was responsible for Charleroi, a whole area there. And another story, because his son was also a hidden child, my cousin.

What is – what are their names? Your uncle and –

My uncle was Chamek- Chaim, Chaim Weisser, one of the siblings of my father, and he married Martha from Czechoslovakia and they had a son called Michel, and Michel was hidden in the Ardennes as well then. The lady who hid him survived many, many years. She was recognised as- I forgot the name suddenly. A –

As a righteous –

Righteous amongst the nations, thank you. As a righteous amongst a nation. Michel managed that. Funnily enough, during the war – subsequent to the war, many, many years later when I came on a visit from Israel and I found the lady who at the end of the war was involved in hiding in me in the Ardennes. **[00:36:02]** I found her name, Madame Wittamer, and I managed to make an appointment to see her but she never turned up. I subsequently learnt that she'd married and never told her husband that she'd hidden a child during the war. My father says that – again I'm digressing, I suppose – that he, when he went to find me and did find me, she didn't want to give me up, as a lot of them didn't. She wanted to keep this child. He never talked about her either, which again I found a lit – subsequently difficult to understand because obviously, I was the last step, if you like, in the life story of being alive. In the Ardennes the – obviously the Resistance had put me with her and for whatever reason, no information, not of any kind from any of the family, apart from the fact that they may have met her once or whatever, not from my father, not from my stepmother, not from anybody. That in a way hurts because that would have been [sighs] – it would have been good.

For you.

[Gets upset] Sorry. Sorry.

It would have been good for you to have that connection.

Close the circle, basically I suppose [laughs].

What was her name, on the record now?

I only know her first name because there is a card which the Spanish lady found. Her name was Wittamer – excuse me. **[00:38:03]**

Wittamer?

Yeah, W-I-T-T-A-M-E-R.

That was her first name or her surname?

Her family name.

Family. Madame –

Madame Wittamer – excuse me.

Madame Wittamer.

I didn't think it would affect me like that, sorry. Yes, Madame Wittamer. But finding her, that was interesting, her not coming forward. I mean I was already married at the time that I learnt.

So you were looking.

Yes, I was.

But Jacques, maybe just before we talk about her, because we need to understand how you got to her. So from the hospital, just let's go back to the chronology a little bit.

Yeah, of course.

So you were in hiding in hospital, then you were taken to the Jewish orphanage.

Yeah, in Brussels, called Baron de Castro. It was a *pouponnière*, the equivalent of a nursery I suppose. But from the photos you could see there were different age groups. Obviously, a few of us were the youngest because I was – this would be 1944, so I was already about two years old.

And how long were you then kept there?

By the looks of it, again I'm not quite certain because even she is not certain of all of the children there – she's still finding children, that lady, believe it or not. I mean we're all over. She discovered one in Australia, Bill of course in Los Angeles, myself –

So both of you know because of her research.

Because of her research, not because of Reinier. This is because of her research.

So just tell us now who she is because –

This lady, as I said an amazing lady from Spain, Bilbao, her father was one of those who fought against Franco, so the whole story of the Spanish Civil War and everything comes into it. **[00:40:04]** Be that as it may, he was quite a character, from what she told us. And she married a Belgian lawyer, Philippe, and pure chance, they bought this house in Brussels and this house was the *pouponnière*, was the orphanage where we'd been. And she discovered it had been a *pouponnière* and for whatever reason, maybe her own background which is in itself quite a fascinating background, she decided she wanted to find out more about the children that were there.

So how did she discover that house was a –

I believe it was through one of the children who had been there, a guy called Arthur Langerman. I discovered this only days ago through a story that somebody else told me. And Arthur Langerman, one of the children who was there, must have – his story was told in

Belgium because he became a huge collector of memorabilia of Nazi propaganda. He's got virtually a museum and that's nationwide Belgium and I believe internationally even, he's got a – tens of thousands of artefacts.

So he talked about that [overtalking].

He must – and they must have talked about that building and somehow – I must try and ask him when I next see or Zooming with him – the interface was made and between the two of them they decided to do this, and primarily her, I hasten to add. She's an amazing lady. And over the years, I mean they transformed that house totally. I mean you wouldn't believe that house today, amazing place. Anyway, the photos that I have and that Reinier found and that she's obviously got, are of a house with beds with in it and it shows us there, children sitting around in a circle. **[00:42:12]** We don't look unhealthy. I mean we probably weren't that healthy. But we were children. And although she's not Jewish, she's in fact extremely Catholic, she found a photo and it showed I think in that document I showed you, every *Hanukkah* she'd lit a *hanukkiah* with the photo and she circulated that and we found ourselves, a few of us, in that photo as children. And she'd obviously identified us and discovered who we were, with the help also of the fact that Reinier had discovered quite a lot about us. And the fascinating thing is that over the years she found more and more and I think by the end, when I spoke to her last, she had over forty children that she had discovered, who had passed through that orphanage, and as I said, still discovering them.

So her research, and how did it work? Tell us also about Reinier now, and was it parallel research? Or was it –

No, it was- no, no, it wasn't together. It wasn't. They may have spoken to each other- of that I have no doubt. I certainly put Reinier in touch with her at the time.

What's Reinier's surname?

Heinsman.

So he was a –

A Dutch boy, a student of law, and he had volunteered to go to Malines to serve as a volunteer some years ago to take photos because the Germans had obviously taken photos of the – the prison guard, somebody had taken lots of photos, including one of my mother, and they wanted to put an – it was called – a research called putting a name to a photo, and that was his research. **[00:44:16]** He found these photos, which included my mother, and they put names to the photos, and he did, and his research identified locations, identified names, transport, what became of them, sadly those who were exterminated, or murdered, basically, and those who survived, including yours truly. And by pure chance his research found my name, and thank God for modern technology, Google, whatever, Wikipedia, I don't know. He found that I worked for AJEX and also that I was a trustee of the Yad Vashem UK Foundation and he wrote to them, to Yad Vashem UK Foundation here in London and they received this email and they were a bit wary of it, as I would have been. Who's this person wants to know about one of our trustees? But they passed it on to me. We opened a dialogue and that was just over three years ago, 2019, and things developed from there. He said to Yad Vashem that he was writing a book about the children, especially those that he'd found photos in the archives, if that's what they were, in Malines, and then told the story about the children under three years old who were without parents. So, there's a whole section in his book, an amazing book in reality. **[00:46:01]** But it also identifies other Jewish orphanages, including one in Wezembeek-Oppem, again in Brussels. And a lot of the children of that particular orphanage were found, identified and he writes the story about them in that book. That was his mainstay, that book, Wezembeek. If you look at the book a lot of the stories emanate from the children of the orphanage of Wezembeek.

But your photo, how did he find your photo? Or was it through your mother?

I don't know how he actually found my photo. I had photos, I didn't know what they were. I think those photos primarily would have been partly through him but mostly I would suspect through Philippe and Isabel, Isabel being the Spanish lady, because those photos are of the children at the orphanage in Baron de Castro, the *pouponnière*. So, the photos that I have, and don't ask me where I had the photos from, they were discovered in- I can only assume- again

I shouldn't assume because I don't know in reality. I have them, the small little black and white photos, one of them shows Bill and myself during the war, after the war – during the war at the *pouponnière*, after the war somewhere in the Ardennes, probably possibly in Aix-en-Raphael [ph], I can't pronounce it suddenly, in the Ardennes. And in one of a whole group of us sitting in the – in one of the rooms in this *pouponnière* in Baron de Castro of whom at least four are identifiable. **[00:48:00]** Two and a half years old, three years old.

That's extraordinary, because of these two people, they reconstructed your own –

Yeah, yeah, re – basically they're my life. Yeah. True, yeah. And I can only thank them for that. My mazel [good fortune], if you like, that they came on the scene in one shape, form or another. That is quite amazing that here is Reinier doing what he's doing, totally separate, and there is Isabel doing her thing and the two did meet up. You know, they say never the twain shall meet. Here, we have.

And when you first saw the photos, how did you identify yourself?

When I first saw it –

I mean on the photos.

Much later. I had these and I didn't know what I had. I had these photos all these years and it's only when the story started, if you like, to develop, you know, just before the Covid killed off so – I shouldn't use the word killed, but it did – changed so many things that I discovered who I was. I – there was a photo of me, I knew it was me but where it came from, where was it taken, no idea.

But could you identify who on the picture you were?

Oh, yes. Yes, absolutely. I was told. I was told and on one of them it gives my name, on the back of one of the photos, *souvenir de Jacqui*. Who wrote it, no idea. But Jacqui is in fact my

name that the family knows me by, Jacques but it's Jacqui, my *nom du guerre*, so it must be somebody who – it must be a member of the family. That's all I can assume.

So that photo travelled with you to the Ardennes and then taking your passport [ph].

[Both talking at once] It must have travelled, yeah, and – no, it wouldn't have travelled with me. **[00:50:03]** Definitely not. Excuse me. No, that photo would not have travelled with me to the Ardennes. It would have come into my possession much, much later. Definitely later because the number of times – and there's a photo of my cousin, Michel, who was also as I said hidden, same style of photo, so it was that period, we know that. Where did his photo come from? How come I've – the fact that I've got this photo, it must have come from a box that somebody had somewhere, a member of the family.

And you got it at post-war somehow?

Yes, definitely post-war. Oh, absolutely, much later.

So somebody kept it.

Yeah, yeah.

We don't know who.

We don't know. I wish I did.

So it's very complicated because it's all these layers of –

Yes, there's so many different layers that – the puzzle, you know, trying to find the bits and pieces, it's complicated, complex.

It is complicated. So, let's go back to the Spanish lady and to that – the building.

Well, that building still exists today. As I said, we went back last year and one of the survivors made a painting of that photo I showed you, of that group of us behind. Quite an amazing photo. I downloaded it from a WhatsApp she sent us. We were there obviously- quite a few months. The rooms are, looking at the photos, very simple, a lot of baby cots about, beds. It shows a lot – they – no, not a lot. It shows some of the staff. They must all have been – they weren't nurses, that's for sure. Were they Jewish staff? I suspect not because from what Isabel told us, they were paid, they weren't volunteers, so I suspect they were Belgian staff looking after us. **[00:52:08]**

So they're now at that point taking care of Jewish children exempt from deportation.

Yes, and those child – sorry, the staff, some of them must have been Jewish. I'm certain they must have been. Certainly, in the other home I mentioned, Wezembeek, definitely there's a whole history of Madame Blum who looked after the children.

But how far? Where was Wezembeek? Also –

Wezembeek is in Brussels. It's – Wezembeek in, you know, it's six – five, six miles away from Baron de Castro.

So there were a number of Jewish orphanages?

Of Jewish orphanages, yes. And Wezembeek was the best known, the bigger one.

And then were there only very young children because they took away the others? Or were there also some older children?

No, some of them were older. They weren't all children. Looking at the photos, they were not – and that is again a fascinating part of the story because the fact that we survived, Baron de Castro group, if you like, because we were all young, but the Wezembeek children weren't. They were older. You look at the photos, they weren't –

So your group, how many children were there? Today, in the –

She found in excess of forty over the years, Isabel. I suspect there may be more. But we obviously weren't there together all at the same time. The house could not have housed that many. Although the – Belgian houses, they call them *maison de maître*, were very lovely houses. We were on four floors at least. I'm actually very grateful for this interview, I must tell you, apart from the obvious reasons. It's actually putting together a package more than I've been able to do for a long time. **[00:54:00]**

Well, it's very complicated, you know, to be a child survivor.

I'm a complex – yeah [laughs]. We all have our idiosyncrasies as well.

So you said there were forty children at various points. So how long in reconstruction do you know that you spent there? How many months or [overtalking].

If I – it's my working-out – I really should liaise more with Isabel on that – but if we were – Belgium was liberated in September of '44. I believe I got there around June of '44. So I would think at around three to four months. That would be my interpretation because we were eighteen months in the hospital, in Antwerp. So, working out logistically, the –

And at what point then was the decision made to take the Jewish children, to take you [overtalking]?

My understanding is towards the end of the war and that's what I write when I – the – I'm not one of those who has been telling a story for forty years or twenty years or whatever, it's only a few times, four or five – this will probably be my fifth. I would imagine that the underground somehow got to hear of it, came and took us away under the noses of the Germans, because we were under their watchful eye all the time, and spirited us away in different places. And the one – I was in Aix-en-Raphael [ph] with Bill- with Bill. That's my understanding because the photos show us together. One of them, one of the photos shows us

together with an American MP. Now, the Americans liberated Belgium, as I said, late September-ish of '44, so that's my working-out of it. **[00:56:04]**

So do you think you were together in the same family?

Almost certainly. We were – the photos show us – different photos show us together, dressed differently, and with one woman – and the – one of the photos shows a woman and we, Bill and I, like to think that it must have been this lady, but we don't know. We have no way of knowing if it's Madame Wittamer or not. It would be Mademoiselle anyway. It would be Mademoiselle because she was not married at the time. I shouldn't say Madame. She's really Mademoiselle Wittamer.

But the name, how do you remember the name? Where was –

It's on a card and I've got a photocopy. I must find it for you. I think I saw it the other – I was researching it a couple of days ago. And there's a card that shows her name and her address. Somebody must have found her name and address. It wasn't me.

So she must have been willing or [overtalking] take two boys in.

Oh, I – to – either it was me by myself and I was with a neighbour or she took us both in. I have no idea.

What was Bill's name at the time? Do you know?

It wasn't Bill, it was William – I – so used to calling him Bill.

What's his surname now? Bill…?

I told you, I'm not good at putting together my story.

Don't worry. But I just wondered about his first name. What was his first name?

It was William. It was a Jewish name. And he's now called Frankenstein because Bill went to America, became a – joined the – much later in life he joined the army. He still, bless him, he still works, Bill. He's my age, going, he's – it's his birthday soon, in December.

Bill Frankenstein?

Bill Frankenstein. **[00:58:00]**

But at the time when –

It was Bill – it was William – sorry. William. [Bernard Baron]

It's okay, don't worry.

Just William.

