

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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REFUGEE VOICES: THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE

INTERVIEW: 59

NAME: HENNY REDNALL

DATE: 30 APRIL 2004

LOCATION: BIRMINGHAM

INTERVIEWER: HELEN LLOYD

TAPE 1

HR: I was born in Kassel in my grandmother's house, on the 21st of November 1925, and my name is, or was then, Henrietta Helene Spier. I have always been called Henny ever since, nobody bothers about the other. Anyway, I was born at my grandmother's house and my mother who was very, very, very musical, that's her photograph over there, decided that I should be born to music, and in between pains, she was playing the piano like mad. Anyway, eventually, the midwife said, 'Frau Spier, if you don't stop playing that piano, I'm going home.' So she had to stop and the result was myself. Anyway, I had a very, very happy childhood, that is after babyhood, I don't remember much about that, and we at the time lived in Abterode, which is quite a big village in Hessen, near a place called Eschwege, the nearest town was Eschwege. And I was born in Abterode, it was a lovely village, and, as I grew up, everybody was very very friendly, and my mother, they absolutely worshipped her because she helped everybody. If anybody was ill, they came to her first to see if she thought they ought to see the doctor. And anyway she always helped wherever she could. If somebody had a baby she went and tidied up for them so that they were happy and everybody in the village we got on wonderfully well, it was just a family. It was super. It didn't matter what religion you were, everybody was friendly. And I had a sister who was born nearly 3 years after me. And the two of us, my father was a teacher and a Hazzan, and we had a very nice synagogue in Abterode and, funny enough, it is one of the few that is still there but it has been turned into a bank. The bank is the ground floor, the upstairs is exactly as it was with the ceiling covered in molten dovits and it's wonderful. Anyway, we were very, very happy there until, oh, my father was teacher there, it was a Jewish school he taught at. I went to the school, my sister wasn't quite old enough, and then after '33, a law was brought out that all the Jewish schools with less than so many pupils, I can't remember, I think it was 12 or 14, we had either 13..

[Interruption].

HL: We'll continue from 1933.

Tape 1: 3 minutes 49 seconds

HR: In 1933 things which had been so wonderful in Abterode started to change. And some of the local boys, led particularly by one, who was very, very, very anti-Semitic, they started to chase me on the way to school. Oh, first of all, our school had to stop taking pupils because we were short, we were short of one, to meet the regulations that the Nazis brought in. So I had to go to the local ordinary German school and on the way there, where the school, the Jewish school had been behind our house before, and I didn't have to walk anywhere, I now had to walk across the village to get to the new school. And some of these boys started to throw stones at me if I didn't bring them sweets or give them some money or something. Well, I mean I was only 8 or 9 years old, and it was a bit difficult, and I realised that if I told my father he couldn't help me, because the Nazis would have arrested him or done something if he'd gone for the boys. And it was very difficult. Anyway, one morning I was going to school, and they started to beat me up, and my father ran behind, I heard him come behind me, running behind me, and so as soon as the boys saw him they took off. Now, being a teacher, he was quite friendly with the German teachers in Abterode and he took me down to the school and he told my teacher, Lehrer Gerhardt, he told him I was having this trouble and he said, 'Right, I will see to that'. And I didn't have any more trouble after that. He told them all off and that was it. And then a bit later on, suddenly, when I went home, this was late afternoon, I noticed all our curtains were drawn, which was something we never did unless somebody died, you know, the curtains were drawn and they were wedged with stones at the bottom, very, very odd. And I said to my mother, I said, 'Mutti, what's the matter, why have we got the curtains drawn?' She said, 'Somebody has told me that tonight all the windows in the Jewish houses are going to be smashed.'

Tape 1: 6 minutes 9 seconds

Well, you can imagine what we felt like, can't you? The next morning the only windows in the village, and there were a lot of Jews there, the only ones that weren't smashed were ours. I don't know whether that was good or bad, anyway they weren't. But things started to go from bad to worse and then my father, who had always been a teacher, and a Hazzan - he had a wonderful voice, absolutely marvellous - decided he would take up selling farm implements to the farmers roundabout but he wasn't any good at it, he was a born teacher and he was wonderful at that too. Anyway, he decided he'd got to get another job and then in 1935 we moved to Lehe, Ostfriesland, Easten Friesland, which is near the Dutch border, only a few miles from the Dutch border. Anyway, we went there, and we had the most gorgeous house, just in front of the school, it was very, very nice. But I must go back to 1934 now, because in 1934 I was playing outside my grandmother's house, I was playing with a ball, and suddenly, it was quite a big road in Kassel, and suddenly a car drew up, one of these wonderful big open tourers, with 4 huge Nazis inside, in their yellow uniforms and they got out of the car, and they stalked into my grandmother's house. And the woman next door said, 'Henny what do they want at your house?' I said, 'Well, I don't know'. Anyway, they came out with my grandmother, who was getting the Friday evening meal ready, she was in her apron and she'd got her slippers on. And they brought her out of the house and pushed her into the car, seated

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between two of them at the back of the car, and drove off down the road. Well, I ran all the way down the road after them, but of course they wouldn't stop. And I went back in and my grandfather was just sitting there like that, just staring. Anyway, about 20 minutes, half an hour later, my mother walked in. And I told her what had happened. And she rang her sister, my aunt, who lived in Goslar. And she said, 'Sophie, Mutter has gone to Tante Anna'. That was something they'd agreed if the Nazis arrived, it was Auntie Anna, right, Mutter has gone to Tante Anna. Anyway she rang up the brown house, which was Nazi headquarters: 'Yes, your mother is here, and you can come and fetch her'. Anyway, we got a taxi, and they took us up to the brown house, and Mutti went in, I stayed in the taxi, and she came back, she had my grandmother with her, and they told her she'd got to take her round to the prison. So we took her round to the prison, and she'd apparently been accused of calling somebody a dirty Nazi swine, whether she had or not, I don't think at that time in Germany anyone would have been that careless, but, however. Anyway, we took her around to the prison and we had to leave her there. And when we got back we found that my grandfather was very, very, very poorly. And what they'd done, he tried to stop them taking my grandmother out and they smashed his head against a wall. And he died just a few days later, of brain haemorrhage.

Tape 1: 9 minutes 55 seconds

And, from that day on, my mother, who worshipped him - my grandmother was very strict - but my mother, who worshipped her father, was never the same again. She just used to sit there, staring into space for hours. Anyway, shortly after that, we left Abterode and, in 1935, we arrived in Lehe. Mutti didn't like Lehe and she was so unhappy because she loved Abterode and she had lost her father and life just wasn't worth living anymore. And then suddenly she started to, when she went out shopping or something, she couldn't walk properly. So she decided she could no longer wear high heels, she would wear flat ones, it didn't work, and then she got weaker and weaker and she couldn't do anything. And they found, they took her into hospital, and found that she had multiple sclerosis. Well, from that day on, I've sworn that to get that particular complaint you had to have had a terrible shock, which she'd had. 3 years it took her to die. And she couldn't turn round anymore in bed. My father, my sister and I took it in turns, we turned her round at night, we slept with her in turn, and turned her round, and saw to her at night, anyway 3 years later she died, and that was the 4th October, 1938. A few days later was Kristallnacht. Do you know what that means? You do. Right, well, we went, I went to school first thing, my father and sister were following, and I went to school and opposite the school was the synagogue and this, oh no, that was much later, that wasn't in Lehe, sorry. In Lehe we were til '38 and then my father got a letter from the powers that be to say that he was no longer state employed. So that was the end of that. Anyway we went from Hildesheim, from Lehe to Hildesheim, and he got a job there and the Jewish community paid for his wages as teacher and cantor.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 12 seconds

And my sister and I went to school there for a little while. And, first of all, we decided that it was better if my mother went back to her mother, so we took her there and we had a housekeeper. And, on Kristallnacht, which was just after my mother had died, I went to school in the morning, and when I got to the school and looked at the synagogue, which

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was opposite, I couldn't understand what had happened. It looked as if all the windows had melted. Anyway, I had a look, I went up the steps and looked, and it was burnt out. But I never thought of anything, you know, I just thought, you know, its had a fire. I went to school and the children arrived, and my father and my sister arrived, and we started the teaching and then suddenly the women arrived, the parents, the mothers of the children and fetched the children, and my father said, 'What is the matter, why are you doing this?' And they said, 'Well, our husbands have all been arrested and they've been sent to concentration camps.' So, before we could turn around, the school was empty, and my father said, 'I've got to do something about this'. So we went home, we fetched the car, we fetched our housekeeper, who was also Jewish, and we set off for my grandmother, because she was a widow, and we decided we'd be safer there than at home. Anyway, we got to my grandmother's, and she said, 'I've got 50 people here already, I can't possibly put you up'. So Henny, she was also Henny, the housekeeper, said, 'Look, I know somebody who served in the war' and usually the Germans weren't too nasty with people who'd been in the war, right? The First World War. She said, 'We'll go there'. Anyway, we went, but it was quite horrendous a journey, because my father, whilst he'd got blue eyes, he'd a very big Jewish nose, and when we got petrol, I was worried to death, but nobody bothered, and I said, 'At least you've got blue eyes', so-. Anyway, we managed to get to these friends of hers, and we stayed there for 3 or 4 days, and we were petrified all the time, we didn't go to bed, we just sat up. Anyway, a few days later, things seemed to have calmed down, and we went back to our flat in Hildesheim.

Tape 1: 15 minutes 0 second

And nobody'd interfered with it, nobody'd been, it was alright, we went there. But with all these men being arrested, my father suddenly looked at my sister and me and said, 'If you've lost your mother, if anything happens to me, you are in a mess.' He contacted a friend of his, from Lehe, where we'd just been. He was working in Berlin, in the children's transport to England. And within, well, this was the end of November, and by the 5th of January we were out of Germany, on our way to England, right? This friend of my father's, who helped us to get out, didn't. He ended up in an extermination camp. So did my father. First of all, he was sent to Warsaw, and all his family, my father had a very big family, he had one, two, three, four brothers, with their wives, two children apiece; he had two sisters, who had, I'm not sure, because the children were born after we left Germany, I don't know. The elder sister married a man, who had been married before, and she had a grown-up family too, come with him, and the other one, I think she had one child, I don't know. But, anyway, all his family, except for his father, were murdered in concentration camps. And there was just, my father included, and funny enough my grandmother's side wasn't as bad. My grandmother, my father's mother, died in 1934, she had gall bladder trouble, so she was safe. But my grandfather, his father, was sent to a concentration camp, to Theresienstadt, and he came back. My grandmother, my mother's mother, was also sent to Theresienstadt, and she came back. And then, when she came back, people were absolutely wonderful to her, and they arranged for her to get the freedom of the city of Kassel, where she'd lived all her life, and it was quite wonderful, because the Lord Mayor gave her the freedom of the city, and I have a beautiful photograph of this. And also, shortly afterwards, in 1948, she had her 80th birthday and

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the Lord Mayor arrived at 8 o' clock in the morning with three cakes, about so big, and gave them to us, so that we would have something to feast on for her 80th birthday. And it was quite wonderful, it was the first time I went back, from 5th of January 1939, it was fantastic, it really was. And she had a lovely birthday and, by the time we finished, we had about seven cakes, but we did manage to give them to a lot of friends, right? And that was that.

Tape 1: 18 minutes 45 seconds

HL: Can you now go back and name some names and dates for historical records? Can you give me the names of your grandparents and as much as you know about where your father's and mother's families came from? And name the other members of your family who died in concentration camps?

HR: Name them all?

HL: Well, as much as you can for the records.

HR: Well my grandfather, my father's father, was Salomon Spier. His wife was called Gitta, she died in 1934. Now his eldest brother was Adolf, Adolf Spier, but they all came from Erzhausen, which is again in Hessen, but in those days it was called In der Schwalm, right? But they all came from there. And then his eldest brother was Adolf, he had a wife called Leni or Helen, and two children, called Walther und Ernst. Now, then he had, his other brother was Willi, he lived in Berlin. But I think he must have got divorced, he had a wife, I didn't hear of any children, I think he got divorced. And I don't think he ever got married again. Then there was Helmar, who had a wife called Irma and they had I think two children but I don't know their names. We didn't see a very much of my father's family, I seemed to be nearly - whenever I had a holiday from school I was with my grandmother, my mother's mother. Anyway, and then there was, there was Helmar and Irma, and Samuel and his wife was Emma, and his children were called Werner and Gitta. That was the men of the family, my father was Hermann Spier, right? And then his sisters were Betty Spier, and she married a man called Sali Blach, and he had two grown-up children that he brought with him into the marriage. And then my father had another sister called Rosa and she married a man called Erich, Erich Frühauf, he had a dairy firm, and they lived in Kassel, and I don't know if she had one or two children, I really don't, I'd have to look up my family tree to do that. But that was my father's family. My grandfather, as I said, came back and one of the neighbours was absolutely wonderful, he looked after him. He died about '47, right? I never saw him again. But I did see my grandmother again in 1948.

Tape 1: 21 minutes 33 seconds

Now, my mother's family was just my grandfather, who was born in Kassel; my grandmother, who was born in Rothenburg an der Taube, and came to Kassel, and they had a furniture business. My grandfather made furniture, he was a, I can't remember the word, a cabinet maker, and he was fabulous. All my mother's furniture he made, and, in every drawer in the dining room suite, if you pulled it open, it said 'Have a lovely day,

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your father.’ It was wonderful, it was so beautiful, all of it, you know, he was an expert. And all our furniture was made by him and it was of course all stolen, you know, by the Nazis, and I hope the people who had it rot in hell. Sorry about that, but that’s how I feel. Anyway my grandmother and my grandfather were married for quite a long time until, of course, he was killed in 1934, November ‘34. So that was that, that’s the family history.

HL: Would you say that both your mother and your father came from well-to-do families?

HR: My mother did. I don’t think my father’s family was terribly well-to-do. They were comfortable, but you know there wasn’t a lot of money there I don’t think. But, you know, I hardly ever went to see my father’s family, I don’t know why, but a strange thing was this chap, who lived opposite my grandfather and who looked after him, I met him when we were, my husband and I were over there, going to all the places where I had lived or where I had been, and I met this chap, quite by accident. I asked somebody the way to somewhere, to the cemetery that was it, and she said you should go call on Mr. So-and-So, because he knew your grandfather very, very well. Georg Holz was his name, so I went and he was delighted to meet me, and he said to me, ‘You know I bought your grandfather’s house, come with me and I’ll show it to you’. I was a bit like that, wondering what I’d find. Nothing had changed, it was exactly as I remembered it, it was quite fantastic. Anyway, he said, ‘Look, if you want to come to Germany, you can stay in this house any time you want for as long as you like. We only use it as a holiday home. But if you want it, you can stay in it, you know, forever if you want.’ But I couldn’t face it, not without the family. Just wasn’t any good. Anyway, we became quite good friends and he and his grandson visited us in England, me in England. And since then of course he’s died, so that was another end to another chapter. And of course everybody now, my sister went to New York in 1948, we were both going, but I didn’t get there. And she died there, 28 years ago. So I’m the only part of the family, except for a second cousin on my mother’s side, the only member of the family who’s left.

Tape 1: 25 minutes 5 seconds

HL: Going back to your father, you said he wasn’t from such a well-off family, but was he from a well-educated family?

HR: Of course. But you know, most of the Jews in Germany were, strange enough. It didn’t matter whether they were poor or rich, they were all well-educated, all those I met anyway.

HL: Can you talk more about your father’s job?

HR: Well, he was, they called him a deputy rabbi because in Germany, they had, at least in the parts where we lived, the cantors or Hazzans sort of took the place of the rabbi because rabbis only lived in the main town of the county, right? The rest was left to Hazzans, who did the same sort of job separately, and they were there to look after people, after their souls. And I say he was a wonderful teacher, he really was; he helped me such

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a lot. Because, since my husband died, I'm a crossword addict, I can't sleep very well. If I sleep til 3 o'clock, I'm very lucky. From 3 o'clock until 5 or 6 I do crossword puzzles and my father at school taught us all the main towns, the capitals of the world's countries, and you'd be surprised how often they ask you what the capital of Peru is, and I know its Lima, right? And it's fantastic, it is such a help, the things he taught us. He was very, very, very strict, especially with my sister and I, you know. But it didn't hurt us, because what he taught us I most of the time we remember.