[Both laugh] Just William. Okay. But you don't know how – I mean it must have been difficult to rescue all these Jewish children from a home controlled by the –

By the Gestapo. All I can say is the – my understanding of the Resistance, there was a section of the Resistance that specifically spirited away whatever Jewish children they could, and they did, and they were quite successful.

So were there any children deported from there or did they manage to get everyone out?

I have no idea. Absolutely no idea. I would like to think that they all survived, that I certainly would hope so. Bill, thank God, did, and another gentleman I'm in touch with, in fact I spoke to him last night, we're on – regularly on – in contact with each other. His name is Michael, and Michael was in Wezembeek. He was in the other orphanage and he's a successful film industry professional and he tell his story as well. And it's interesting how the two *pouponnières*, the two orphanages, the people who have survived, one of them is a girl and

her name – she married one of the boys who I went on *aliyah* with in 1959 from South Africa when I joined Betar as a youth. We all joined up, six of us, and this girl married Ivor Wolf, one of my mates who went to Israel and she was in Wezembeek as – together with her sister. **[01:00:06]** So somewhere along the line there's always interconnection.

So, when you went, you went to Saint-Raphaël again for how long and were you –

That would have been weeks, possibly a month. It couldn't have been very long because if Belgium was, as I said, in September it was liberated, let's say a couple of weeks before, my understanding again, there's no proof of this, we were re-hidden, if you like. I would have thought it would be a matter of weeks, a month or so. Not a very long, long time.

So now we have to slightly go back to your father's story because at some point he managed to find you and pick you up from –

Well, my father after – his story is- he was in Auschwitz as I said, he was denounced in France, sent to- again a longish story, that part of it. He ended up in Drancy and he was sent to Auschwitz, he arrived there, he was one of the lucky ones, given a job because as I said, he was quite a strong guy, big guy. He was sent to Buna-Monowitz, he worked in the *Kabel Kommando* which he managed to survive. He was then sent to Buchenwald and did a death march from there. In Buchen – I think it was in Buchenwald- he became the hospital porter because the porter fell ill, died, whatever, my father was asked because he spoke a lot of languages, to become the porter, hospital, manner of speaking, in a couple of dozen bandages and a few scissors I imagine, and he became the porter. **[01:02:07]** And the one thing he said to me – this is one of the few things he actually said to me and he mentions it in his story – the worst time came when the camp commandant or whoever, decided that 300 people had to be chosen but fifty of them would have to be chosen by various people and my father was said that he would be allowed five. He could choose five to live. Don't ask me why they did that. Psychological warfare. He said that was the hardest time for him, apart from the time when he was in a bunk – and this stays in my mind – and he said somebody stole a piece of bread from somebody else and somebody denounced that person. And you say, well, Jew denouncing Jew, etc. I said yes, people did. You did anything to survive, he said. But that

was one of his worst moments. So he managed to survive in the hospital. That he remembered. He survived there, was sent on another death march and ended up in the forest of Waldenburg when the Americans liberated. They were in the forest and the Nazis decided that was enough, they ran away and the Americans came. He was asked – again I suppose thank God for his languages – to be the camp command – I shouldn't use that word – to be responsible for the people who had survived and he did that for a few months. **[01:04:02]**

Where?

It's not Waldenburg, it's a similar name. It's near Waldenburg. So wherever the Americans put them all. And he did what he could to save as many and help and administer as best he could. And then he went back to Belgium looking for me, I understand. He knew obviously that her – Marthe, my mother, his wife, hadn't survived. He came to Brussels and in those days "the place to go to" when you came back was the station, always the railway station. There he met somebody he knew who told him, don't bother going to Antwerp, nothing there for you anymore, but your – because your wife died, that he knew that person, your brother has survived – that's my uncle Chamek and we believe your son is alive. So my understanding is – he doesn't say so in his story, he said I found my son, that's what he says in his story. I'm assuming it would have been through the Red Cross and he obviously found me, he says in Virton. Isabel says it was in Aix-en-Raphaël [ph] which are not far from each other, and brought me back to –

Aix-en-Raphaël?

Esch [ph], [Esch], [Esch], not Aix. Esch. I'll get the spelling for you. Esch-en-Raphaël. And there – she's got the cards that prove that I was there at some time for a few weeks and I believe that's probably where it was, not Virton. And he took me back, went back to Brussels, met his wife-to-be, my stepmother, Yvonne, and his life carried on from there, as did mine. **[01:06:09]**

And do you know when he came? I mean probably –

’45 because in ’4 – he says that I caught – when the Americans came, it appears – again I can’t find proof of it – that they brought polio with them and I caught polio in – he says in ’45. My cousin who’s a doctor thinks it was more ’45, ’46 that there was an epidemic. So I lived at that time for a while with my aunt and uncle, whose son they found, Michel, my cousin, also hidden in the Ardennes, totally separate story but quite fascinating as well.

But can I just ask you, so in the Ardennes did you stay until your father [overtalking]?

Yes, I was in the Ardennes till my father found me and I –

So how many months – when did he come?

He says it was ’45, July, August ’45 which to me seems very soon. He was liberated in, well, the war ended in May so it would have end of April, beginning of May that he would have been liberated.

So you must have stayed with the lady at least sort of nine months or –

Well, I don't know that that’s so because I do know that at some stage I lived with my aunt and uncle –

In between?

In – somewhere before he set up his life in Brussels, no doubt about it. My cousin, Michel, remembers, as do I. We remember living together, so it must have been before I went back to him. He may have found me definitely and I lived with my aunt and uncle because they had a place already which he probably didn't at that stage. Trying to put it all together has been a tremendous puzzle, I have to say. **[01:08:00]**

And also, the question which you can’t answer but, you know, is how did you – you didn't know who the person was, who came to collect you.

No. I had no idea. In fact I don't remember being collected. All I remember is, and it's probably because of those photos, those photos are pinpoints that showed that I was somewhere, there was a – there were fields behind us and there's Bill and there's myself, and the other photo shows the MP, so it would have been at that time. So that's the only way I would know that I was there, other than the cards that Isabel found.

But you said that you also know that the lady didn't really – didn't want to give –

No, so that's what I understand from my Aunt Marthe who I lived with and who survived long after the war, thank God, as did my uncle.

Okay, because that must have been a very difficult situation.

Well, I wouldn't have known. It was – I was there, I was playing with my cousin. And I remember, I do remember being in hospital though, so that must have been when I had the polio. That I do remember, because I remember hot and wet compresses. I seem to remember – I don't know if it's true or not, maybe I was told – an iron lung, I'm not sure, but I do remember being in a hospital then, yes.

So is that your first memory?

That is amongst my first memories, definitely. It would have been sort of '45, '46.

In the hospital and with your aunt and uncle [overtalking].

Living with them afterwards and subsequently with my father and going to school obviously. But that was later. But Michel and I – it's amazing, I spoke to him a couple of days ago and he said – we speak in French to each other – he said, I remember the red – what do you call that in English? *Housse* [French for cover] H-O-U-S-E, eiderdown. **[01:10:03]** You know, they used to have these big goose- that we called them eiderdowns I seem to [inaudible]. These were great, big things like filled with goose feathers to keep warm. There was no

heating. So he remembers that and I remember that. And I remember being wrapped up in brown paper with butter. I think it was at the time I've had polio. Excuse me.

And did it affect you badly at that time or –

Hmm, quite badly but then I came to England and it wasn't too bad. I did recover, I was able to do all kinds of things but later on, much later in life I got PPS, that's called post-polio syndrome, so all the muscles that got better suddenly got much, much, much worse. And that's what I've got now, PPS basically.

So, it impacted your [overtalking].

Yeah, infantile paralysis, polio. So yes, the advent of the scourge of the swastika, as they call it – there's a famous book called that – what it did to the world, what it did to the Jews primarily but to millions of others as well, horrible. And the world hasn't learnt, has it? It has not learnt and it's still not learning. We want to educate, I want to educate, but sometimes I'm being positive, my cup's always been – I say that all the time – has always been half-full but there are times when the burden of being Jewish is heavy.

I wanted to ask you about your father- when he came back and tried to build up his life. Tell us, because you didn't, tell us now, what did he do before the war? What –

Before the war he was a furrier and my grandfather was a merchant. He had a shop in- I suppose today an *épicerie* we'd call it grocery but it was everything. **[01:12:06]** It was a multitude of things there.

Épicerie?

Épicerie, yeah, amongst other things, but he specialised in eggs, believe it or not [laughs]. I remember one thing my father always saying, if an egg is low down or halfway up the saucepan or at the top of the saucepan, if it's at the top you don't touch it. If it's in the middle

it's okay, if it's at the bottom it's fresh, before it's boiled. They were specialists in that. He became a furrier at that time. He was a furrier. He –

Post-war?

Post-war, he still stayed a furrier but he was [doorbell ringing, knock on the door] – oh, sorry. It's a good thing the ring doorbell but it does catch you unawares sometimes. So yes, so my father post-war was a furrier. He then went – specialised in leather, so he had a few shops selling leather goods, everything from wallets to suitcases, briefcases, you know, the leather industry.

In Brussels?

In Brussels, yeah. Always in Brussels.

He didn't want to go elsewhere?

No, he didn't. I do remember some of my life at that – he must have rented a villa there and the shop was at the front, a very old villa at the back of the garden which is now a big block of flats. The – I went to school I remember that. But sometime or another, and I cannot remember when, I believe it, possibly when I was hidden or with my step-grandmother, you would say, step-grandma, Yvonne's mother, I remember going to church. I remember playing with rosaries, playing, you know. It's not – playing isn't the right word. Praying with rosaries. And I cannot pinpoint whether it's when I was hidden in the Ardennes with this Christian- wonderful lady obviously, for taking us in, or me in, amongst others, or with bobonne [ph]. **[01:14:11]** She was called bobonne [ph] to everybody, grandma.

Bobonne?

Bobonne, B-O-B. And her father- her husband, Albert, I mentioned earlier on, Yvonne used to tell me that they were involved in saving Jewish lives. She didn't say whether it was children or adults or hiding them or whatever. But yeah.

So your father married a non-Jewish [overtalking].

A non-Jewish lady, yes, who subsequently – and I digress a bit – because of the laws of inheritance in Belgium, remembering that she had a child of her own before she married my father, she had to adopt me, as my father had to adopt my stepbrother, Mich – and his name's Michel as well by pure chance. But she converted late in life, so she's buried with her – with my father in Brussels Shul, where soon after they got married. But I never had a passport so for many years I travelled on a *laissez-passer* all over. As I think I mentioned to your earlier on, I found that *laissez-passer* amazingly.

So does it mean your father didn't have a –

No, it means my father didn't either.

Was he stateless?

He was stateless, as was I stateless. But my father, I don't know if – he must have taken up Belgian – I took up Belgian nationality extremely late in life after I went back to Belgium in the '60s and I met Judy. I – you had to buy your nationality, so I bought my nationality, my – it's called *la petite nationalité*, the small nationality, so I became Belgian. **[01:16:02]** But when I came to England and became a UK citizen, which I did by adoption as well, the Belgians would not recognise the fact of being in those days dual national 'cos I've also got Israeli passport, or I had. I don't have any more. I had an Israeli because I went on *aliyah*. So, you can see, being a wandering Jew, a *Yehudi*, you know, that has got a lot of background to it in this respect. So, my father, yes, he carried on. He became quite successful, thank goodness.

And Jacques, did you – your father married, er –

Yvonne.

Yvonne. Were you aware that you were Jewish?

Barely. At that stage, almost not, I would say.

Did they try to kind of live a non-Jewish life or how –

Not particularly. The only times that I knew possibly that there were some – there were "Jews" in the family, considering that all of the brothers and sisters came from an Orthodox background, my grandfather had a beard down to here, black hat, black coat, although he wasn't considered a Hasid, he was extremely Orthodox.

What happened to him?

He died. He was taken to Auschwitz, as was his wife. Therein lies another story because he was –

What were their names?

His name was Mordechai, Mordechai Weisser. But his wife, that's the complexity of war and the Jewish marriage laws of the time was an Eisen [ph], so I had – those two aunts I mentioned before who were Eisen [ph], as against Weisser. And some of the Eisens [ph] are buried in Antwerp – not in Antwerp, you couldn't bury Jews in – their own separate cemeteries in Belgian, you still can't. So, the Orthodox are buried in Putte. **[01:18:00]** Putte is just over the border in Holland, so all the Orthodox members of the family are buried there. The others are in Jewish sections of non-Jewish cemeteries.

Yeah, but he was murdered and his wife in Auschwitz?

No, no, grandfather was. But he was taken – it's also an amazing story and it's slightly explaining my father's story. He managed to go to the south of France to a place called Saint-Jean-de-Luz and there, there were ships going to England with refugees. But unfortunately, in those days to get on board a ship when there was no port as such, you had to row out, there

were rope ladders going up the side of the ship, and my mother-in – no, she wasn't my – my grandmother, because she – it was the first marriage of my grandfather – refused to go up that ladder. So he stayed behind, she stayed behind, ended up in Auschwitz. Because people were falling off those ladders. She saw that and refused to go on board. Anyway, finally they sadly – there's proof of that as well – they ended up in Auschwitz and they were sent from Drancy as well, as was my father. But they didn't survive. But there were eight – a lot of the siblings did. Some came to America- came to Belgium. I'll start again. Some came to England and that's the aunt and uncle I spoke about before. So, they were here. Some of them survived in Europe. My Aunt Berthe, my Aunt Cylwa, who came to England, uncle Chaim, Chamek, who was in the Resistance. And I've got photos of them but what's amazing, photos of my mother. There's only two in existence. **[01:20:00]** One, the one that was found in Malines, of which there's a painting out there. If you remember, Prince Charles organised a sitting of five or six survivors a couple of years ago. One of those painters, my daughter, for my eightieth birthday begged, pleaded, did whatever and he agreed to paint my mother, so that's her painting in the hall, from a photo. But there is another one of my mother- and that is the one where she's in the HaNoir HaTzioni, a youth movement in Antwerp. And on that photo are the other women, the sisters. So, there's my mother plus Berthe, Cilli, Regina. There's I think three or four of the sisters, of my father's sisters, in that photo.

Your father's sisters?