Tape 1: 27 minutes 11 seconds

HL: Were you in his class in the Jewish school?

HR: It wasn't a class, it wasn't like that, love, we never had so many children in a Jewish school, so we were all in the same large room: class one there, class two there, class three there, and the youngest at the front. And the ones that were at that moment being taught, unless it was something that we were all taught, they sat and wrote whatever they'd been told to write down, and the others answered questions, right? But it worked very well, and people told me that the teachers who took up this class after my father left, they couldn't manage a whole class like he'd done. You know, they'd have people talking and this that and the other, and they said it just wasn't a patch on it.

HL: And your father taught all the subjects then did he?

HR: Yes, yes, he was very clever. And not only that, he and my mother had beautiful voices. They did quite a lot of singing in public, sort of, you know, amateur concerts and so forth. We'd have a concert in the school one evening and they did that quite regularly, all the places where we lived, until Mutti got ill, and that was the end of that.

HL: Was that unaccompanied singing, or with a piano?

HR: Well my mother was a wonderful pianist, she also played the violin. She was a wonderful musician. I can't do anything except sing, I can't even read a note of music, but there you are, you can't have everything.

HL: What sort of music did they perform?

HR: Oh they liked operettas. Now, last night I went to amateur operetta at Sutton Town Hall, and they were doing the 'Zigeunerbaron', or the Gypsy Baron, and I knew every tune they played, and I would have loved to have got up there and helped them but nobody asked me to. You can't have everything, anyway, but they loved things like that.

Tape 1: 29 minutes 22 seconds

HL: And was there much cultural life in your area, were there things you could go to, plays and-?

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HR: Not in Abterode, no, because it was a village. But they did, we did, they did organise little concerts at our school, you see?

HL: Until what age were you taught by your father?

HR: I finished in Hildesheim, I was nearly 13.

Tape 1: 30 minutes 0 second

HL: When the Jewish school closed, can you talk about your education after that?

HR: I went to the village school for a while, in Abterode. My sister wasn't quite old enough you see, so she came later. Anyway, I went there for a while, and then my father got a job in Eschwege, which was a town not far from Abterode, as a teacher, and he then arranged to take, there were 5 of us who were the right age, he took all 5 of us with him in the car every morning to Eschwege and we went back to the Jewish school there. And then, as I say, eventually he got this job in Lehe and we left Abterode.

HL: So he was really your main teacher of all subjects apart from that short spell in the village school?

HR: Yes, yes. And when he decided that we ought to sort of learn a bit of English just in case, he sent me to a private tutor to learn English, but I didn't realise what a big mistake the man made until I got to England, because he taught me all the words, but some of the words were so ancient, it was unbelievable! They were so old, they couldn't even remember them here! Anyway, he taught me the words, and when I came to England, I couldn't make up a sentence for love nor money. Well, they sent me to school in Tunbridge Wells, and they sent me home because I couldn't speak. All I could do was sport and needlework. And they didn't think that that was good enough.

HL: Well, we'll come to England; we're still sticking to your time in Germany.

HR: Yes, yes.

HL: Was it your father who taught you about the Jewish religion?

Tape 1: 32 minutes 0 second

HR: Oh, but we were taught that at school. And also I went with him on Friday night. Normally, the women didn't go on Friday night, but I always went with him on Friday night, I went upstairs to the services. One night in Lehe, I was absolutely petrified. I was all alone and suddenly my side of the synagogue filled with youngish men. And I thought just keep calm, just don't panic, and I looked at my father and he looked up and said, 'It's alright, it's alright'. They didn't do anything; they just stood there and watched the service. I don't know whether it was ready for exterminating the synagogue or what, because it was shortly after, you see. Anyway, they just stood there and then, when we

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finished, they left, but they didn't interfere with anybody. But I must admit, I mean, I was about 11 and a half, twelve, and I was terrified. But I say it went off all right. And we had, apart from one problem in Lehe, two boys living opposite, only young boys, came to play with my sister and when they'd left, we found they'd pinched my mother's watch, her gold watch, and there was nothing we could do about it. The same as when the boys beat me up, nobody could do anything, you weren't allowed to, you see, you weren't allowed to defend yourself; it didn't work, not if you were a Jew.

Tape 1: 33 minutes 50 seconds

HL: Can you talk about the synagogues you were involved in from early childhood, your memories of them?

HR: Well, there was the one in Abterode, very beautiful, and I say thank God it's never been destroyed. And upstairs, if you go to the attic, its still there. It was a lovely synagogue. But most of the synagogues were much the same pattern, you know. And then the one in Lehe was lovely, absolutely beautiful. It looked actually more like a little mosque from the outside than a synagogue, and the one in Kassel was superb, well, you've seen my picture of it, haven't you? It was absolutely gorgeous. And strangely enough it was very much like the Synagogue at Singers Hill in Birmingham. And the first time I walked in there, I just couldn't believe it, I thought I have to go right to the end, turn down left, go in the front row and sit in my grandmother's seat. But it didn't work out like that. Anyway the synagogues were superb.

Tape 1: 35 minutes 0 second

HL: And was your family very strict?

HR: Oh yes, oh yes.

HL: Can you talk about that?

HR: Well, you know we kept everything, we were strictly kosher, and we just did everything that was expected of us. The only thing I've been told we did wrong, we always had German maids until a certain time when a law came out to say that they were no longer allowed to work for us unless they were 45 years or over, in which case the men couldn't make up to them, I think that was the idea, right? But, anyway, we always had German maids, and they always used to do everything that had to be done on the Sabbath, and I was taught here that that was altogether wrong, that nobody in your house was supposed to work on the Sabbath, not even the maids, but the maids had all day Sunday off, to do their bit of religion, for Sundays, so I can't really see that we were committing a criminal act. Apart from that, it was very nice, it was lovely having Mutti lighting the candles on Friday evening, and saying all the prayers, very nice. That was when we came home from the synagogue, Papa and I. And then Hanukah, lighting the lights, it was just wonderful. We kept everything that one could keep properly, except for the maids.

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HL: How big was the Jewish community in your first village?

HR: You know there were quite a lot. There were quite a lot of Jews, Jewish families. It was a very big village, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, I should think there were about 15 families in Abterode.

Tape 1: 37 minutes 8 seconds

HL: Did you have any non-Jewish friends?

HR: Oh, loads of them, until, as I say 1934/5, when people just started to keep their distance. But strangely enough, when I went back the first time, to Abterode with my husband, I was standing in the middle of the road, they didn't have a lot of cars in those days, I mean the only people who had a car in our village were the doctor and my father, right? So, I was standing in the middle of the road, just looking around me, and suddenly this woman on a bicycle came up, and she nearly fell off her bicycle. She said, 'Ah, es ist Spier's Henny! Nein, um Gottes Willen! Es ist Spier's Henny!' And she was the maid or the helper of the people next door but one to us. And she hadn't forgotten us. And I've still got the photograph of her, the boy from next door but one and myself. And I met her again every time I went. My husband used to take me nearly every year because my grandmother came back from the concentration camp, my aunt was still alive because she had married someone who wasn't Jewish, and they were just going to arrest her when the English troops walked into Goslar, and so she didn't go to a concentration camp, she stayed at home. And her husband stuck to her. And anyway it was wonderful, right? So that was that.

HL: Is it your impression that it was quite unusual for people to go back and settle where they were before the war in that way?