Yes, my father's sisters. They were all young teenagers. Well, younger than that.

Jacques, what happened to your mother's family?

That's the hardest part, my guilt, and my father's, you know, way I suppose, that he actually never spoke about – I told you in his story very little apart from the fact that she found her brother and her sister in Malines and obviously we know that they died. He doesn't speak about her father or her mother. I've got their names, I know that they died and obviously it could have been Auschwitz but how or where, what records there are, very little. What were they – what did they do before the war.

You don't know that?

No. On his side, yes. On hers, for some unknown reason, not. Maybe Bad Arolsen may have some information. Yad Vashem, only the records themselves of course. **[01:22:01]**

And did you –

The fact that they –

Jacques, did you know that Yvonne wasn't your mother? Did you know that you had another mother?

No. In all honesty, no. To me at the time she would have been my mother because she was with my father, and Michel was my brother. And the others, I didn't know too well after because they were born after I left, Marc, Michel – the other Michel, Hélène, Luc, they all were born well after.

So you didn't actually have the awareness of your history at that time.

No, none whats – absolutely none, no. I'm sure there's – I'm not the only one but when I look back on it, I think to myself, what a complicated mob we were [laughs].

So is there any particular point where you remember getting that knowledge of finding out about your birth mother or –

I knew a little bit well after, probably from the photo that my aunt had, this aunt who lived in England that I went – who was in the Resistance, Auntie Cilli [ph]. She had a friend who sent her this photo of all those teenagers in the HaNoir HaTzioni. She's the one who told me, that's your mother. She's identified and actually got a photo with arrows and showing who's who. We also believe that amongst that group is a lady called Mala, a different Mala of course, who's very – who's quite a famous Jewish girl who together with her boyfriend, Edek, are talked about quite considerably in Auschwitz. They're one of the few who escaped

Auschwitz but were recaptured. It's quite an amazing story about Mala [Malka Zimetbaum]. And we believe we know who the lady, the girl is, in the photo. And there may be others but we just don't know because there's nobody to identify them. **[01:24:04]** The last lady who might have identified, died a few years ago in Belgium. She never saw that, the photo which I saw because she didn't – she didn't see it. Again, part of it I suppose one has to say, Reinier awoke the deeper knowledge, and so did Isabel. But before that it would be my Aunt Cylwa here in England who had this photo which I have.

So what led to the decision to – for you to be sent to England? What was it?

My health primarily. I think there were other family elements as well. My Aunt Paula, who by the way, also was not Jewish, she converted, Orthodox in Antwerp, a beautiful woman. When I came here she made sure I went to *shu*l in Wembley. It was Wembley Synagogue in those days. And I remember Rabbi Berman who happened to have been a chaplain – that's my AJEX side of the story – who happened to be a chaplain during the war, Rabbi Berman, a British Army chaplain.

So how old were you when you came to England?

I was twelve. No, sorry, I lie, I lie. I'm, um, I – for the first time I came to England I would have been about eleven and a half, the first time, just before I went to Rhodesia, 'cos I came back to England later, much later, because I went to Israel first.

So, at that point you probably can remember but did you want to come to England?

No, not particularly. I was with my aunt and uncle.

Another separation for you.

It's another separate – but that was life, I was here with my aunt and uncle, I knew they were my aunt and uncle, I knew they were not my father and mother or stepmother, but I was with them, I'd been – I remember my father bringing me on one of those ferries and I was –

excuse my French – sick as a dog. **[01:26:05]** [Laughs] I – I'm a lousy sailor and the Channel wasn't good that night, that day. I remember coming to England and I remember coming to – they lived in Wembley, in Wembley Hill Road and I've got pictures of myself at that age. I remember I've got photos of going with the two dogs – we had two Alsatians – with them, and my aunt and uncle, all off to Southern Rhodesia.

Did they have children?

No. I believe that maybe one of the reasons I was sent to them. Health was part of it of course, but I think there were also family reasons. I can't think of a better word. But my uncle was a furrier and who as a furrier goes and lives in a hot climate? [Laughs] Well, believe it or not, the furs were much in demand in those days. So, we lived in Salisbury [now Harare, Zimbabwe] and then Bulawayo.

So was that – before we – I think we should have a break, just before- just talking about England a bit, what were your impressions –

But there was – sorry, before England. In Belgium still, no, absolutely no indication, as I think I said, that I was Jewish, apart from the fact that probably something must have given me an inkling because they spoke this foreign language when we were there, when the family got together.

You mean as your father and his siblings –

My father and his siblings, they were always speaking and I – and obviously at that time I was French-speaking, we were in Brussels, I was born in Antwerp, Flemish-speaking, but I'm sure we were – I can't remember as a little boy what language I was taught when I was two, three years old in the *Meisjeshuis* or in the hospital in hiding. Actually I must ask Bill if he remembers whether it was French or Flemish. I'm sure – I'm guessing it was French. **[01:28:01]** But there was this foreign language. Today I know it's Yiddish. Then, I wouldn't know because they were all, as I said, they all spoke many languages, all spoke Yiddish, all spoke French, all spoke Flemish, a lot of them spoke English, because –

Polish?

And certainly Polish. But I do know subsequently much later, they all knew their Hebrew because they came from an Orthodox family. They didn't speak Hebrew but I know they knew their prayers.

You didn't go to synagogue or –

No.

No religious festivals?

No, that's why I mentioned to you, that's why – what was I doing in church? And I remember, I remember that. I'm thinking it was with my step-grandmother but it may have been that lady I was in hiding in, in the Ardennes.

So, do you think your father, not made a decision, but wanted to really assimilate or to –

I don't know. I truly do not know. I do know that much later in life there must have been something because Yvonne decided to convert and I'm talking – she was not – and we're talking a mature lady, I'm talking in her sixties, seventies – seventies.

So much later.

Much, much, much later. Could it have been because of burial? Could it have been because my father – I remember I was more traditional then, much more traditional, then I went there and he said, don't worry, I've bought *kosher* things, I've done this, I've done that, I've put candles out. And I thought to myself, interesting, because we never did, not just, you know, my brothers certainly don't have any recollection, or my sister, of any *Yiddishkeit* and yet my brother, Marc became Orthodox, very involved with the Jewish commu – much later. **[01:30:02]** Much later in life he became Orthodox, he married an Israeli Orthodox girl, he

had a *kosher* – he has a *kosher* home, 'cos he's still alive, thank God and was involved with the Jewish community, with children, education, with – it's just –

But not at the time? Not [overtalking].

Not at that time, no. This was later.

So you went to a Belgian school.

To a normal school, who knows what I did – played, walked, did whatever I did. One thing I do remember though – I've mentioned this to somebody before – my father when we came home used to take our shoes and polish the soles always. Our soles had – the soles of our shoes had to be perfect. Don't ask me. My interpretation would have been that shoes were also important, walking, death march, this, it was your saving grace, having shoes on your feet. I'm guessing. Maybe that's what he had to do in the camps. I don't know. He certainly never spoke of it. But I do remember that. [Doorbell rings] Sorry. It may be the post. It may be the postman. Somebody rang.

Very busy house you've got here.

[Both laugh] Anyway.

One sec.

Sorry about that. I should – no, it picks it up automatically. But yes, isn't that bizarre? As we speak, I – I may have mentioned this once before, I don't know, but I remember that, polishing the soles of our shoes. Isn't that bizarre? **[01:32:00]** But it sort of comes back sometimes.

Do you think your father was very affected by his experiences at that time [ph]?

I have no doubt, I have no doubt. You know, you bury it, you – he, as I said, didn't speak about it. It's amazing that he gave his – twice he gave it, the one I've got and a subsequent one to a book that exists in Belgium and I've got a extract, his particular story, within the other stories.

He gave it – '56, we're going to look at it.

No, that's his deposition in writing. He gave it again, together with a photo too, and I've got it there, here or upstairs. He gave it again, slightly different. You know, he identifies a few things differently but generally speaking, much, much of a muchness, but doesn't go into great depths about his own feelings. I don't know how your other interviews have been but it's matter-of-fact. I did this, I did that. It's factual, I went there, I did a death march. Does he speak about suffering? Not particularly. It was cold, it was hot, maybe a bit. We stood a long time in the rain, it was bitter cold, they dropped dead or whatever, we had to get the bodies, whatever. No – how can I explain? In fact, I think I'm saying more than he probably did [laughs] in his interviews, in terms of actual reactions, feelings. I'm not saying he didn't say it, I'm just saying it doesn't appear. And I'm in awe at those who actually do express their deepest feelings of empathy, of what it was like in terms of what am I going to do after this? Am I going to survive? **[01:34:07]** I'm sure there must be lots, I just can't imagine.

So do you think it was difficult for him also to have a sort of emotional connection with you? Sorry, it's a difficult question.

[Sighs] It's a difficult one and it's interpretive.

Yes. From your point of view.

From my point of view, I would hope so, I would think so, but I don't know. Because does it remind him of his wife, his first wife? The good times, the hazards that were in his path leading up to him being sent to Auschwitz, of her disappearing, of me, of him not knowing what happened to me, knowing what happened to his daughter, my sister. Very hard to pinpoint. That's really psychoanalytical. Your speciality [laughs].

Sorry. No, not normally [laughs] but it just in this situation, you know, it – just thinking of that complex situation, you know.

Yeah. I sometimes wonder – I mean Frank was saying how, you know, you've done 200 of these – I wonder how other people have been able to express their – I won't just go for innermost thoughts because I don't think you'll ever give totality. There's always a reticence, there's always a holding-back. I'm sure of that. But today I think I've said more than I've ever said [laughs] in the whole of this thing, never mind what I may have written or said to other people.

I'm trying to just understand from your perspective, as a boy, you know, in Brussels [overtalking].

It was just – it was what it was. **[01:36:02]** I was going to school, I must – I presume that I played with others. I definitely was different from others insofar as I wasn't in the best of health, I couldn't run around and play football or tennis or whatever. So, I must have been different. I can't imagine I wouldn't have been. School wasn't far from where we lived, so I do remember walks. It wasn't very far. Hmm- the -I am hmm-ing a lot– the school, it was Schaerbeek where we lived. It's a part of Brussels where – it's a diverse community. Today it's very Islamophobic, that area – Islamist, I should say, that area. But in those days I remember – it must have been subsequently – it couldn't have been before I left as a young boy – helping my father. Once a year in Brussels, Belgium, there's a [brasserie?], an annual get-together where all the shopkeepers put out their stalls in the marketplace or whatever and there's a memory of helping but I can't remember when that was.

I mean did you – and do you remember accepting this decision to be sent to England?

No. I just remember I'm here [laughs].

Yeah. I mean you –

It would be my interpretation today, not then.

Yes. But at the time it wasn't something you questioned, you –

No. No, I did not que – I'm sure I did not que – I may have – I may have asked of Paula and Joseph, my aunt and uncle, well, what am I doing here, where are we going, why are we doing this? I remember playing with the dogs. That I do remember. That I remember very well. I remember various things subsequently. Obviously I was older. **[01:38:00]** But I wonder if all to some degree the life that I have led has made me bury things. I don't know. Some people say they remember when they were three years old, two years old. I don't. Some people – there are times of my life when I was twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, I don't remember. I remember going to summer camp with Betar in South Africa, I remember going on *aliyah*, but I don't remember particular, specific elements that identified me as a Jew. Where that would come in is because of Betar. Betar, other than when I was bar mitzvahed and my aunt made sure I went to *heder* and what have you and learnt my *parashah* [a section of the Torah]. Why did I do it? Did I know? No. Betar taught me that as a youth movement. They –

But they, your aunt and uncle, they were Jewish, they belonged to a synagogue.

Oh, yes, definitely.

So you came into –

Into a Jewish environment, not forgetting that at that time they lived not – in Wembley, Wembley Park. And there was an aunt and an uncle here, my Aunt Regina. Aunt Regina, Father's sibling already lived here. She had four sons, all Orthodox. The eldest son, Joseph, made sure that all of the boys were Orthodox, we – and that's where I, you know, I joined Bnei Akiva. I was a twelve-year-old – no, I would have been – what would I have been then? Not even eleven probably. Do I remember why I went there? No.

And which school did they send you to?

Oh, Park Lane. It was called Park Lane. I found amongst a box of things my- what do you call it, report from the headmaster then, 'has a problem with language'.

How did you get [inaudible]?

How did I manage? I do remember wanting a master – I can't remember who, teacher – standing me in front of the class, saying, this boy doesn't speak English – I learnt subsequently those were his words – you've got to help him. **[01:40:08]** I remember his hands on my shoulder, don't ask me why. Was he the headmaster, who knows? But I picked it up quite quickly. And, you know, the English as it's spoken was taught to me not so much in England but guess where? In Rhodesia. We were taught diction, we were taught how to enunciate, how not to garble or warble or – you know, you had to speak the Queen's English. Well, that's the way it was [sighs]. So yes, it – it's so interpretive, what I'm saying to you because it's my perspective of what it could, should, might have been. I don't know.

Well, that's what we want to know, your perspective today.

[Laughs] That's all I can see.

But I think – but Jacques, I think we should take a break because we came to –

[Break in recording]

So Jacques, let's start back in England.

[Both laugh] Back in England.

You came to England. Anything else before then we move to Rhodesia?

So we're talking – here I am, I've arrived here, we lived in a place called Barn House in Barn Hill in Wembley. I went to *shul* at Wembley United Synagogue at the time and I joined with

my cousins who were already members, as children, Bnei Akiva for a short while, I went to school at Park Lane School and after a while we moved to Rhodesia.

And it was clear from the beginning that they wanted to move to Rhodesia, or –

Almost certainly. Again, I was not party to it. I was the recipient of being able to do it but I wasn't asked or told. **[01:42:00]** I was told, you know, we're going to Rhodesia, you're coming with us, sort of thing, which I did. When we first moved to Salisbury and subsequently to Bulawayo, most of the – where I spent most of the time, as I said, I went to school there and I have memories of one kind or another but primarily other than school and being the bus monitor or whatever, you know, you had little sort of things to do here and there. The one thing I remember the most interesting and the most self-satisfying was belonging to a youth movement, which my aunt made sure I was, and that was Betar. There I learnt a lot more about not my personal background but the Jewish Israeli-to-be- knowledge that I did not have anything of any kind. We obviously had campfires, we sang around the campfire, we were taught songs, we were taught about the *halutzim*, about the nascent – at that stage it was still a young, independent country, how it came about – the fight of the underground, the Lechi, the Irgun, the Haganah, the British who did not entirely cover themselves in glory either. It was a tremendous learning period and it was fulfilling insofar as it was an education of my people, for want of a better word, that I never had.