HR: To go back and settle? No, that wasn't usual, it was unusual, yes. I don't know any who did. I did have an offer from one of my very first boyfriends, who lived in Kassel, opposite my grandmother and I mean there was nothing lovey-dovey about it, he was a great friend of mine, he and his brother, we used to go to fairs and things together, and go in carousels and things like that when I was little. When I got a bit bigger, he was always friendly, neither he nor his brother ever became Nazis. Anyway, when the Nazi things got bad, my grandmother had a tenant. Now, she said to me, 'If I see you talking to Kurt again, I shall report you to the Nazis'. I was only twelve, right? Anyway, what we did, when I was going to school in the morning, I used to look out of the window and so did he, they were exactly opposite, as I say. I used to trot up the road and he trotted about a hundred yards behind me and when we got to the nearest shop, we used to look in the shop and have a word with one another. And he went to work opposite my school, so we walked together to school, but not exactly together, right? But at least we talked to each other. Anyway, I met him again when my grandmother had her eightieth birthday, he came. And we went out for about a week together, we went dancing and we had a whale of a time. And then I came back. And I got a letter from him saying, 'Please, please will

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you consider coming back for good?’ And I wrote back to him and I said, ‘Kurt, I’m very sorry, the £25 I needed to come to Germany was loaned to me by my fiancé and no way am I coming back.’ And that was the end of that. And he died a very little while later in a helicopter crash. He was a radio-, he was something to do with the radio and he died in a helicopter crash. But I couldn’t go back.

Tape 1: 41 minutes 15 seconds

HL: But your grandmother settled back did she?

HR: She did. But my grandmother was rescued by the Russians from Theresienstadt and she was sent to recuperate in Switzerland, and it was very strange. My aunt, who was still in Goslar, saw the British troops coming, and she waved a white handkerchief out of her window and somebody came to see her. And she told him she had 2 nieces in England, would he please, please, please contact us and tell us that she was still alive? And he did. The thing that, he always said ‘Cheerio’ to her when he left, they got quite friendly, so we all called him the Cheerio, he lived somewhere in Leeds when he was at home. Anyway, he wrote and told me my aunt was still alive, and you won’t believe this, the next day I got a letter from Switzerland, a Red Cross letter from my grandmother, to say she was alive! So I wrote to them both and told them that, you know, they were still alive. And when my grandmother got my letter, she said ‘Right, I’m going home’. And they said to her, ‘You can’t go home, its ridiculous! You want to go to Israel, its holy ground there.’ She said, ‘Sorry, my holy ground is in Kassel, where my daughter and my husband are buried.’ She hitchhiked most of the way back. This was 1946 I think, 45/46. And she was 76 or 77, right? And she hitchhiked back. And my aunt heard the doorbell go one morning, and she opened the door, and there stood her mother. Anyway she stayed with her and her husband for a while, but she never liked her son-in-law, and so eventually she got some rooms in Kassel where she was very, very happy until the Nazis came, right? And we did go and see her quite often. She died in ’56.

HL: I suppose what I’m trying to get at is the extent of the anti-Semitism in your community, because you’ve actually talked about some Gentiles being very kind to you, and yet clearly most people didn’t associate with you, apart from the early thirties.

HR: Well, no, that isn’t strictly true. The people, who were my friends, I mean, they obviously didn’t do it openly. I mean, I had one friend, who lived just down the road from my grandmother, and I went to see her one day, shortly before we came to England. And there was something on the table. And I said, ‘Marianne, what’s this? What is it?’ And her mother said, ‘It’s a gas mask.’ Well, I’d never heard of a gas mask in my life. And I said, ‘Oh, what’s it for?’ And she said, ‘We’ve all been issued with them’. And I said, ‘Oh perhaps we shall get one.’ And she said, ‘No you won’t, you’re Jews.’ So I shut up, you know? But, on the whole, the people who were my friends were still my friends. And Hans and Kurt, after Hans went into the Navy, the German Navy, and he said that in the Navy, nobody was anti-Semitic. I didn’t think that that was quite true, but he said, ‘None of us on my boat were anti-Semitic’. And we’re still in touch. He’s well

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over eighty and we're still friends, we phone each other or we send each other picture-postcards, and we're still in touch.

Tape 1: 45 minutes 11 seconds

HL: Did you notice any differences in attitudes towards Jewish people in the different places you lived, for example in Lehe?

HR: Well, in Lehe we had no problems. The people either side of us spoke to us, there was no problem, we were never in any trouble in Lehe. In Hildesheim, we didn't know anybody because we weren't there very long. And when Be-. My sister and I, just after my mother had gone to my grandmother, we were with her for a little while, and went to school in Kassel, but we didn't really have any trouble, I mean except for that horrendous experience when the Nazis fetched my grandmother, no.

HL: Now before we move on to the Kindertransport, do you have any other memories from your childhood, for example things you did outside school?

HR: Who?

HL: Do you have any memories of things you did outside school from in childhood?

HR: Oh, well, I had a lot of friends amongst the Jewish children, and, do you know, even from Abterode, there's a couple of them left now, I mean we're none of us getting any younger, but they're still there. Most of them have gone to Israel, you see, and I'm no letter writer, I hate writing, so I get letters to say why don't we hear from you. I did get to organise, we were asked to a meeting in Lehe, a reunion in 1985, and I did organise getting in touch with all the children, right, that were left. And my husband and I went and I went in, walked into this hotel, and there was a lady standing by the desk and she looked at me and she said, 'My God, you're Henny Spier.' And I said, 'What makes you think that?' And she said, 'You're so like your mother, you couldn't be anybody else!' It was wonderful. It was wonderful meeting them all. She died shortly afterwards. There's a photograph over there of a boy who went to school with me, and he was at this meeting, and he and his wife came to see us shortly afterwards, he died a year later. There's not many of us left now. But those of us who are left, if we wanted to know each other, wanted to get together or anything, they would be there.

HL: Now, when your father came to organise the exodus on the Kindertransport, did he have any contacts in England?

Tape 1: 48 minutes 0 second

HR: None at all, none at all, but you didn't need it. My father and my aunt took us as far as the border in Aachen, and the last time I saw him he was on the platform in Aachen with my aunt, and that was that. But he did ring us up regularly, and also of course I heard from various people – Günther who was with me at the reunion, he wrote to me

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from Holland to say, 'Your parents and mine have been sent to concentration, to Warsaw', that was the first thing.

HL: Your father?

HR: My father, yes, no, he married the housekeeper. They were told that it was much easier in the concentration camps for people who were married rather than single, women or men, right? So he married. This is at least what my aunt said. So he married the housekeeper. And he was sent to Warsaw, and from there he was sent to Treblinka. And the last message I saw from him he wrote to my aunt a postcard to say, 'Tomorrow Bernie has her birthday' – that was my sister, that was the 12th July and she had her birthday on the 13th. 'Tomorrow Bernie has her birthday, we're well, hope you are.' And that was the last thing, 12th July 1943, anybody heard of him.

HL: Can we come on now to talk about your journey to England?

HR: Could I spend a penny first?

End of Tape One

TAPE 2**Tape 2: 0 minute 12 seconds**

HL: Now we left you saying goodbye to your father on the station. What happened after that?

HR: Well, we all got on the train. There was, oh, about 500 of us came on that particular day I think. This was the 5th January 1939. And we went across the border after I'd said goodbye to my father. My sister and I of course were together and we went across the border to Holland. And as we got to Holland, the train stopped. And a lot of ladies came up and gave us hot soup. And do you know it was absolutely wonderful? And until we got into Holland, there were Nazis in their uniforms, patrolling the train. And you know, I wasn't very happy about that, but as soon as we got into Holland there wasn't a sign of a uniform anywhere and these lovely ladies giving us vegetable soup I think it was, warmed us up and did us the world of good. And then we went on to I think it was Rotterdam, do you know I can't really remember. And we went across to Dover overnight; my sister and I had a cabin right at the bottom of the boat. I thought we'd never get there. Anyway, we did and we slept. And we landed about 6 or 7 in the morning, at Harwich. And then we were taken across to a holiday home, a summer holiday home in Dover Court. And it was all chalets, and it was quite amazing because there was no heating of any sort in these chalets, they were just little sheds really, you know, chalets with beds in them, and I just could not sleep because I was so cold. And I had 12 or 13 blankets, and, being used to feather beds or duvets as they're called now, I lost the whole lot every night, and in the end, I ended up by putting socks over my pyjama trousers so they didn't slip up, and wearing my coat, and I think most of the

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others did the same. But we couldn't keep warm at night. I mean, January is quite cold, you know, in a holiday camp anyway. And we were a bit startled by the food. I mean it was nice to get it all, to have it all got for you, but smoked haddock and kippers – I'd never heard of them, you know, but its funny how you get used to things, because now they're my favourites, right?