And also a bit of belonging in a sense –

And there is that aspect of it, the belonging, the being together, *chevruta*, being friends with- although still I have to tell you, I – to some degree solitary, to some degree still different because I wasn't in the best of health anyway. **[01:44:18]** So there was always that, you know, you couldn't go out and start playing rugby or doing certain things that – couldn't.

So you couldn't do the sports?

No, that was certainly a big no-no. The one thing I do feel that I lost out on, Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia certainly, beautiful country, 'cos I remember parts of it, I was never taken

to Victoria Falls. I mean for crying out loud, you know, it's a couple of hundred miles up the road. Why did nobody ever take me? But they didn't and I – isn't it funny how small things like that nudge [ph] and nag you and you wonder, why was I never taken there? [Laughs] But there you are.

Jacques, how did you get on with your aunt and uncle? I mean you said they didn't have children.

No. To me, they were looking after me, you know. I had my room. I have to admit that, you know, the people with whom I socialised with, there were younger people obviously, but everybody had servants. I think my aunt and uncle had one, possibly two. So when they worked, I was obviously looked after then when I wasn't at school. I didn't think in terms of black and white. I knew they were working for my family, for my aunt and uncle – they were always Aunt and Uncle, not Father and Mother obviously – but they were there doing the housework, doing whatever they did. And I had the two dogs with, so I had company of that sort, if you like. **[01:46:03]** But it wasn't particularly – oh, how can I put it – child-friendly, if that's the right terminology. I do remember *Pesach*, of course I had my *bar mitzvah*, I told you. I remember that. And my Uncle Joseph belonged to the Yiddish Theatre Club, so they used to go out and that and I remember they used to get together and we used to have *Pesac*h at their place. The names came back to me the other day. Mark Markov [ph] and Etta Topol [ph]. They were the actors of the Yiddish Theatre in – I don't know if it was in Rhodesia but certainly in Bulawayo. And those names came back to me the other day for some unknown reason. But apart from my *bar mitzvah* and going to *heder*, that's the only thing that I truly remember and whatever I learnt with Betar was *Pesach* at the Markovs [ph] and Etta [ph], Mark and Etta [ph]. But it wasn't – it was traditional, it wasn't what I would call Orthodox particularly. I do remember the *hazzan*. Believe it or not, a small town like Bulawayo had a *hazzan* and a rabbi. Gollen [ph] was his name and that does stick in my memory. But what I do remember the most was when you got capital punishment you got it in those days. It was the ruler against your knuckles at *heder* in the morning, whenever it was. We were admonished accordingly. Couldn't do that today. And I also remember I was good at history, you know, and a few other things, but science, I wasn't brilliant at it but I do remember the teacher. It was a Bunsen burner tube on your *dérriere* [buttocks] when you were naughty.

[01:48:04] So we – our schooling was actually – it was good from that point of view. But then it was all white. I suppose if one goes against the idea of a them-and-us situation –

Was it a Jewish school or –

No. No. I'm not even sure there were any Jewish schools. If there were, I'm not aware of it. I wasn't aware of it at the time. But I do know I was taught my *bar mitzvah* by a lady, Mrs Kaplan, always wore mauve. Funny, it came back to me the other day. And I don't particularly remember the ceremony. I did find photos in that book I was telling you about, of some of the family and the get-together. It was in March 1955, obviously my thirteenth, my *bar mitzvah*. But I don't particularly remember standing on the *bimah* and doing my portion. Isn't that funny? The photos show me I was there, I had it, there was the party, but I do not for the life of me remember standing up and doing my portion.

But your father was there or –

No, he wasn't there. No, definitely not. He was still in business.

Were you in touch with your father or the family?

Do you know, I don't remember, particularly. I do know subsequently when I went to Israel that he did come a couple of times to see me in Israel. I have no recollection whether he did or didn't come to Rhodesia. Again, naughty of me never to have actually delved into it more.

And what was it like? I mean you said there was nothing Jewish in Belgium post-war and then slowly more in England and then more –

Certainly a lot more in, you know, the –

Was it a natural thing or did it at the beginning –

It was my surroundings, it wasn't me searching for it particularly. I suppose I – in many respects I have to thank Auntie Paula, who I was with. **[01:50:02]** I don't know if Uncle Joseph was involved at all. He was the Orthodox one as a teen – as a youngster himself, not subsequently. Auntie Paula was a convert and – but she's the one who insisted that I have my *bar mitzvah*, she's the one who made sure I went to *heder*. That I do know- absolutely.

So you your Jewish identity became stronger in Rhodesia?

Yes, my identity definitely enhanced, developed and came to term in terms of tradition, to start with obviously- what it means to be a Jew, but still not deep religiosity as such, definitely not. That came, oh, decades later because I went to a Seed [ph] seminar in Leicester, the very first one in England.

But at that time you were –

At the time, no.

And what did your aunt and uncle, what did they do in –

Well, he was a furrier. He had a shop in Salisbury. I don't remember the one in Bulawayo. And she was a – she was with him. She was a – she did, um, she was a furrier as well, as it were. He was a very good furrier, I do remember.

They worked together?

Yeah, they worked together. He – I do remember one thing, he built the shop himself. I mean the structure was there but everything inside, he did. He was extremely good with his hands. He was excellent. He did carpentry, he did electrics, he did everything himself. It was called Polar First. Who calls in the middle of the- Rhodesia, a place Polar First? P-O-L-A-R. Her name was Paula. Maybe he took it from that but polar, as in north and south pole.

And they were selling –

And they were selling coats and minks and – because there were mink farms and of course there were other furs that today, hmm, not allowed to talk about. **[01:52:01]** But yes, yeah, furs. Quite –

What was the plan? To stay there for a long time, or what was their plan?

Well, I don't know what their plan was. They certainly carried on for a while. But I went on *aliyah*, I went with Betar, in 1959 I went to Israel, this group of us. And –

You went with your –

With the *chevra* [a close-knit group], yeah, with the *gar'in*. We were *gar'in beit* [Pioneers Group B], *gar'in beit* from Africa, from South Africa. And then we joined up with the South African Federation in Tel Aviv. We were members there for quite a while. I stayed in Amatziah, which is the place we were first allocated. It was a – it was actually a [inaudible] how would you say? It was a cooperative, if you like, in a way. It wasn't a *kibbutz*, it was a [inaudible]. And we lived in *tzrifim*, in wooden huts, metal beds with cans at the bottom of each leg, with creosote or the equivalent oil or whatever, because of the *jookim*, ah, what do you call those *jookim*?

Bugs. Bugs.

Bugs, yeah. Yes, bed – not bedbugs. These big ones with –

They were big? Big?

Yeah, they were big [coughs]. Lighting was through generators and I was- they went into the army, when I did my part of it, we – the *gar'in* was called *mitnadvey choots la-aaretz* [foreign volunteers] *mahals*. And *mahal* if you know, in 1948 they were a group from all over who fought but they carried on. So, from South Africa there were a lot of *mahalniks*,

volunteers, who went into the army. I did my volunteering, if you like, on Amatziah. There I was responsible inter alia of the *neshek*, that is the armoury. **[01:54:02]**

Weapons?

Because the whole of the *neshek* was surrounded by obviously a deep defensive perimeter, lit up at night, barbed wire, and we had to look after what arms we had. And I was also a cowboy [laughs]. I looked after the cows, so I had to learn to ride a horse. I fell off quite a few times, I hasten to add, [laughs] as one does.

Can I ask you, Jacques, what did your – when you decided to go on aliyah, what did your aunt and uncle think of that?

They must have been in agreement because I went and I must have nagged them I suppose, I want to go with, you know, my group.

So you finished school?

I finished school and I went. I was seventeen years old. Must have been *meshugge*, [laughs] literally.

But they were in agreement, they didn't –

Well, they didn't- certainly I have no recollection of them saying no. In fact, they may have been happy to see the back of me, I don't know [laughs]. One has to joke and laugh. But no, I went with them. I was in touch with them. They stayed some years after I left because it was in the time of Smith. He was the prime minister at the time.

And did they eventually – did they –

They after – they eventually left and came back to live in England. But that's a lot later. I stayed and went to Israel, as I said. And I have found them in that box and others

subsequently photos when I attended the fourteenth anniversary of the state of Israel because I have a photo of a flypast in the shape of fourteen. And the tanks were going through the streets. I think it was Jerusalem. I'm not sure. So yes, I was there from 1959.

Until…?

Un – I stayed there for six years in Israel, I was there in Amatziah then I had to go for a – I had an operation and that was a triple arthrodesis in my ankle. **[01:56:15]**

Did you –

Because of the polio, yes. And it's to stop me wearing braces and things like that, which they did in Israel, amazingly at that time when you think about it. Even today, going to the airport it still dings [laughs] and I can't do anything about it. But we – so I was there for quite a while. And I went and also lived in Heftziba which is the kibbutz I was telling you two of my aunts went to live in because one of my aunts, Auntie [Sella], who's in that photo, was a *shlichah*, together with her husband. They were left-wing and they were emissaries in South America, so they – she spoke French, so did he, they learnt Spanish, they were emissaries for the movement they belonged to, which was I think Dror which was very left-wing. And they had this *kibbutz* up north called Heftziba, amazing place, where I lived and worked for a while as well on and off. Because when in Israel, I also amongst other things – not chronologically, I hasten to add – I, after I did my *ulpan* [place to learn Hebrew]-A*kiva* [name of the specific ulpan] in Netanya, I went to study at the Tadmor Hotel *kabalah*, which is hotel reception. Tadmor Hotel in – at that time was a hotel for students to become an – it was a burgeoning profession at the time and there I met more people, most interesting, it was fascinating. And I got my- to [inaudible] of my certification and worked in various hotels in Tel Aviv. **[01:58:01]** And the last one was the Galei Kinneret in Tiberias where I stayed quite a long time, where I met a lot of people and amongst the things I wrote about was meeting the glitterati, as I called them, of the time, everything from Ben-Gurion to Peres, to all – I've been to all the – they were people of the time who were either ex-Haganah or ex-Ezel or ex-Irgun or – they became the politicians, they became the government, they became the archaeologists, they became the founders and the subsequent socialites of the time. And it

was a fascinating time. I must admit, that was the part that I always loved about hotel and in that respect although I may have been solitary, I loved being with people and hearing their stories and what their life was, what they became, how they developed it, how they survived whatever they survived, whether it was Europe or Israel, Palestine and all that went with it.

And was it a particular hotel you were at?

That was the Galei Kinneret in Tiberias. It was the hotel in the north. The Dan Hotel was the one in the south.

Okay. And what were you doing in the hotel? What –

I was the reception man and became the manager in due course. It was a reception- *kabbalat panim*, the reception, the public relations.

So you enjoyed that?

Oh, yes. We made some excellent friends there, we met some wonderful, interesting people, both politician, economics, artisans, and – a lot of artisans. And then of course in summer, because Tiberias being extremely hot, the Christian groups especially used to come in summer to visit, Capernaum, the Mount of Beatitudes, Tiberias of course, whereas the locals, the Israelis, used to come sort of autumn, wintertime because it was not a) so hot and b) it was a place to go for a bit of a break and everything that went with it. **[02:00:22]** No, it was an interesting time of life and it brings the best out in people sometimes. Sometimes not the best. And of course, right opposite were the Syrians, and from time to time they were shooting down and it was – and we used to go to Ein Gev opposite, it's to take the people water skiing and travelling there. Good fish there, by the way, St Peter's fish. And I met a lot of people from England, from all over the world and I stayed in touch with some of them after the – afterwards, and during. And that was also a period of- when possible, travelling around the country quite a bit. And when we first went the interesting part was Ivor Wolf, I mentioned to you, his wife was one of those who was hidden in Wezembeek. He was a member of the *gar'in* with me. He went into the army, blah, blah, blah. And we went on one

of these *tiolim* [excursion] to the north and he found photos of a whole group – of the group when the lorry we went in lost one of its wheels as we were driving. We were saved by a miracle. And I have absolutely- but no memory of it and yet I see a photo of myself, I see them, I cannot recall that. And he – he sent it to me and he named all the people who are there, though most of them are still alive, thank God, including Ivor. **[02:02:04]** And he says, don't you remember, we changed the wheel, and look what he did and he was the *madricha* [youth leader]. And isn't it funny, there's certain parts you remember and there's other parts, if it wasn't for photos, if it wasn't for people saying, and basically, it's the story of my life. If it wasn't [laughs] for that, I wouldn't – I truly wouldn't know.

So, did you think at the time you would stay in Israel?