Tape 2: 3 minutes 2 seconds

Especially smoked haddock. Anyway, they looked after us very, very nicely, and we made quite a few friends there. In fact one of them, there were three young lads about, three- four years older than my sister and I, who looked after us for some reason; they felt sorry for us and they looked after us and they made sure that if anybody came looking for children, and if they didn't like the look of them, they sort of stood in front of us, so they wouldn't see us. Anyway, we were there for about a fortnight. And it was so wonderful, they took us to the pictures. Now I hadn't been allowed to go to the pictures in Germany for years - it said 'Juden verboten', not permitted for Jews, you know, and suddenly we could go to the pictures and we could go anywhere we liked and it was wonderful.

HL: But would you have understood the film, the text?

HR: Yes, it was, oh dear, I can't remember the name, oh, she was a very famous film star, and she was with Bing Crosby and all sorts of people, I can't think who she was, sort of South Seas pictures – Dorothy L'Amour. Oh, it was beautiful, really was lovely. And we went to that and we were, you know, really looked after, it was nice. And we had sort of musical evenings, very nice. And then we were sitting in a room. 4 or 5 of us, and had our photograph taken and I don't know. years and years later, after we had the first Kindertransport reunion, in '87 I think it was, we went down to this camp, a busload of us went down to this camp. And there were all sorts of files, and I looked at this one file and I opened it, and there was me staring up at me from donkey's years before, well, January '39. Well, there was a lady with me, called Paula Hill, who used to do the histories and records of everything, and we looked at this photograph, and she said, 'Henny, would you like a copy of that?' And I said I would love it. Well, a few weeks later she sent me this copy and she said, 'Have a look at the person sitting next to you, its Bertha Leverton.' Have you heard of Bertha Leverton? We were sitting next to each other. But of course we never knew that until after the reunion of the Kindertransport. It was wonderful. Anyway that was that.

Tape 2: 5 minutes 55 seconds

HL: Do you know who was running the holiday camp?

HR: Pardon?

HL: Do you know who was running the holiday camp?

HR: I haven't the faintest idea, no. We had a lot of students there who helped us, you know, understand things, and explained things to us.

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HL: How was your English then?

HR: I didn't have any! Everybody spoke German. There was no need, right? Anyway, that was the first holiday camp. And from there we went to, wait a minute, where did we go? Selsey, yes. We went to Selsey. I think they must have had a little bit of trouble with some of the lads and girls getting together, so they decided to separate us, and we went to Selsey, and we were in a, just the girls were in a camp there, a holiday camp. But we weren't there for very long. And then we were moved to Tunbridge Wells and that was fabulous. I think it was a sort of a manor house, it had a huge park with three lakes in it, and it was fantastic. And apparently the old lady who'd owned it had died, and she'd left it to the Spanish refugees, in those days we had Spanish refugees, right? And when they finished with it, we got it, and it really was absolutely wonderful. And there were a lot of nice girls there and the matron was very good, Marta Nathanson, very, very good. And, oh, we had the most gorgeous bedroom, I mean talk about mine, it was twice as big. But, I mean, there were six of us in it, right? Anyway, that was where we went next. And from there, one of the girls, called Vicky Glasier, who came from Wales, suddenly war was declared, and her mother told her to come home and she took three of us with her. Now that was a big mistake. My sister and there was a distant cousin of ours, called Esther Spier, took her and my sister and myself with her to Mold, Mold in North Wales. Well, I think mother was dumbfounded and she didn't like it. We couldn't do much about it. Anyway, a little while later, they sent me to Chester, she'd got a friend there, a Mrs. Goldschmidt, and she had a sick husband, who was 70ish, and I was, what, thirteen, fourteen at the time, and I had to look after him while she went to mind a market stall in Mold, especially on a Saturday morning. And I had to bring him downstairs from his bedroom and all the old beggar wanted to do was to kiss me on the way down, and I thought, 'If he doesn't stop it, I'm going to murder him.' But I didn't have to, because he died quietly, right? And she didn't need me any more, 'cause that was all I was there for.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 9 seconds

So they sent me, she or the committee or whatever, they sent me to Birmingham. I was never asked, and they didn't send me to Jews, they sent me to people who were not Jewish, which to me was absolutely awful because I wasn't used to it. Anyway, the first couple I went to, they'd got another refugee, a very nice girl, and they didn't really want two, but they sort of got me until they could find something better. Then I went to another couple who hadn't got any refugees, but who couldn't really afford to either. And I was there for a week or two, and they were very nice, they were Christadelphians. Have you heard of Christadelphians? They were very kind to me. And then they sent me to a couple, who had no children, and who were fairly well off, again Christadelphians, but she was quite the worst Christadelphian I've ever come across in all my life. Because the rest of them were very kind to the children they took in. This one, she was so impressed with her own importance, it was unbelievable. I was nothing but the charwoman, I was supposed to be an adopted, semi-adopted, child, but I wasn't, I was the charwoman. And she was, of course all the women under 45 had to go to work if necessary, she went to work in a bank and I kept the house clean. Luckily, she did teach me exactly how to clean a place and how to keep it that way, which was a great help and benefit. I learned how to

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cook in the English way, right, which I didn't know before, because we did everything in sauces, we didn't just put it in salt water, we did it properly at home, you know? But I was taught how to do everything, which was the only benefit I got from that, and I was also taught how to speak English properly.

Tape 2: 11 minutes 18 seconds

Because, what, with the friends I had and with them, if I made a mistake they'd put it right and that's the only way to learn. And also I sat and I read, in the afternoon I read every book I could lay my hands on. I'd read 'Gone with the Wind' in German, it's a most wonderful book, and I now started to read it in English and I must admit, there's one thing you can't do, if a book is written in a certain language, you should leave it at that, right? Because it loses in the translation, definitely. I mean, I've read, I don't know if you've ever heard of a book 'All Quiet on the Western Front', have you? Well, that was written in German, and it was fabulous. I read it in English and it just didn't have the same effect, it's strange, isn't it? I think if you can do it, read the book in the language it was written in. Anyway ---

HL: How old were you when, as you say, you were working as a char for her?

Tape 2: 12 minutes 21 seconds

HR: 14, 14, anyway, the thing is she taught me a lot and I'm very, very grateful for that, but she was a bitch that was the only way I could call her. She told me I was to call them Uncle John and Auntie Phil, and one morning somebody came to the door, somebody who worked with her at the bank, and I said, 'Auntie Phil, Mr. So-and-So's here.' 'Don't you ever call me Auntie in front of anybody.' And then she said, one day she said, my grandmother had a very big house, and some of the flats, or whatever you call them, bed-sitting rooms were let, only three of them, and it was an enormous house, and she said, 'Pah, you come from a tenement, don't you?' Well, we lived in the most beautiful houses, my parents and I, because they always went with my father's job. The property was in front of the school, and that's where you lived. But they were nice, they were beautiful houses, and we didn't have small houses at all, we didn't go in for small rooms, you know. So, 'You lived in a tenement, you'd be surprised what people around here think of you.' Well, I stuck it for seven years, all through the war, only just up the road, it was in Royal Green, right? There was nothing I could do, I was underage, I couldn't do anything, could I? I got I think 12 and 6 a week when she went to work and I had to do all the housework, and that didn't bother me, but she was so nasty, it was unbelievable.

HR: And, in fact, when she died, oh, he died first, she called me round to be with her, when her husband died, he was a lovely man, really nice, he didn't deserve her, but she was alright with him. Anyway, some years later, when she died, her nephew asked me to come to the funeral, and after it was over, he said, 'I did want to apologise for her, she was a nasty bit of work'. He said, 'Even to my mother, her sister, she was evil.' I suppose she couldn't help it. And not only that, she was going to a meeting in town, to a Christadelphian Sunday meeting: 'I must not put any lipstick on, it'll show' or 'I must keep my gloves on, they'll see I've got painted nails', you know, it wasn't something I was used to. Anyway, that was that. But, as my mother used to say, 'There's some good

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in everything, no matter now bad it is.' And the people next door, they were very kind to me; they'd got a son and a daughter. And the people in the road were wonderful, even now, if I - there's not many left - but if I see anybody, it's like meeting relations, it's wonderful. And people often used to say, 'Look, we're going so-and-so, will you come with us?' And I'd ask, and she'd say, 'No way, they don't want you, they're only sorry for you.'

Tape 2: 15 minutes 35 seconds

Anyway, the boy next door decided when he was 13 or 14 that he was going to marry me, right? Didn't tell me that, but everybody else knew. But I was always allowed out on a Saturday afternoon and I used to go to the Odeon in Sutton, to see a film, or the Empress, which it was then, and it was funny, he always turned up, and I always had one of the outside seats in the middle gangway, you know, I never liked to be inside, and he always arrived and sat with me. No fuss, no bother, nothing like that, we just, you know, company, it was nice. And then he decided he was going to enlist. He wasn't old enough, he was 18 months younger than I, he wasn't old enough, but he was going to have a go at the Germans to make up for what they'd done to me, right? Well, the day he joined up, the Germans gave in, and I said, 'Well, obviously Peter, they've heard about it'. 'Never mind, I'm going to have a go at the Japs.' Well, as soon as the Japs heard about it, they gave up, right. Anyway, he was sent to India for officer training, and that was that. I had letters from him, and he told me he loved me, and this, that and the other, but you know, I didn't take it all that seriously. And then, I went from, when I was 21, I decided I'd had enough, right? And I went to see a Miss Simmons here in Birmingham, at a committee, and she said, 'Oh, my dear, I am so sorry, I'll see what I can do.' Within a week, I was in a hostel in Wheelers Road. It was wonderful, it was like heaven. They were my people, they spoke my sort of language, and it was wonderful. And somebody found me a job as a housekeeper to a family who were also refugees like myself, and it was super, really was wonderful. And even now, all these years later, what, 45 years later, I'm still in touch with the daughter, who lives in London and rings me up at least once a fortnight to make sure I'm still alive, right? It's nice, and I say, 'Inge, I don't know why you bother, I was only your housekeeper.' 'Don't be ridiculous, you're part of the family.' So, you know, that was lovely. Anyway, and then I went out to a garden party, and a bit of a dance, at Dame Elizabeth Cadbury's cottage up on the Bristol Road, way up into Northfields somewhere and suddenly a young man asked me to dance, and before we'd hardly got anywhere, I was floating that far over the ground. And I said, 'Put me down!' And he said, 'What are you talking about?' And I said, 'Put me down!' And he looked and said, 'Oh I'm sorry.' He was six foot tall and he'd just picked me up! I mean, I was only little.

Tape 2: 19 minutes 0 second

Anyway, we got quite friendly, and we went out together for a bit, for about three weeks. And then I came in one night, having been, I think we went to the Lickies. I came back to the hostel one night, and somebody said there'd been a phone call for me, and that Eileen Rednall, that was the sister of this Peter, she and I were going to the Alec that night, she wasn't coming. He'd come back from India and he was taking me instead. Anyway, you know, I was absolutely dumbfounded and my sister and I we'd planned to actually go to America because we had a cousin there, a second cousin, my mother's cousin, she

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wanted us to go over so that we could be together. Well, we planned to do that. Anyway, that evening Peter called, he was quite imposing in his Lieutenant's uniform, and we went to the theatre and we were both terribly shy. You know, we didn't shake hands or anything. But as soon as we got there, we just couldn't think of anything to say, it was funny. Anyway, he took me home, and said, 'We'll try and do better tomorrow.' Anyway, we didn't do any better tomorrow, because we were both terribly shy, but I said, 'Peter, Bernie and I, we're going to America on such and such a date.' He said, 'You're not going anywhere. You're staying here and you're marrying me.' And I didn't quite know what to say. He said, 'No way can you.' I said, 'I'm not going to marry somebody who isn't Jewish.' 'Alright, I'll become a Jew.' I said, 'You can't do that.' He made all sorts of other suggestions because he wanted to marry me and nobody else. So I gave in and I married him, and we were together for 47 years, all but three weeks. And he died of cancer. It was a wonderful marriage, because he was the one person who didn't mind me being Jewish. He said, 'There's nothing wrong with being a Jew.' Well, he didn't have quite the same ideas as I did, but anyway. And he sort of, he always fetched me and took me out, after synagogue, he always took me out for lunch, because he said it was my day off, and we did everything together.

Tape 2: 21 minutes 54 seconds

He was an estate agent and chartered surveyor, and I ended up, instead of being a housekeeper, I ended up being his secretary, because I'd read enough by then to be able to spell. And we worked together for many years. And then he decided he was going to work for another firm, to give up our business, it wasn't doing very well. Because when his father was ill, the people who were supposed to manage it let it practically go bankrupt, and Peter and I tried to pick it up, we did pick it up, and then I got, we asked if we could buy the building between us, there was an insurance broker in the office, and Peter and he wanted to buy the building together right? So we got in touch with a Mr. Dixon, Donald Dixon, and he came and negotiated it all, and it was very strange, we got on like a house on fire, and we bought the building, and he turned up one day and said, 'Would you like to merge your business with mine?' And by that time Peter was working for British Rail in Nottingham, and I said, 'Mr. Dixon, quite frankly, I haven't got anything you could possibly merge with anything, I have £15 a week and that is all there is.' 'I'm not bothered about that, I want you to join us, my firm', he said, 'and I'd like to open shop at Wild Green.' Well, it was very strange, 'cause the shop opposite us was vacant, so we went and we got that and I started his business off up there, and it went like a bomb. And I took my Nationwide Building Society agency with me and the whole lot took off like a bomb, and of course a lot of the people knew me, so they came, right? And it was wonderful. And then I was there from '77 until '81. And in '81 my mother-in-law was very poorly, and we only had a 3-bedroomed house, and I thought we can't have her there, not with a family as well, because I had two children, a son and a daughter, and, anyway, we looked for a bigger house, this was 22 years ago, and we found this, right? We lived in Orphanage Road before then. Anyway, that's what we did, and we had, I had a son in 1959, he was 45 this month, and a daughter, who was 43 this month, right?

Tape 2: 24 minutes 51 seconds

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HL: Would you like to name them?

HR: Yes, my son is, I called him David Spier Rednall, but unfortunately he doesn't use the Spier, he's just David Rednall, and my daughter is Carolyn Sarah. Carolyn was my mother's name, right. And of course she's married with two children. And they're Helen, isn't it marvellous, Julian. Helen and Julian. Julian's eleven and Helen's eight. So I've got two grandchildren. And my son got married to a girl who'd been married before and who had got a daughter from her previous marriage and the daughter had a baby, making me into a step-great-grandmother! And I said, well that's nice, because I couldn't become a grandmother in my own right, because the children are too young, so you know I got something I didn't bargain for. And she's absolutely gorgeous the little'un, she's two. So there we are, that's it.

HL: Now backtrack to 1946 when you were 21 and you decided you couldn't bear to live with this family any longer. Who was this woman, what committee was it that you went to?

HR: It was the Jewish Refugee Committee, and everybody who was a refugee or has been in Birmingham knew Ruth Simmons. She was a little lady, she was even littler than me, and she was absolutely fantastic and so kind. It was unbelievable.

HL: Had she had any contact with you during the war years?

Tape 2: 26 minutes 29 seconds

HR: [Shakes head]

HL: In fact, had you had any contact with Jewish people at all during the war years?

HR: Well, I used to go to synagogue, but in those days the synagogues were so full, that you couldn't find anywhere to sit, you know, it was very, very difficult. Sometimes in the window seats you could find a seat, but the people, the Jews in the synagogues, they never spoke to us. The only people who spoke to us were other refugees. It wasn't a bit nice.