Oh, yes. Yes. But then something happened family-wise. I think it was my cousin's impending wedding. Anyway, in Belgium, my – Michel, so we – I went to Belgium, went to the wedding. He married a lovely lady – they still live there in Belgium – Simone. He was a doctor by then. Well, he was already when we went in – a bit later again, he and I. And I had in the meantime decided, well, I'm here, I might as well do something, so I went to Antwerp and decided to be [laughs] a diamond cutter, of all things. A boy born in Antwerp goes back and becomes a diamond cutter. But you had to pay to become that, you know, you didn't just become an apprentice, which is what I was. So, I paid it and I probably ruined my eyesight [inaudible] 'cos it was getting truly hard. It was the diamond centre of the world. And for years afterwards I kept that table and the special elements that we used to work with in order to cut a diamond. To cut a diamond you need another diamond. And I wasn't – I have to admit, I wasn't particularly good either, so I stopped it. And then I joined a company called Sibetra [ph] and I became an administrator in import/export. **[02:04:05]** And another one – so I did various administrative work. And then the Six-Day War came along, 1967, so Michel, my cousin, doctor, he volunteered. I did as well. We both flew out, I think it was on the third day of the Six-Day War we landed in Lod, as it was. He was immediately whisked off to a hospital to work and I was taken to Gadot. Gadot is at the- of Syria, on the border, which had been heavily targeted by the Syrians. And it was a clear-up job literally of the *kibbutz*. I mean the chicken farm had exploded and we had to dispose of all the detritus of course. And one of the jobs subsequently after a few days was to go into the Golan, 'cos by

then it had been captured, and clear up there. But there it was a clearing-up of collecting everything from fowl – fowl being chickens and turkeys and what have you – and cows. I'd been a cowboy so I couldn't do it. But of course you had to also clear up all the camps where the Syrians had been. And the things we discovered there, phew. And also clear up what we suspected might be dangerous. And one day I was with the cows and I – it's funny, I never thought of it before – I remember a cow was kicking something and I thought, that's a funny-looking can. And I picked it up and I don't know what made me say, I shouldn't be doing this. I threw it and it landed twenty, thirty metres away and it exploded [laughs]. It was a concussion grenade but it was like a tin can, you know, of food. **[02:06:02]** Anyway, that's what I did. Then it was time for a little bit of *nofesh* [leisure, vacation] not *chofesh* [time off] *nofesh*, which was a bit of relax-time. There we went as a group of English-speakers from various parts to Eilat and guess who was there, also doing a bit of *nofesh* because she had volunteered to go to a *kibbutz*. It was Judy. And Judy had been a volunteer at this *kibbutz* and we met in Eilat and the rest is history I suppose. After a while we wrote to each other and one thing led to another, she came to Belgium, she'd come to England, Belgium. I went back, we met, also a long story in its own right, and in 1970 we married, had a daughter in 1972.

In Belgium?

In Belgium, yes. We lived in Belgium. And it must have been during that period that I tried to get Madame – find Madame Wittamer- Mademoiselle. It must have been Mademoiselle Wittamer 'cos I can't imagine it would been any other time.

Why did you try to find her then?

Do you know, looking back, I wonder if Judy had anything to do with it or I had told her or somebody must have said, maybe one of my aunts and uncles must have mentioned it 'cos in those days everybody used to come to Knokke. Knokke was the place to go to for English Jews. You went to Knokke or you went to Blankenberge or you went to Ostend. And the people from Antwerp or from Brussels all met up in Knokke. So aunts and uncles and cousins and what have you, we all – and there's photos of us all meeting up in Knokke. This was soon after the war and even much later, everybody went there. And we still go there. Well, we

used to – yeah, we still go to Knokke. Well, we haven't since the Covid. We've only been once but we used to go every year, at least once. **[02:08:03]**

Yeah, I know it well as well [laughs].

Do you know Knokke well? Why?

Not so far from Cologne.

Oh, that's true, yes. People used to come from Germany, from Switzerland. Yes, the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine used to come. We used to go to Motkes [ph]. Motkes was the only Jewish hotel, I think. It's now a huge, not so nice block of flats.

Right, so you used to go there?

We used to go there regularly, to Knokke and I – and that's where everybody – when the family got together, the various aunts and uncles and cousins – not the cousins, but the aunts and uncles. Again, what did they talk about? War. What did they talk about, in what language? Yiddish.

So did you pick up some Yiddish?

So, I picked up a bit of Yiddish there- certainly not when I was a little boy. So, I picked up a bit of Yiddish. But again, my Aunt Paula and Uncle Joseph in Southern Rhodesia, if they did not want me to understand something, what did they speak? Either Fle – not Yiddish, Flemish. So, I picked up a bit of Flemish [laughs] as one does when people talk a language that you're not supposed to know or understand.

And when you were back in Belgium, were you were in contact with your dad and had more children?

Oh, yes, that's when I met up with them, yes, absolutely. I met up with Hélène, with Marc and with Luc and Michel, my stepbrother, so that's – when we used to go out, we used to go out, a group of us to Madus [ph] in Brussels, in Avenue Louise. We used to go to the *balle des orangers,* it's called, the annual ball where all the Jewish people who – one of an age used to go once a year in the Galerie Louise. That comes back to me, some of the things we used to do there.

So it was an active –

It was pretty active, yeah. But I – before I met Judy, I used to have a flat on the ground floor with – in a house not far from there. **[02:10:03]** And the funny thing is, when I went in '67- I gave the lady maybe – not even twenty-four hours' notice that I was leaving, I'm going now, boom, and she was happy. She said you must go. I remember that. Lovely old lady. She owned the house. We had some fun. I had the ground-floor flat when I worked in Brussels at the time. But it was fairly active. We used to go out a lot, we were young obviously. As I speak, I – some of those things come back to me I haven't talked about for a long time. That was before I met Judy. The Jews of Brussels, like everywhere, were in separate sections. There were those whose parents had or still belonged to the left-wing, there were those who were right-wing but not right-wing Orthodox per se, just right-wing, and there were the centrists. And I discovered that Marc was sort of left to centre and he himself I said earlier became quite – well, he became Orthodox, he converted – because his mother, Yvonne, was not, she converted much later, my father was – until he married an Israeli who – then he became much, much more Orthodox. But yes, we lived –

Who was it your father married again? No, Marc.

Marc, Marc. He didn't marry again. He married an Israeli. Her name is Dotti [ph]. Now, Dotti [ph] is from North African background. So the one thing I always remembered at the time and even now when we go – he's not well – last time we met it was about seven, eight months ago – he served couscous. Boy, then, she can make a couscous. **[02:12:00]** Only, well, you know what the Spanish and Portuguese – that's what we call – we say here – she was from- I think it was Tunis, yes, from Tunisia. Her couscous was – you can't compare [laughs].

There's always somebody who does the best. My Auntie Marthe, Chamek, Michel's mother, her thing was *fis* [ph]. You know what is *fis*? *Fis* is what we would call – it's marrow of the bone.

Oh, bone marrow.

Yes but it's –

Beef?

Yes, beef, but it – *galarita*. Oh, what do you call that here in English?

Jelly?

It is like a calves-foot jelly, you might call it. That's it. Calves-foot jelly. Now, she could make that. Boy. Not many people – well, you can't do that anymore since- what was that called, when the cows became sick? Mad cow disease. Since then, you can't make a –

So Jacques, were you happy to be back? Because you were in Israel, back in Belgium, so did you –

At the time I was, yes.

You were. Did you feel Belgian at the time or did you – how did you identify yourself?

Do you know, looking back on it, I think I would say more English, even then. But that would have been Southern Rhodesia because everything was English. The education was heavily into history and what have you and it was – one of my favourite subjects was geography. To me, being English-speaking, the, you know, their history, their background, the aristocracy, I was a bit of a royalist I suppose you could say, very much.

So you had some – so that's a colonial identity?

Yes, very much so colonial but British.

British? Yeah.

British more than anything else. And then when we – I met Judy and we got married, she wanted to come back to England, so we did. And we came here, and that was in – soon after Corinne got married – was born. **[02:14:05]** So we got here in 1973.

And her parents, where did they live?

Her parents lived here already. They already lived here. They lived in Finchley.

Refugees from…?

They had been refugees, as Judy explained to – oh, no, sorry, it's not there, it's not noted. Her parents were from Austria, they're from Vienna. They came as refugees. They were servants.

Domestics?

Domestics, yes, very much so, in Yorkshire, to start with then elsewhere. He went back into being- into accountancy and they lived in Finchley. He's a bit further north of Finchley, East Finchley.

So were you happy to come –

Oh, absolutely. I, you know, where I am –

You felt British before you came?

Yes, I – you know, I am where I am and you do the best you can where you are. I said, '*Yehudi, noded'*, wandering Jew, you settle where you are. I wouldn't have looked at it that way. I'm sure I didn't. But yes, we settled here.

Where did you settle?

Settled first and foremost – I came here in a way, a) Judy wanted to come b) I had an opportunity. Britain joined the Common Market. My cousin's parents lived here already and there were four boys I told you, who lived in Wembley, Wembley Park, went to Wembley *shul*, the eldest of them was Joseph, he became a banker and lived in Paris, married a girl from Hungary via Sweden, whose parents also escaped Hungary, her mother did, father. So, he married. Then there were twins, Peter and Jackie Schuldenfrei, and a younger boy called Henry. Peter was very involved with banking/property and he was a director of united Repristos [ph] and I was invited through him, because I said I wanted to come, to work for united Repristos and I came and we lived to start with in Croydon. **[02:16:15]** It was an unusual time because it was a company house before we found our own place. In West Wycombe. I worked for Allders of Croydon, a department store. I refurbished, I developed it, I was involved with the service control, so I had a couple of hundred members of staff under me. It was administrative, it was in front [ph], it was a new phase in my lifespan, as it were. And I carried on, moved to West Wycombe, still working for Allders. But then there was to a place called Medhurst department store in Bromley. It became Allders of Bromley. I redeveloped that particular department store, meetings, lawyers, furbishment – refurbishment. Very, very, very interesting, meeting all kinds of people that you wouldn't imagine but the retail world is a different world to what I had been used to. You adjust, I worked there, and then I became – Allders Group, UDS, was bought out by Dixons and Stanley Kalms, and Peter was transferred with him and invited me to work for Dixons, which I did. I became a director of property and it was called Orbit Electronics and we developed shops all around the country under Dixon brand name, from Southampton to Liverpool to Manchester, so I did a lot of travelling, refurbishing properties and buying new properties. **[02:18:06]** So that was another phase. And the whole thing collapsed, if you remember. Peter went on to other things. I then joined – I was unemployed for a while. I joined an organisation called Greater London Enterprise Board, property – in property – I was property manager or – I can't

remember the title exactly. And we acquired properties within the GLC Greater London Council, was called the Greater London Enterprise Board, refurbished – it was for retail. It wasn't retail, it was industrial – industrial and small workshops. So, we did that, renting, refurbishing, buying, selling. So, I met some most interesting artisans for the small places. I kept in touch. One of the things over there was made by one of them actually. So that was fascinating as well. And then Greater London Enterprise Board came to an end after a while. Again, I had to find work and guess what? Up and along came the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women. I had a reasonable background for it, I was interviewed by several of their vice presidents, some who are still alive today, believe it or not. But they'd all been either – at the time – I'm going back twenty-eight years now – this was the time when the Association had still a lot of veterans of the Second World War as well as those who did National Service which finished in the '60s. **[02:20:03]** And that's AJEX for you. Today it's basically made up of those who were National Service and current serving personnel, a few hundred of them. The – anyway, I was taken on by them. Amongst them was a gentleman called Mordaunt Cohen. Mordaunt Cohen had been a colonel with the Askaris in Kenya. He was responsible for a whole – I don't know if it was a battalion or not but of black African British soldiers, so they fought, and there were all kinds of weird and amazing people. One, Jack Lewis, for instance, had served in India.

So it was quite a change for you, professionally.

To me, it was – professionally chalk and cheese. But the personalities, there again I spoke about background, people, the human flotsam and jetsam of the background.

And was it the first time in a way to be involved in a sort of English-Jewish charity?

Yes. Yes, basically, yes. I had obviously been involved before AJEX with various charities obviously, everything from UJIA – oh, it was, er, U-J – U-P – whatever it was before that-the board of deputies and things like that. And *shul* of course, I was in Croydon Federation then United Synagogue. But no, a total different concept of the Jewish input into British society from a military point of view and what they did. And again, the link with the Second World War of course, the British having been, thank God, able to do what they did in the

Second World War, stood firm, we all know the story of what happened, Battle of Britain, blah, blah, blah, Dresden, everything that happened. **[02:22:08]** But also the first major camp from the British point of view to be liberated was Bergen-Belsen. There were a few smaller but very – not very well-known. That was the prime one. And of course, I met these people, what they did and how the people that they met from the camps. And that all sort of formed part of a picture of the puzzle where I was not central to but a corner, a facilitator, whatever you like.

Tell us just briefly, what was the – what is the main aim or was or is still of AJEX?

Today the three pillars, if you like, are still commemoration, remembrance, education where possible, harder and harder because of the age or the profile of its membership. And of course, being able to show that Jews did fight, Jews were willing to join the army and fight for their country, being the United Kingdom, Great Britain, and not what was being told out there, that Jews never fought, that Jews, they always kept their heads below the parapet. And I've always said you have to be able to show who you are, for what you are.

So when was it founded, AJEX?

It wasn't called AJEX originally. You could say that 1921 was probably the pivotal time when an association of Jews first laid a wreath at the Cenotaph, a big Magen David. And I must see if I still have a photo of that. It shows that the majority of the people were women. Why? The men had come back from the war, the few – we're talking First World War – but they did, and as such, a wreath has been laid at the Cenotaph since that day, apart from during the war, the Second World War, until today, and this year I was there again, I'm pleased to say. **[02:24:20]** The association per se obviously has changed. It is governed – just our terminology – it is made up a lot more now of serving personnel, both air, sea and land. So the military has changed from that point of view. But no, anti – fighting anti-Semitism, it's still, you know, the days of Mosley are not forgotten and- in a way, if you think about it, and I guess I know, when we turned the clocks back a few weeks ago we actually turned them back eighty-five years. Anti-Semitism has exploded in our faces again, if that's a term we're allowed to use. A direct regressance [ph] has been appalling and it's not all to do with the

current so-sad war but that is a re-fighting in Gaza, but the latent anti-Semitism that was always there has allowed itself through whatever you choose to call it. But it's staring us in the face and if we don't stare it back at it and do something about it, we will to some degree not succumb necessarily but regret it woefully.

So what do you think should one do, or –

Again, I come back to the one word, education, but it's difficult. **[02:26:00]** A lot of people still in the wider world, Jews included, have not enough knowledge of their own background to be able to respond accurately with knowledge. And you hear that in these shows, these podcasts and what have you. People phone in and say – and then the person interviewing them will ask a question and they don't know the answer, or have the wrong answer, and that is where we sadly fail, I believe.

We can come back to that. So how many years did you work for AJEX?

I retired in December 2018, so I worked there twenty-four years. I was their director for quite a while. I am still a vice president. What's in a name? What's a title? But because I believe in the concept of the need to show that at the end, you know, if we don't ensure that we look after ourselves as well as the wider community, we'll have to answer for that.