HL: Which synagogue?

HR: Singer's Hill. But, you know, that's the way they were. They were so busy with each other; they didn't have time for us. Anyway, I went to see Ruth Simmons and she was fabulous and so were all the people in the hostel. But of course-

HL: Which hostel?

HR: It was a refugee hostel and the people who ran it were Echts, were refugees, so you know, I was home. But, as I say, going to the synagogue, until many, many, many years later, when I joined the Ladies Guild, and helped with the preparation of food and coffee

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and so forth, nobody spoke to me. But the moment I stood behind that table, serving coffee and cakes and biscuits, people suddenly realised I was alive. It was very strange. And now, I've got an awful lot of friendly people, you know, and I do go every week if I possibly can, unless something's happened.

Tape 2: 28 minutes 3 seconds

HL: You're not the first person who's told me of this unfriendliness.

HR: Oh no, well they all agreed with, all my refugees agreed with me, yes.

HL: Why do you think it was?

HR: I don't know. I have no idea. Perhaps some of them objected to my being-, well no, this was in the days before I was married, I don't know whether any of them objected to my being married to a non-Jew, that I don't know. I don't know. I always thought they ought to have somebody at the door, who would welcome people who were strangers. And in fact now, I mean, I'm very well known, you know, and if I see anyone come in, and they look a little bit lost, then I-. Whenever I see anybody come in the door, and I'm pretty near the entrance door, whenever I see anybody who comes in, and they look a bit lost, I go up to them and I ask them if they're strangers, and they tell me, and if they're just looking for somebody, that's alright; if they are strangers, I usually say to them, 'Look, come and sit with me, until you know where you are', and they find that is very pleasant. Several people I've done it to, and they've said afterwards it was so nice to have someone to welcome them and help them with the seating arrangements. So I do that, but I think they ought to have somebody who's there especially for that reason, right?

HL: After the war, obviously you were able to practice as much as you wanted when you were no longer living with this family?

HR: Practice what?

HL: Did you manage to keep Friday nights and-?

HR: Well, you see I was working for this Jewish family and obviously, you know, I spent Friday night with them and Saturday lunchtime, and so forth, and I've always, when I got married, always kept Friday night. I mean, my husband would sit in here and watch television or whatever he wanted to do or go upstairs, he was a terrific record fan, jazz, traditional jazz, which isn't quite my scene, but-. I prefer continental operettas, Strauss and so forth, and, anyway, I always went into the breakfast room, lit my candles and said my prayers and on. Saturdays, I always went to synagogue, right?

Tape 2: 30 minutes 53 seconds

So we didn't really interfere with one another. He didn't-. He wasn't-. His mother and his father were Congregationalists, but Peter didn't altogether believe in these things. And he was quite open-minded about it all, so we had no problems, you know.

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HL: Did you keep a kosher household?

HR: No, no I didn't. Because, for the simple reason, that when I was with these people at Wild Green, everything was done the wrong way anyway, so you know, I just ate whatever was there, especially during the war, you know, you couldn't make that much fuss over anything. You had whatever you were given and that was that. So no, I didn't, but I must admit, since Peter's died, I don't have anything in the house that comes from a pig, like bacon and ham and sausages; I do go to Gees, the kosher butcher, if I want any sausage. Mind you, I mean, I do eat out, and I do eat things like chicken, I'm not strictly kosher. But, apart from that, I keep everything that's going, all the festivals.

HL: You've been going to Singer's Hill for half a century, so-

HR: I've been going a long time, yes, they're beginning to know me.

HL: Can you talk about the changes that you've seen over those years?

HR: Well, the synagogue was full when I went first, as just a refugee, it was completely full, you couldn't find a seat, especially at the high festivals. I'm afraid now, sometimes if there are thirty people downstairs, that's all there is on a Saturday. It's very sad. And they are talking about making other arrangements, getting together with Pershore Road Synagogue, and having a new synagogue for the two lots, so-. But, if they give that synagogue up, that is my home, right? That is where I was brought up in almost. I think I might have to move.

HL: And what about changes in the Jewish community in Birmingham, what changes have you seen?

Tape 2: 33 minutes 19 seconds

HR: I don't know too much about that because I have my own friends, and, you know, people I've known for years, for ever and ever and ever, and the one thing I do is, I've been very lucky, oh, I must just tell you this. Many years ago, when I was with Dixons, and I was on the counter, a gypsy came in, and she looked at me and she said, 'You know, you are never, ever going to be rich but', she said, 'you are never going to be poor either, you will always have enough to manage.' But she said, 'You will never, ever feel at home with people, you will always be an outsider.' She was unbelievably right. The only place I feel at home is when I go-. In London, they've got a day centre at, I can't remember the name, West Hampstead, we've got a day centre for refugees, Kindertransport and AJR, and when I go there, I'm home. Its weird, I speak the same language as everybody else, and they know what I'm talking about, and I'm home. But, apart from that, she was ever so right, virtually everything I've ever done, somehow or other, I'm still an outsider. I mean, I've been president of the voluntary, Women's Institute, not because they thought I was wonderful, but because nobody else would have

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the job. In fact, the present president's had her job for about eight years, and nobody else will take it.

HL: Is this the president of the WI in Sutton Coldfield?

Tape 2: 35 minutes 15 seconds

HR: Wild Green. Yes, Wild Green. I've been the Chairman of the Guide Dogs for the Blind, I was there for many years, and I raised more money than anybody else had ever done, because I've got a lot of friends you see? And I made, I had big dinner dances and things, at Penn's Hall, have you heard of Penn's Hall? It isn't anymore, but it was then, and I raised an awful lot of money with the help of the previous chairman, and one or two other people, who knew a lot of people. So we did very well there. I gave that up in '88. Now I have a very good routine: on a Monday I usually try to do my garden, or whatever needs doing here; on Tuesday, I go to the Day Centre at the Pershore Road Synagogue, where they have a lunch, and we usually play some sort of weird game like Bingo or something, or just anything, but that's nice; on Wednesday, I go to the local hospital, the Good Hope, and I do the flowers in a couple of wards, because many years ago Peter and I used to deliver Meals on Wheels, and in 1995 Birmingham suddenly decided that Sutton was no longer going to do Meals on Wheels, they were going to take it over, so we all got the sack, and I mean we weren't paid or anything, but we got the sack. Most of the people who were doing that, that was the Women's Voluntary Services, right? WRVS, they opened a shop in Good Hope Hospital, and then they wanted people to wheel the trolleys round to the patients' beds with the newspapers and sweets and things, so Peter and I did that for a while, course he'd retired by then. And then, when he died, I did it for a while with somebody else, but I noticed how very awful the plants and flowers looked in the various wards, and I thought that it was bad enough having people who weren't very well, but you don't really want to see dead flowers, do you? So I asked if I could see to them and I do two wards, Wednesday mornings. Well, nobody bosses me, I do what I think needs doing, and I leave it looking as nice as I possibly can. Because it's my sort of scene, doing that you see, and also it finds the patients somebody to talk to out of hours. When I went this last Wednesday, one of them looked at me, I just lifted her flowers onto my trolley: 'Those are my flowers!' And I said, 'It's alright, I wasn't thinking of stealing them, I'm only going to tidy them up.' 'Oh, that's alright.'

Tape 2: 38 minutes 13 seconds

Anyway, you know, it's nice, and the people are nice, and I had bowel cancer 10 years ago and in that hospital ward I now work in they treated me like royalty, in fact they couldn't have done better for royalty, and I made so many friends, including the surgeon, they were absolutely wonderful. And I've recently been told I need never go again, I'm all clear, right? But they all welcome me when I go in. I did try to resign once, and they got the manager and, oh, I don't know how many people and I was told that no way was I going to resign. So I'm still there, but I love it, because here I'm alone, there I've got company, and it's lovely. And I deliver the Jewish Recorder for the Birmingham editor, only about nine copies, but it takes me about 18 miles to do that, but it's something to do and it's worth doing.

HL: And can you talk about your involvement with the Association for Jewish Refugees?

HR: Well, that was a bit of an accident. It was after I complained about this gentleman not being so terribly friendly and welcoming and he could do better, that the next meeting I went to, I was told by one of the group managers that as from now, I was the new Chairman. I just stood there, I couldn't believe it. But I've since told my group that if they have any complaints about anything, don't mention it, because if you do, you'll end up with a job.

Tape 2: 40 minutes 0 seconds

HL: How long had you been going to meetings before you became the Chairman?

HR: Oh, Peter and I went together, yes, for quite a while, when we first heard about it, I can't remember when I started, but I mean, well he's been dead six and a half years and we'd been going, we must have been going 2 years before then, it's about 8 years I think. But, anyway, I've been Chairman since I think 2000. Not only Chairman, but Secretary, and then the Treasurer died, so I got that as well, but you know I've got about 60 members I think, but a lot of those live in the country, like Worcester, or Gloucester and some live in Aberystwyth, can you believe them, being joined up with Birmingham? Anyway, I wrote a letter a couple of weeks ago giving them details of what we are going to do shortly and I said those of you who live several miles away I understand that now we have several new clubs, so if you've got one near you, please let me know and I'll take your name off my address list. I mean it would save postage, wouldn't it? I've had one reply to say, the lady said her husband had died and please, you know, delete her, and I said I wouldn't do that if I were you, because, you know, being with the AJR, it is quite a lot of help, because if you're ill, and you have no-one with you, they'll look after you, they will help you. I've also told them that we have an American fund apparently, if anyone can't get to a meeting, they are allowed to take a taxi. But do you think any of them will take it? I mean, I don't know why we have to be so proud? The money is there, it was given freely, why not use it? No way. The only time they'll use it is if we go on a coach trip, and then they can pay for the coach. But that is a help of course, as they're quite expensive. And we've been on one outing, to Beth Shalom. Have you heard of that? And it really was wonderful, quite wonderful, in fact we're trying to organise another one now. Very nice! I didn't go down to the basement where they have all the horrors of the concentration camp, because I feel that there's no point in doing that. I've lost all my father's side of the family in concentration camps. I don't want to know all the dirty details. In fact, I went to a Holocaust Memorial Day celebration, not a... a Holocaust Memorial Day, Day of Memory, the other day, and somebody came out with all the details of what happened in these various camps, and one of them was that they were asphyxiated and I'd never heard that before, and it so upset me that, after the first lot was over, I came out, I couldn't stand it. All the others think I'm crackers, but one or two of the older ones said they felt exactly the same. They said we must keep this up, we must let people know what's happened, so that it gives them something to work for a better life, but it hasn't done anything yet, they've had all the dirty details, and nothing's

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happened to make it any better has it? And it isn't only us Jews, it's all other sorts of, I mean its coloured people, it's people from different nationalities, it isn't just anti-Semitism, its anti-anything, racial, religious, anything. So, you know, I'm not for it, I-. Yes, we'll have a memorial service, and we'll pray for their souls, and we'll give thanks for their lives before all this happened, but I think that is all that is necessary, so there you are.

Tape 2: 43 minutes 56 seconds

HL: Can you talk about how long it took you to find out what had happened to the various members of your family after the Second World War?

HR: I didn't, I didn't, I never enquired what happened to them. I knew where they were sent, I've got it all in detail in my-, funny enough in my family tree. It tells you where all of them died. Most of them, funny enough, died in Riga, something I'd never heard of before. Except for my father and his second wife, who died in Treblinka, and of course I heard from Günther, the lad whose photograph I showed you, he told me that his parents and my father had been sent to Warsaw. And then my aunt told me he'd been sent – she was still in Germany – she told me he'd been sent to Treblinka, but, as I've been told by several people, in Treblinka, which was purely an extermination camp, they didn't let them live more than 24 hours, I don't know. I've never, a lot of them have had details of what happened, but as there were about twenty five, twenty six of them, I didn't want the dirty details, and anyway I couldn't do anything about it, could I? I pray for all my family by name, every night, and more than that I can't do.

Tape 2: 45 minutes 29 seconds

HL: Do you have any message for someone who will watch this film in future?

HR: Don't waste your time.

HL: Do you mean don't waste your life?

HR: No, don't waste your time watching it! No, I've no message. I have my own views and I'm sticking to them and people who don't like what I say, and there are a lot of them, because they all want to spread these wonderful details of what happened to everybody, people who don't like it don't have to contact me, do they? So, you know, that is all I can say. I had a wonderful life, until the Nazis came, we were such a united family, and you know, I had no problems, until the Nazis came and murdered my grandfather, and indirectly my mother. Until then we were a really happy family.

Tape 2: 46 minutes 46 seconds**PHOTOS****Tape 2: 47 minutes 6 seconds [Four photographs]**

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HR: This is my mother, Lena Spier, or, as she was originally called Lena Nussbaum, in 1901 in Kassel; that is myself in 1926, also in Kassel, and that is my daughter here with us in Birmingham, no, yes, in Birmingham, and that was in 1962, and this one is my granddaughter Helen, and she is at home in Harpenden and she this was taken in 1996.

Tape 2: 48 minutes 3 seconds [Four photographs]

That's my father in Lehe in 1936/37, in his official outfit, as a Hazzan of the synagogue; that was my mother, before she was married in 1919, and this is my grandmother and her husband was with the Sanitätskolonne in Germany, in fact he founded it in this particular place, and she was told, when she was being sent to the concentration camp, if she wore that uniform she would be treated very much more like a human being than an animal. And because my grandfather belonged to the Sanitätskolonne, which is the equivalent of the St. John's Ambulance here, people help other people, you know, like ambulance people, but not exactly paid for it, and this was true, and she found when she got to Theresienstadt, she actually nursed people who were lying on the floor and were desperately ill and they had no beds or anything, but she nursed them and she looked after them and she survived, and she came back to Kassel in 1946. And that was us in Ostfriesland, outside our house, at the back of which was our school, Jewish school, there's my grandmother, my sister, is it? No, sorry, myself, my mother, my sister and my father.

Tape 2: 49 minutes 50 seconds [Four photographs]

This is myself in Kassel, with the boy from next door, who we used to play together, and that was taken in 1913. And this is of a group of refugees in Dover Court, they were called Bay Holiday Camp I think it was called, after we'd arrived with the Kindertransport, and that there is my sister Berna, I'm not on it. Then the next thing is one of my oldest friends, who lived opposite us in Kassel, Kurt Ilyin and his brother Hans, who were great friends of mine. Kurt died in a helicopter crash but Hans is still alive and we're still in contact.

HL: Where and when was that taken?

HR: This was taken in Kassel, in 1948, after I'd gone back to be with my grandmother for her 80th birthday, right? And this was our wedding day; Peter's and mine, on the 2nd of September, 1950. And that was taken at the hotel, and I can't remember the name of it at the moment, on the main Hadley Road, in Birmingham

Tape 2: 51 minutes 18 seconds [Newspaper article – entitled 'Dienst am Nächsten: R. Nussbaum']

This is a report about my grandfather and my grandmother, telling how shabbily he was treated by the Nazis when they arrested my grandmother and he subsequently died after that. But it also tells about the wonderful things he did, like his service to the Red Cross

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sort of ambulance service, which he was actually more or less, which he more or less founded in Kassel, and also we had a First Aid post, if anybody in the area got hurt, or something, they could also come to us and, as most of the people who worked with my grandfather lived round about, he was able to get help for most accidents and things within a very short time. And of course at home, in his office, my grandmother worked very hard to help him. And when she was sent to the concentration camp, they told her to wear her Red Cross uniform, because she would have it much easier in the camp. And that was true. And she returned to Kassel after she was released by the Russians from Theresienstadt. She was sent to Switzerland first, but she returned to Kassel as soon as she found out that her daughter was still alive, and she came back because she thought she'd like to be near where her husband was buried and her daughter was buried in Kassel, Bettenhausen.

HL: And how long was she in Kassel for?

HR: She came back about '46, beginning of '46, and she died in Kassel in 1956, so she still had a bit of time to see some of her old friends, and Peter and I used to go over every year to be with her.

Tape 2: 53 minutes 24 seconds