It's interesting. I don't know whether AJEX has a view on this because Britain, in contrast to America, once a refugee joined the army, they did not become naturalised, only much later.

No, absolutely. No, no, no.

It's interesting.

It is. No, if you remember, the book by Helen Fry, where she highlights that the secret listeners- what's it called, of- anyway, the secret listeners. And they had been on the Isle of Man for a long time and it's the same for Judy's parents. They didn't become immediately UK citizens either. **[02:28:04]**

No, mostly sort of '47, '48.

That's right.

But what is interesting to me, you know, if you join an army and then still –

True. But by the same token, the reverse could be said of the Germans and Austrians who joined in the First World War by the hundreds of thousands, the army of Bismarck and- I've forgot the army of what in Austria, and they were still Jews, they were not Austrian or Germans, and suffered the consequences. And that is amazingly difficult to understand because America never did that. They joined the – those who could, did, and they became American. It's a perspective that I am not sure there has been a lot of investigation.

Yeah, that's so interesting, you know, whether fighting in the army, is nationality, you know, normally you get [overtalking] in some way.

Yeah, absolutely. And if you think of all those who volunteered, for instance, in the Spanish Civil War from England, from America, even from Palestine there were some. Again, never recognised. And all the Americans who went as volunteers as *mahalniks* in '48, same sort of element.

So in terms of identity, Jacques, today how would you describe yourself?

A proud English Jew. I'm a naturalised British cit – or UK citizen. I didn't have to buy it. I'm not sure how I earnt it.

When did you get it? ***[02:30:00]***

I got – do you know something? I've got a total memory blank there. Oh, it must be about twenty or thirty years, or more than thirty years ago and the culmination of that is my medal presented to me by the Lord Lieutenant a few, um, six weeks ago. So –

Tell us about it. Tell us about it.

My British Empire medal. My involvement a) with the *Shoah* story, the Holocaust obviously, AJEX in part as well, and my involvement with the community and being a survivor and talking about it more and more as I sort of progress in life or get older, basically.

Did it state what you received it for?

Yes.

What is it? What is it?

Basically the commemoration of the Holocaust education and the Jewish community. The thing that intrigued me the most with the advent of AJEX was what it allowed me, and I said it in my story as to some degree, again, people. I must be a people person in some ways because apart from meeting the Queen, I think it was in 2000 when she opened the Holocaust Wing in the – at the Imperial War Museum.

The First Gallery?

The First Gallery, yes, which was absolutely and totally amazing. And meeting the – General Petrenko, I think his name – if I get it right. At the – I think it was the Logan – was it the Logan Hall – wherever it was, for the anniversary of the liberation by his troops of Auschwitz. There was all the other people that I have met, the prime ministers and what have you, a lot of it through obviously my affinity with *Shoah* but also through AJEX. **[02:32:09]** And the other one that stands out the most is meeting Pope Paul in – at the Vatican. I took a group of international war veterans from Israel, America, Canada and England and we met the Pope and that was an amazing experience, staying in Rome and having the opportunity to meet him. He was the one- the Polish Pope basically. So – he was such a fragile-looking man but what was the most fascinating about him was he looked my uncle, being Polish maybe, that's why. My uncle who married my father's sister, Cylwa, who had been in the Resistance

came over as a Polish soldier and joined the British Army here. And I always forget [sic] that round sort of face of Paul, of the Pope, that's always reminded me of my uncle. So, I met some wonderful people.

And you said that you're active in Holocaust education.

Where I can. You know, I call it education and it is to obviously a degree, but it's all Holocaust remembrance more than anything else because as I said earlier on, what am I educating? I'm really highlighting a story which is mine within a bigger story. I'm not saying, you know, it – I survived on meagre rations and I was in barrack so-and-so, and thank God I survived. **[02:34:08]** It's educational but it's something that needs to be said and it has to be known, not just mine but everybody's story and it's impossible to have everybody's story. There are so many out there but it's symptomatic, it's an example of it.

And do you find that – you said that you only started talking recently, so [overtalking].

I've only – this is- apart from as I said to Samantha –

One sec. Yes, I said – my question was, did you start – you started talking about your story recently.

Very much so. I think the first time that I actually spoke "aloud" was when I was asked to speak for three or four possible minutes at Yom HaShoah at the Dell, you know, at the Dell. I've been involved with organising the Dell for many decades, the commemoration on Yom HaShoah every year and I've been involved first with the board of deputies then with others. And they said, well, why don't you tell your story? I said, I've got nothing to tell. I'm a survivor by virtue of having been born and I'm alive. And they said there must be more. By then of course I already knew about Reinier and everything. I never thought that it was productive, for want of a better word. They said but you've got an interesting story. So, I put it all down and since I've spoken possibly – this particular interview may be my fifth or sixth because I spoke to the League of Jewish Women locally. They asked me if I would speak. I

did it during lockdown once, on Zoom. So that's one, two, three – about, yes, then I've done it for ITV but very briefly. **[02:36:02]**

This was for the reunion?

This was for the reunion.

We'll come to that in a second.

And the other one will be the one for my book with Samantha.

My story?

My story is in my book. And the one with you now. So I don't go to – I haven't gone to universities or schools. I did speak once a little bit in part when I told the story of AJEX at my local – at my *shul*. There I stood up and mentioned *en passant* part of it. I've still got that. So I've got the story of AJEX as I saw it over the period, with photos. And I've got photos of my meeting with the Pope, I've got photos with the Queen, I've got photos with various other people. In a way it shows me that maybe I should put some kind of album together [laughs] because the one thing- when you watch stories on TV, the ones with – what are they called – they go back to their roots and a researcher takes them with a crew.

Who Do You Think You Are?

'Who Do You Think You Are?' And I think to myself, somebody's done all that research, here's the person, a bit like yourself, if you like, and I think isn't that wonderful? These people are learning so much but it also shows how much a researcher can actually find out. And that to me – and in a way – again I come back to Reinier and to Isabel – they did it, but in a different format for a different reason. And as a result of it – but I wonder- where the link is because these are famous people but there's a lot of non-famous people who also have stories which you are finding out about through the AJR and other organisations who are doing the same- the Spielberg Foundation being one – the Shoah Foundation being another

one, the Wiener Library- there're so many out there. **[02:38:21]** And it makes you wonder where is it all going to be deposited? Because for the moment it's in different areas, different places, should it be centralised? Will a copy go in the British Library, and questions of that nature come to the fore.

Yeah. Well, we can discuss that later but we, as I said, we are in the process of building a Holocaust UK testimony portal where this will be centralised. You can find the different –

Because there is also the one in Southampton University and there's one in Wolver – is it Wolverhampton? There's one there as well, something, I can't remember. There's also a university involved with –

Yeah, different places.

Yes, different places.

But Jacques, what I want to ask you, so basically because of the research of Jacques- Reinier and Isabel, in a way you have more material to talk about.

Exactly. That's what you're hearing a lot of it, of what I'm saying to you, is as a result of what they have done for me inadvertently or otherwise.

So are you in a position now – would you feel comfortable going to a school and talk?

Not quite because although I would be possibly comfortable to do it, I haven't yet got it as a package because the one I did in 2021, that needs updating. And as I'm asked more questions and more – but I'm wondering whether it'll become too long because for the moment I'm able to do it on, you know, half a dozen pages.

Work on it.

Oh, it's something I certainly will be doing.

So tell us, please, about this reunion which took place last week. ***[02:40:01]***

That was absolutely amazing. We've been on Zoom. If I start with Reinier for a minute. We were on Zoom with a few of the people. He interconnected us, he linked us in. I'm sorry, I'm not always looking at you, I'm trying to focus on the book and some of the things in it. But what I found was, that for some unknown reason, two people were working separately, doing more or less similar but different. So, once he put his visual elements written and pictorially together in the book, I had material and then Isabel comes along, discovers various things as well, finds me, as did Reinier in a different way, because of names and the *pouponnière*. And she develops – she finds out and she researches. I told you she – some years before we actually all got together she had this – these photos and she put them on one of her tables and lit a *hanukkiah* which I thought was absolutely amazing. And there's the religious, the social aspect, the research aspect, and she decided – we all spoke on Zoom, those who could – and wouldn't it be fabulous to have a reunion? Not just on Zoom but physically. And she put it together, amazing lady that she is.

In Brussels?

In Brussels, in the building, in the house she owns which is something else again. Her husband also has a story of his own, Philippe. Everybody's got a story. And –

So, what was it like, the –

It was out – first of all, we had – she had so much to do, she had to put it together, she had to make sure it was a *kosher* event because a few of the people – one of them is actually ultra-Orthodox from Antwerp, one from Israel, also extremely *frum*. **[02:42:14]** I'm traditionally *frum*, if you like. She made sure that there was that aspect of it. She made sure that everybody was able to come. And some people came with their children. One of them came with her daughter and grandchildren all the way from New York. I came with Judy, my wife, and Corinne. She was – and that was also something else again. And anyway, be that as it may, she got us all together, we all fixed on a date, we all sort of arrived. Being Belgian, what did

we do? We said we're going to Belgium, what should we do before? What should we do after? Let's go to Knokke for a few days [laughs] before going to Brussels [laughs]. So, what did we do? Exactly that. We went to Knokke. Oh, dear, that is when you think about it quite funny. So, Judy and I went to Knokke and Corinne and her son, Oliver, my youngest grandson, they came by Eurostar. They came – we went a few days before, as I said. Anyway, we all met up in a hotel. But the thing is, we booked this hotel not knowing that Bill and his family had booked the same hotel. So what did we need to do? Corinne had to go in first to ensure – this is hilarious when you think of it – that we didn't meet up because ITV, ITN, had said we must have you when you actually meet up, so that there is no –

Fakeness?

Possibility of having to redo it, so it's not quite the same as the natural first time you see each other in the flesh. **[02:44:11]** So [laughs] bless her, she made sure that he didn't come down, made sure that we didn't have to sign in at reception, [laughs] immediately taken to the room – he was in a different room somewhere. Anyway, we didn't meet up, made sure that we didn't go outside looking for taxis afterwards to get to the house. She was good, she did a great job. Anyway, so we went to the house and that's all – you can see all that in the ITN thing, we were walking up and everything and he's waiting upstairs and it shows us meeting up, upstairs because the rest of the group who had all come together were downstairs. It was a lovely summer's day, I hasten to add. There was a lovely marquee outside in the garden. Everybody was there. But ITN had particularly asked that only Bill and I go upstairs into – yeah.

But had you spoken to Bill on the phone?

Yes, we'd spoken before, yes, absolutely, we knew –

So you established that you were together –

Absolutely, we established –

You both couldn't remember each other.

We couldn't remember. We already knew that.

But you were together most of –

We were together for at least – I'm suggesting that if we were together eighteen months in the Sint Erasmus Hospital and then subsequently in the *pouponnière* and then subsequently probably in- hidden in the Ardennes, it must have been two years at least.

So what was it like, then?

It was emotional. He's bigger than I am. He's quite a big guy. And he served in the American army as well and he – well, we embraced, we met up, shed a few tears obviously and then we spoke and then we were int – sort of interviewed a little bit by ITN, who did some more filming. **[02:46:07]** The – that room which was where we were all sitting in a semi-circle which looked barren and dark and – you've seen the photos, cots there, imagine this with beautiful furniture, with – because the – both Philippe and Isabel have a – they have a truly beautiful home. And there on a sideboard is that photo. Quite, quite amazing. Quite amazing. [Sighs] Anyway, [gets upset] anyway, we – afterwards we all went downstairs and we all spoke a bit. Some of the speeches are probably shown. I have different films and photos from other people. The most touching side, the most touching for me, [sighs] was actually the lady in Australia, quite an old lady. And we all spoke in English. We had no choice in some way because, you know, there were French-speakers, Flemish-speakers, German-speakers, Hebrew-speakers, so the common language, [sniffs] excuse me, was English. [Sighs] Seeing all the grandchildren [gets upset] I didn't react like that, then. **[02:48:07]**

It's okay.

Oh, yeah, seeing the children there, it was something because they were learning, they were seeing things, they had their parents or grandparents there. They sort of asked questions. To them it was different because obviously, the perspective is of a house that was lived in by a

family, 'cos Philippe and Isabel have children, their daughter – I think their eldest daughter got married some time ago, a few months ago, beautiful ceremony in the – I think it was in the cathedral in Barcelona. I think it was Barcelona. Well, what a beautiful wedding.

But you said particularly seeing the lady in Australia, that was [overtalking].

Yes, she was – she wasn't physically there, so I suppose in a way that made it more emotional because she couldn't be there, so you can only imagine, and that I think was quite- well, it was – it's emotional for me now. It didn't seem to be at the time, I have to admit.

But what is – is it the tangibility then in a way, something you can't remember, that everyone is now [overtalking] [inaudible].

There. Yeah, even though she's, you know, thousands of miles away, she's there.

Was it a shared –

'Cos she's there.

But also that you had all the shared history?

Yes, we all did of course, yes, we all – that's right. We all had that shared history. And one of the speakers – excuse me [blows nose] – it was Arthur Langerman who emphasised that he speaks wonderful English. **[02:50:08]** He emphasised the fact that we do not – we have no memory but there are memories because the memories are – have been brought to us, shown to us, highlighted by others, not by ourselves.

And none of you have any memories? Nobody in that group?

No. No. He said that so succinctly. It was quite amazing, you know, in reality because it's true. There's the photos, there's the stories, there's the cards, there is the index files that have been found wherever by whoever, and that basically has been the crutch of it I suppose. And

we've had a Zoom since, by the way, and a lot of them are – this is before the war in Gaza, I think three months – no, two and a half months ago we had a Zoom with those who could make it.

And do you find that it gave you some sort of – I mean maybe closure is the wrong word but some sort of –

Yes and no. Only insofar as the fact that I could put a physical face to a name. Here was a photo of Arthur Langerman. I've seen photos of him as a baby, as an adult, but not in the flesh. Bill, ditto. In the book there's a photo of him, there's – I've got photos of him when he was a child, when we were both little children, but not in the flesh. And the funny part of it is whilst we were there, they invited the local *échevin*. The local *échevin* would be the equivalent of an alderman. And what I – I looked and I thought, that's my cousin, once, no, maybe twice removed, from Antwerp, Isi Halbertal. **[02:52:05]** And Isi.

I know Isi.

You know Isi?

Yes [laughs].

Where do you know Isi from?

He's a relative of my husband [laughs].

You are kidding me. Isi Halberthal. I told you it's a small Jewish world. Wow, you know Isi. Ah.

[Laughs] I knew his aunt – his mother, Clara.

Clara was my aunt.

Clara is your aunt?

Of course. Clara is my aunt.

Oh, my God. And the last time I saw her was in Knokke.

Yes, that's the last time I – no, sadly I saw – I didn't see Clara. Excuse me. I went to her funeral unfortunately. I went to her funeral.

That is unbelievable.

You are kidding.

No. I know Clara –

That is – wow.

Very well.

And Clara is related through the Eisens [ph] that I mentioned to you before. Halberthal wasn't her – that's her married name.

So how do you –

Remember, she was – Halberthal was – became Padwe. Padwe was her second husband. What was his first name, Padwe? He was in the diamond business. I've got to tell Judy this. She's going to blow her mind. Whoa, so we're related, almost related [both laugh]. That – oh, wow, oh, wow, oh, wow.

So hold on, how is Clara related to you?

Clara is my second aunt I suppose you should say. Clara is a rela – the Eisens [ph], I mentioned two aunts to you. There was Auntie Esther, who was a Eisen [ph]. There was Auntie – oh, she lived in Bat Yam.

So your father's sisters?

Half-sister. Half-sister. So, Clara must be her – an – a half-aunt I suppose. But she was always Aunt Clara, yeah. Clara was a relative, definitely but it's a half – it wasn't a step, I'm sure it's half. **[02:54:01]** But yeah, of course Clara, her flat in Antwerp, oh, yes, and Isi with his big, fat cigars.

So, Isi anyway, let's come back to you.

[Laughs] Yeah, sorry.

We'll continue that conversation some other time. So, Isi came to –

Isi came as an alderman of wherever at Etterbeek I think. And I said, but how can you be an alderman? He's involved with the *pouponnière*, I think the – supporting and – not financially but in every which way, that building there, the house. I must find out the exact connection there. But I said, '*Isi, Isi, was machstu ier*?' as one says, what are you doing here? He says, I've been involved, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I said, but so have I. And we didn't know, either of us. He, in his way, me, in a different way. He didn't know about me through Isabel and of course maybe she – well, he wouldn't have unless he knew the names of those kids, and he wouldn't have known. She wouldn't – obviously didn't mention it. So there was another connection there actually on the ground. There was Isi. Wow, that was last year. That is absolutely – so there's something else that- I think Frank did not know about. Very small. Wow, that is something else again. But anyway, Clara and Padwe, I knew them obviously and saw them whenever we went to Belgium or she came to visit either in Knokke where she had a flat in- not Lippenslaan, in Wulfstraat [ph], Wulfstraat, she had a flat at the top there, so she was forever going there. And I saw Isi there of course, and the other members of the family. **[02:56:00]** So I'm surprise, he never mentioned the family

background. Anyway, we're digressing probably. We're digressing to personal, other things. Anyway, Isi was there, there was a rabbi there – I can't remember his name sadly. And we had a meal there, we chatted some more and then we all went our way basically.

And do you find that the children had something in common? Did you find it was –

Yes, so we – well, we've got a WhatsApp group and we talk to each other and wish each other, you know, good *yom tov* where appropriate or –

How many people are in the group?

I think- seventeen or eighteen at the moment. Not everybody wants to be on it, not everybody else – not everybody's able to be on it. That's sadly the other aspect. Or at the same time, there may be – there are more in the group but not always able to be on Zoom at the same time. There's also the time difference, Australia, America, Belgium. We always try to go by Belgian time. Well, that's obviously ten hours from Los Angeles. God knows from Australia. From London it's not a problem. I never have a problem. I'm the lucky one there [laughs]. So whenever there is – something happens, so we try to focus Belgian time.

So I asked you [overtalking] some sort of closure or some –

Whether or not there was closure, yes and no. Yes, only insofar as yes, the photos are highlighted with adult faces, with people with different perspective on life. Bill, for instance, is very much a Republican. Michael from Wezembeek, not from Baron de Castro, he's very much Democrat, I'm a "royalist," the – and I suppose to some degree a bit to the right, being Betar. **[02:58:00]** Some of them are irreligious, there are a few who are religious, modern, and one or two are traditional. There are those who will be – who are irreligious because they've lost any religion they might have had. That's the one thing I also have asked others, why my father, my uncles, my aunts, none of them particularly, other than Auntie Regina because of her sons becoming Orthodox, the four brothers, none of them stayed within Orthodoxy particularly. Tradition, possibly. Nobody's been able to give an answer. I think – at one time I think it was either Michel, my cousin, who said it is probably because they lost

their faith in the camps. And I say, yes and no. Some no doubt will have, some found it, or some maintained it, no doubt about it. Obviously not members of my family per se, who were in the camps, or suffered the consequences of, whereas to some degree did I find any religiosity because of it? No, I think just life. I think my cousin, Peter possibly, he was always Orthodox. And all his family are now in Israel. All of them have made *aliyah*. And his grandchildren, all Orthodox because of Joe, their eldest brother, because he's fond of all the tradition, very much a traditionalist, and his mother, my aunt. **[03:00:00]** No, not particularly Orthodox.

But for you? Your Jewish identity –

Ah, yes, definitely through what life has offered me I suppose, primarily I should imagine because of the people I have been with. I think that's the influence. I mean I've worked with the immediate [ph] pastor, Chief Rabbi Sachs, what an amazing person, the current Chief Rabbi I work with, the various Israeli ambassadors here in England, I have known or worked with in one shape, form or another, and the current one is very Orthodox, the ambassador. And I've read their books and I've been with them and I've governed with them. So yes, from that point of view, but I'm not a *Hasid*, I'm not – I'm traditional.

But do you don't relate it to your experience? Your – no.

No.

So Jacques, I want to ask you, how – what impact do you think did your experience, your very early childhood experience, that you can't remember, how do you think that it changed your life?

I can only imagine that if there is any bearing it would have been the psychological aspect of it. I can't imagine it can be anything else. If it – if there is anything, it's buried deep. Interpreting what might have been is impossible. You can work at it, you can try it, I look at a photo and I think, well, if I hadn't done this, if this hadn't happened to me, the options are so many and varied, I can only say that my *mazel*, if you like, my luck, was I was born when I

was born because otherwise I wouldn't be here, that I had the gift of a wonderful wife, supportive, a friend, daughter who's getting more and more involved in the community, grandchildren, one more than the other, involved – not easy for the youth of today. **[03:02:35]** You can try and educate as much as you like, the world around them does not make it easy. I see that with my youngest grandson, the one who came with me – with us to Belgium last year. He belongs to the JSoc in Edinburgh but as much as he sees, the influences around him are such that the pressure, not just of studying and learning, and he's found out a few things about my own mother that I didn't know.

Is he interested in your history?

More and more, yes. He's helped me in a few things. But as he says, the pressure against – it's not only the Jews, ethnicity per se, it's against Islam, it's against – it's everywhere. It's not only in the UK, it has to be said. But at the moment it's very much to the fore and I think to myself, but I want to educate, I want to teach, I want to say, this is what happened to me, make sure it doesn't happen to anybody else.

And did you speak, Jacques, did you speak to your daughter about your history?

Not a huge amount. I've shown her, I've – she's read the books, she's been with me, she's supported me, she's very much into fundraising because she is very involved in charitable organisations, especially to do with people who have cancer, with children- the OLLIE – I forgot the name – Foundation that she was involved with, that young man who took his life in Borehamwood. **[03:04:22]** She's been involved with quite a lot of charities, both working and volunteering. But again, you want to ensure that your children know about it but are not submersed in it.

Yeah. It's not easy.

Not easy. Some are, I noticed that. I mean I look at the daughter of Isi- not Isi, of, er –

Zigi?

Zigi, Michelle. She's much more involved. She has spoken and still does I believe, at second-generation. I wonder if Corinne will one day want to do that. I don't want to – and the fact that she's coming with me next year, maybe, I don't know. It's one of –

Next year to…?

To March of the Living.

Okay. The two of you?

Yes. Judy feels it would be too difficult for her. Not physically. She's okay. But she doesn't feel – if she – if – I think if Corinne does it, she may do it again 'cos I hope, all things being equal, because the year after will be a huge year, the eightieth of so many things, end of the war, liberation of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, a specific – there's so many others of course, a huge amount of others. I mean how many thousands of camps were there? 1100 or whatever. **[03:06:01]**

Jacques, how do you see the future of Holocaust? I mean you've been involved in Holocaust education and you're now doing your own [overtalking] as well. How do you see the future of Holocaust education, in the light that, you know, we won't have so many survivors, how –

It's going [laughs] – it's going to be virtual. I have no doubt in my mind. And I think we have to concentrate our minds on the fact that when one will no longer be physically visible to others, it's got to be virtual. But will people perceive it the same way? Highly unlikely. It will be historic, history, and it will be historic. But so long as there are people who are willing to still go for, still ensure that there is a March of the Living, still ensure that HET educate, still ensure that AJR do what they do, the Wiener Library and others, then there is definitely hope. But whether or not it will eradicate anti-Semitism, anti-anything, no, probably not because the – we're not made up – our make-up isn't that way. That, I discover more and more. And you know what shows it to me? When even Jews question what's going on. I'm not talking about the Israel-Gaza war, when Jews even today say no, it didn't happen, not the way that –

not so many died, this didn't happen, are you sure, and even the word are you sure, highlights the lack of knowledge.

And are you worried about recent events? I mean [overtalking] have seen happening.

Oh, absolutely, yes, because when I go to the Survivors' Centre since all this happened, the number of people who are there, who say a) I said eighty-five years ago it's coming back a) it's coming up, it's erupting in many ways – I shouldn't use exploding – erupting and there's no doubt that they perceive that what happened to them can and could and probably may happen if something isn't done to stop it one way or another or slow it down in one shape, form or another, because, you know, we mentioned *Shoah*. **[03:08:33]** To me – I've said this and I'm guilty in many ways of saying that *Shoah* to me is not Holocaust. *Shoah* is specific to the Jews. Holocaust, the Greek word says what it is, and HET chose- and that's the one thing I feel, and I disagree with the people when they say it's cross-communal. I say, no, it's not. The Holocaust is genocide, yes, it affected different people in different places, absolutely, but the *Shoah* was specific to the Jews in a way that even today- the extermination, the killing of people, is not in the same –

I understand. So, you're saying Yom HaShoah –

Yom HaShoah is –

Could only be to the Jews

Yeah.

-and Holocaust Memorial Day broader.

Should be the broader aspect. And in many ways I think that even today when you go to the sermon, and I go every time, I think to myself, yes, the gypsies of course, they suffered horribly, the communists, the people perceived as different, gays or otherwise, anybody who's different, yes, all suffered and are still suffering and shouldn't suffer. **[03:10:00**] But

when I go to the service, the focus still starts with the killing, murdering, whatever wants to call, exterminating of Jews. The others seem to follow. And I don't think they should. Everyone should be recognised in their own way for what happened to them. Rwanda, Biafra, Viet – not Vietnam- next door. What's it called again? Cambodia. They're all holocausts in their own way, all genocides, and should be recognised as such. Should they all be put together as one? I have my questions. I'm sure I'm not the only one, although I'm maybe one of the few who dares to mention it [laughs].

Yeah, that's a big question, isn't it?

It is a big question.

How to commemorate [overtalking].

How do you commemorate – remembrance is the easiest part. The commemoration of it the hardest part. I mean I've met that lady who spoke a couple of years ago at Holocaust Memorial Day from Cambodia. The story she tells and told, it breaks the heart and I think to myself, it's a – it was a holocaust, it was a genocide, why doesn't it have its own day of commemoration? Should they be sharing it? We should all share what's bad but should we not in a way also individually, have it? I don't know. It's – somebody with – in a higher pay-grade than me who will maybe highlight that.

And you said you go the Survivors' Centre.

Yes. Not every time but more – more lately. **[03:12:02]**

And do you like it? Why do you go to it? What –

A) to meet some of the – some of the characters are quite – quite amazing, Robert there, amongst others. Mala comes from time to time, not as much because she's so busy, bless her. That lady –

No time, yeah.

She's there.

But for you?

Ivor- not Ivor. Ivor Perl is there, comes with Miriam and then Rabbi Junik comes and says a few words- my new rabbi, I'm going to involve him. I've asked him if he'd be willing to do it.

But do you feel it's important for you as well?

Yes but I still feel – I still feel different. They say you shouldn't, you mustn't. I said but I still feel I haven't gone through what you've gone through. I've gone through whatever I've gone through but not quite the same way as you. And as you well know, there is a pecking order. There is- how can I call it, an element of- I was in Auschwitz, it was worse than Ravensbrück; I was in Bergen-Belsen, it wasn't the same as where you were hidden in the farm, or whatever. There is a pecking order and that to me is anathema. Pain is pain, whatever pain is. I don't know if you can answer that but I have noticed that. It doesn't always surface quite as vociferously as I've just mentioned it but there is an underlying tone, definitely.

Well, there was a whole issue I think with who was supposed to come to the Survivors' Centre, when it comes to the refugees and I think they made a decision at some point that anyone who came out after Kristallnacht was allowed to come and if somebody came before, they are not allowed to, as far as I know – I don't know what –

Change – yeah, there is changes, there is change. **[03:14:13]** Yeah, the power of suffering is – it's – it is what it is. And we talk a lot of the physical aspect. Not enough is mentioned of the mental aspect, I feel.

I agree with you. But I think at the time there was not a lot of support for the mental aspect of [overtalking].

Excuse me. Yeah, not the way it is now.

Survival, just survival.

Yes, and *Shalvata* [Jewish care] does and did and does what it can. But there is different groupings to do and there's more and more involved in that.

Yeah. Jacques, in terms of – you said you're Jewish British. Where do you feel is your place of home? You lived in so many places.

Here, England. I thought of going on *aliyah* again. Judy and I thought of it but could we go? I know I could. Judy might be able to but it would be tremendously difficult. Corinne's here, the grandchildren are here, although the other side of the family is all there. The European side of the family is either in Europe or in the UK, what's left of it. But having said which, anybody in France or Belgium who can, does, goes to Israel. Sadly, it's much worse than here.

Yeah, so – but you're –

I'm settled.

Here.

As much as one can be settled [laughs].

Yeah. Do you sometimes think how your life would have been without Hitler, without the war?

No, because I've known nothing different. **[03:16:01]** So taking into account what has taken place, would – the world would definitely be different but to what extent and how? You can't imagine, you can't forecast. You can try to, you can hope, you can imagine, but I doubt you – if you come to a specific, tangible answer.

I mean for you, you lost your mother so young.

And my sister.

And your sister.

Well, and I never knew either. And other members of the family of course. On my mother's side, on my – my grandfather, grandmother. I think I worked out compared to others it's low numbers, if you can call it that. I think I worked it out it was eleven. But compared to others, who can talk about twenty, thirty or more.

But you have a lovely portrait of your – you commissioned a –

My daughter commissioned that, yes. Corinne did that. So –

Was it a painted portrait of a photograph?

Yes, he did that. He's a lovely – absolutely wonderful guy. He's currently painting the King, as far as I –

And he made this for you?

And he did that one. He was commissioned. You know, to me, that's pretty – pretty amazing, I have to admit. And King Charles, you know, it's still hard not to say the Queen, it's still hard after a year. King Charles, he has an affinity with the community. There is no doubt about it. But like all either royalty or politicians, he's governed by what goes around in the country, the –

And he commissioned that painter to paint a survivor?

He was Prince Charles then.

Yes, but –

He did the – was it five or six, I forgot. **[03:18:00]** Do you remember that?

Yes, I remember that. So, he did – this painter did [overtalking]. We are going to look at it.

He – yes, this – the painter is one of the ones who – he painted Helen.

Helen? Right.

I must see if I've got the book. Judy must have it in there. Sorry. He commissioned different painters to – each one to paint a different survivor and he did. And you know there's a Lady, she's a Lady, I mean that's her title – Lady, who does sculptures of survivors. Oh, you know her?

Yes.

She's amazing. When we went to the unveiling of Ivor Perl's a few weeks ago, her studio, it's on the south of the Thames, her house is on the Thames, so you're sitting there and the Thames is flowing past you. Amazing. But that studio, of all the survivors, of kings, the Queen, Princess Margaret, all people that are well-known –

And now she's doing- I think she's supposed to do Kurt Marc next.

Is she doing Kurt Marx next?

I think that was the plan. I don't know if-

I don't. It takes time but she does it voluntarily, philanthropically. She and her husband are amazing.

So are you pleased with the portrait of your mother?

Oh, totally. Absolutely over the moon. It's – that's why we put it there, not here – there. First thing you come in, last thing when you go out.

Okay, Jacques, is there anything we've discussed, many, many of the topics, is there anything else you'd like to add?

I'm sure there's lots of others that would come to the fore with your probing questions [laughs] but I can't think of them for the moment, I have to admit. I'm sure there are others that need to be pulled out literally but our cognisance of each other through Isi. **[03:20:08]**

Okay, we'll discuss that but it is a very small world. Jacques, do you have any message for anyone, you would like to – who is going to [overtalking] interview in the future.

My message is we live in a small world, it's truly small today, not what it was. We have been given the opportunity to live in it, we have been given life, we must do the best we can with what we've got and we must try and ensure to the best of our ability that any pain that is inflicted on the people of the world is removed in one way, shape or another. It's not deserved, it's not necessary. The world can be a better place, it can always be improved upon and it can only be done by people of a like mind, and we have a duty of care to ensure to the best of our ability that we can have a friendly, a cohesive, a knowledgeable, well-educated world of people that respect each other, that live together in harmony where possible. Yes, we're all different, yes, we're different colours, yes, we are different races, ethnicity, but we're humans and we must act accordingly. That's all I can say.

Okay, that's an important message, more today than before.

Than it has been for a long time. Technology has so much to give, positive, but sadly the positive is turned into negative so easily and we shouldn't be doing what we're doing. **[03:22:11]** There's so many – where, you know, science fiction is becoming reality, no doubt about it. And if virtual reality from the point of view of education is the future and there's nothing else that I can imagine, so be it. It's there, we must make the most of it and we must use it to our advantage, positively.

Well, this is a digital – we are creating a digital resource [overtalking].

Yes, we are, and that's why I'm emphasising this is what it is and you're doing a tremendous job and I truly take my hat off. I mean all of the work you do, truly. It's encapsulated in everything you do and what Frank has been supporting you and doing in his own right as well. I can see it can't be easy for you there, after that I'm sure I know enough of you, you know, you're listening to people talking and I'm wondering to myself, what is going through her – through his mind as I am sitting here, saying what I'm saying.

Okay. We'll discuss it in a second. Thank you in the meantime, Jacques, thank you so much for sharing your story and we're going to look at some of your photographs and documents.

Okay.

[Pause from 03:23:34 – 03:24:48]

And this one depicts my grandfather, Mordechai [ph], together with Hella [ph], my father's sister, his eldest daughter at the time, walking in Antwerp. And I'm afraid I have no knowledge of where in Antwerp or who took the photo or when.

And their surname is Weisser?

Yes, Weisser.

And what happened to them?

Well, my father – they both perished in Auschwitz. We have documentation on Mordechai Weisser. He was deported from Drancy in France to Auschwitz and obviously he did not survive. Hella, I have no knowledge but I can only assume that it would have been from Belgium.

Thank you.

Okay, so this is a photo which a friend of my aunt in Antwerp, Clara, found amongst her possessions and transmitted to Auntie Cilli [inaudible], my father's sister living in London some years ago, and it depicts a group of youth from HaNoar HaTzioni [Jewish social youth movement] in Antwerp. **[03:26:12]** And on the photo are my mother and several of my aunts which in reality is one of the three – I think it's three, yes – only three photos which shows my mother and my aunts when they were youngsters.

Oh, this is my father, Jacob "Kuba" Weisser. I again cannot tell when it was taken. He was extremely smartly dressed, ergo it must be well before the time of the war. I suspect he would have been about nineteen, twenty in that photo.

He looks twenties [ph].

Yes. So, this is a photo of my mother, Marthe Mandelbaum, who became obviously Weisser, found in the photo archives of Malines in Belgium from which a painting was subsequently made and it's one of the very, very few photos of my mother in existence. Provenance, unknown but history implies that it is taken during her short detention in Malines before being deported. **[03:28:00]**

So, this represents three photographs. The one on the left is again of my mother. Next to her is her brother, Maurice. And next to him is their mother, Dina, who also perished. The two of them – well, all three perished in Auschwitz.

And how did you get this photo, Jacques?

The first one you know of, well, from Malines, and the other two, my youngest grandson, Oliver, extrapolated from the sections of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Thank you. Yes, please, Jacques. Tell us about this absolutely amazing photograph.

Well, this photo whose provenance I cannot identify, except to say that there are a few of them around. It depicts a group of children at the *pouponnière* of Baron de Castro in Etterbeek in Brussels, which was a Jewish orphanage. Several of the children are still alive today and had a reunion last year at the home which you see here, and now obviously much more modern. And I'm the young boy on the right-hand side, fourth along, fourth from the right, wearing a dark pair of trousers with sort of braces. It's in a room where we obviously must have been sleeping because we are all surrounded by cots.

And do you have no idea how you received this picture?

How, who took the photo or how it came about, there are a few because Reinier found one as well, we found one, and so did the lady whose house now is- well, it's hers now of course but it was the orphanage and it's absolutely amazing. **[03:30:16]**

You know, I wonder whether it's possible that it was taken by the Résistance by someone to send to relatives because I have seen another picture of somebody who was in hiding, a boy in hiding. They took a picture to send to the parents.

I have no idea.

No? Maybe something like that.

It could be something similar, yeah.

Thank you.

So here again we are this group of Jewish children in the Baron de Castro *pouponnièr*e where we were for several months or even longer sum. And this has been colourised and here I am, third from the right, again still wearing the same clothes. When we had our reunion last year, one of the people who attended did a painting of these children in her own way and what is amazing is that we were all able to personally and physically identify with each other in view of this particular photo in a room on the first floor of the house which was obviously our dormitory.

So, this photo, again provenance unknown, probably in the Ardennes with Bill, with whom I was hidden firstly in Antwerp in this hospital, Saint Erasmus, and subsequently the *pouponnière*, and towards the end of the war, in the Ardennes. **[03:32:05]** And you can see me in the background, the fields, but again neither of us remember each other and these photos are truly our only memory.

So, this photo again provenance unknown, but it's obviously after liberation, after September 1944 because we are somewhere in Belgium, possibly still the Ardennes, and the soldier in the picture is an MP, American MP. Bill is on the right-hand side of the photo, I'm in the sort of fur-looking coat on the left-hand side. And there is a lady with us but we don't know who she is.

Similar photograph again, provenance unknown, with Bill, again presumably in the Ardennes in view of the background. I'm on the right-hand side, Bill is on the left, and although he has copies of this photo, we have no recollection of each other that identifies anything other than what the photo shows. The annotation on the back says *souvenir de Jacqui* [ph]1944, translated as souvenir of Jacques, of Jacqui [ph], 1944.

Thank you.

Yes, please.

So, this picture is one taken post-war and it shows my stepbrother, Michel, in the middle and a friend of ours, Marcel, and myself on the far left, taken somewhere in Belgium obviously but I don't know where. **[03:34:11]**

Thank you.

Yes, please.

So this photo is one of my Uncle Joseph. I'm standing up on the seat of the car, an Austin A90 I believe, and somewhere in London, a stopover before we packed and went to Southern Rhodesia with my Aunt Paula.

Following on the previous photo, here's one on the Edinburgh Castle on our way to Cape Town and then Southern Rhodesia with my Auntie Paula in the deckchair and our two Alsatians, Pip and Bambi. A wonderful sea journey that took a long time in those days. And we were in for a shock when we actually landed. The train journey from Cape Town to Salisbury was never-ending but fascinating.

This photo is taken in 1955 at my bar mitzvah with Auntie Paula and Uncle Joseph, and a thirteen-year-old boy studying his *bar mitzvah* with a teacher by the name of Mrs Kaplan who was an amazing teacher and ensured that my Hebrew was as good as could be for the period because not forgetting that I still had a heavy Belgian/ foreign accent. **[03:36:08]**

Yes, please.

So this photo is taken in East London, South Africa at Betar summer camp. I'm afraid I don't remember the year but it was one of the camps that assembled *chanichim* [participants] from various Betar locations around South Africa and I came from Southern Rhodesia, I think one of the few who did come from Southern Rhodesia. And this is where I got peritonitis and had to be taken to hospital, emergency, everybody went back home after camp and I stayed on for a while.

Thank you.

Okay.

This photo is taken in Israel, near the Lebanese border, somewhere not too far from Metula I believe, but in any event in the north of Israel with members of my *gar'in beit*. We were all *mahalniks* from South Africa, we went on *aliyah* in 1959, and there is the van and I'm the second from the left, sunglasses and *kova tembo* [Israeli farmer's hat] and next to me is the madrich who came with us. One of our members must have been taking the photo because there were six, plus the madrich. Memories and vagaries abound, just not the date.

This is a photo with members of the family at Oliver's *bar mitzvah*. Oliver's the young man in the middle in March of 2015 at his party. **[03:38:03]** I'm on the left, my wife, Judy, next to me, Corinne and our oldest grandson, Thomas.

Yes, please.

This is a photo taken on Wednesday 19th of November 2003 with the International Council of Jewish War Veterans. It's an audience with the Pope, John Paul II, which I organised on behalf of AJEX together with International Council and we were received by the Pope. We made a presentation of a silver *shofar* to him. Members of the group are from America, France, England and Israel. I am the second on the right of the photo, next to the Pope, with glasses and the Pope is cogitating on something that was said to him in terms of the papacy and the anti-Semitism that led to so many people dying during the Second World War, some of whom were saved by emissaries of the then-Pope, but many didn't.

Thank you.

Yes, please, yeah.

Okay. So this is my certificate of identity which was issued to me here in England in order to travel and enable me to go to Southern Rhodesia via South Africa. **[03:40:00]**

So, this is the book cover of the book written by Reinier Heinsman, the young student- legal student from Amsterdam. The name of the book is 'From the Children's Home to the Gas Chamber' and shows photos – a photo of some of the children who were in the second Jewish home. And one of the people in this photo, the young lady on the bottom left, is a girl called today Roni Wolf who married Ivor, who believe it or not, was one of the members of my *gar'in beit* from South Africa when we made *aliyah*, the six of us, to Israel in 1959.

Thank you. Yes, please.

So this is the back cover of a booklet which was put together by Maria Isabel and Philippe Binard Alvarez, who currently own the house where we were taken during the war in 1944 until the end of the war virtually. And it shows on the left-hand side a photo of the family, and on the right-hand side obviously the building itself. Isabel and Philippe are a wonderful couple. They work for the – as lawyers for the European Commission and when we met in their house as survivor-children of the Holocaust, of the *Shoah*, we bonded and found that the work there and the research that Isabel had put together was absolutely outstanding, deserves all our praise, appreciation and deep thanks. **[03:42:24]**

Thank you.

So, this is my WhatsApp group of the children of Baron de Castro, with some of the names of those who were able to attend the – first of all the Zoom prior to the actual get-together in Brussels last year, 2023. We keep in touch and we have since then had two further Zoom meetings, get-togethers and which we could organise soon, very soon, another in-person get-together.

Jacques, this is to say thank you so much for sharing your life history with us and sharing your photographs.

Delighted. My pleasure. And I hope it helps to develop your wonderful endeavours. I'm truly in awe of what you and Frank and everyone involved in this project are achieving. It's amazing, and thank you.

Thank you. We'll let you go now [both laugh].

[03:43:46]

[End of transcript]