

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Association of Jewish Refugees

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive, prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

AJR

Winston House, 2 Dollis Park

London N3 1HF

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	5

Interviewee Surname:	Huss-Smickler
Forename:	Natalie
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	20 March 1912
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

Date of Interview:	19 February 2003
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour and 25 minutes

**REFUGEE VOICES:
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE**

TAPE 5

NAME: NATALIE HUSS-SMICKLER

DATE: 19 FEBRUARY 2003

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 54 seconds

BL: Can you tell me your name please?

NHS: Natalie Huss-Smickler.

BL: And when were you born?

NHS: On the 20th of March, 1912.

BL: And where?

NHS: In Vienna.

BL: Mrs. Huss-Smickler, could you please tell me about your family background?

NHS: My family background? Well, my father was a businessman and -. About me or my family?

BL: Well, first about your family. Where did they come from? What were they doing?

NHS: Well, yes, my mother came from Poland and my father was also born in Poland but they came very young to Vienna and we considered ourselves Austrians, Viennese Austrians. Yes, until Hitler came.

BL: When did they come to Vienna?

NHS: My father when he was 14, and my mother after she got married, 21.

BL: Can you describe what your father did and what sort of milieu your parents lived in?

NHS: Yes. My mother's father was an estate manager. And my father's parents, they had a, what do you call it? A fruit-, what do you call it now? Where you grow fruits, a large, large fruit-, where you grow fruit, what do you call it? An orchard, yes, something like that, an orchard.

BL: And in Vienna, when you father came to Vienna?

NHS: Well, he was at the age of 14, as I said. He stayed with an uncle and he was a businessman, so my father learned all about business from his uncle until he got married and then he got his own business, his own shop.

BL: What sort of shop?

NHS: Textile.

BL: And where in Vienna?

NHS: In Vienna.

BL: Where? Do you remember where it was?

NHS: Yes, in the tenth district.

BL: And can you describe-? What are your first memories of growing up in Vienna?

NHS: My first memories in Vienna? Well, we were Jewish, naturally, but we didn't feel any anti-Semitism. We had non-Jewish friends as well and we were very happy there, very, very happy. It was our country; we considered it our country until Hitler came. And then, after a short while, my father got the note within 24 hours that he had to leave the shop and we had two flats there, one adjacent to the shop and one upstairs, and they had to leave, just walk out, leave everything behind.

BL: When was that exactly?

NHS: That would have been '39, '40 because they came over here '39. No, no, no, they came '39, so that happened '39 and they stayed with friends.

BL: Just to go before the war, can you describe what school you went to?

Tape 1: 5 minutes 47 seconds

NHS: Yes, I went, after the standard school, I went to a commercial college for two years, and after that, I was a secretary until Hitler came. And then I could still work in my father's shop until later on when it was dangerous and I went to England.

BL: And what sort of friends did you have in Vienna? What sort of circles did you mix with? Do you remember anyone?

NHS: Yes, they were all intellectuals and we went together to theatres, to concerts and dancing. Yes, we had a happy life in Vienna.

BL: You didn't experience any anti-Semitism at all?

NHS: No, not at all, not at all. Until after Hitler came and I was still there. A man came into the shop and said: 'Will you take the display 'Jewish shop' off?' And my father said I never had it on. So he said: 'Well, a woman stopped me and told me that she saw your father taking off the note', which wasn't true. And then we had SA men standing in front of the shop and they came in and apologized and said they had the order, they have to stand outside in uniform to warn people not to come in because it's a Jewish shop.

BL: And what did it feel like, to experience this?

NHS: Well, we had a terrible experience while I was still in Vienna. A van drew up in front of the shop and a mob of people headed towards our shop. And one woman, her eyes I will never forget in my life, horrible, hateful eyes, stretching out her hand: 'This is also a Jewish shop'. And my father, my brother and I, we were standing inside. The feeling you can imagine. Then a man behind her took her on her shoulder, turned her around, and said: 'No, not this one.' Can you imagine the relief it was? And they went away. That van was loaded with goods from other shops. But they didn't come into ours.

BL: So the clientele of that shop, was it a Jewish area, where you lived, where the shop was?

NHS: No, it was actually not a very Jewish district but there were plenty of Jews living there and we had a beautiful synagogue also, so there were Jewish people but more like Viennese people.

BL: What was the name of the synagogue?

NHS: Oh, god. Well, we called it Tempel. Humboldt-Tempel, I believe, I couldn't swear to it, but I think it was Humboldt-Tempel, I think so, but we called it Tempel. And it was a very beautiful one, until it was burnt down, in the Kristallnacht. There again, can I tell you about my brother's experience in the Kristallnacht?

Tape 1: 10 minutes 7 seconds

BL: Sure.

NHS: Round the corner from us was a college and that's where they put all the Jewish men. They rounded them up in a van and, as they got off the van, they were pushed down on both sides of the door, of the entrance, where SA men were standing. The difference between SA, that was the ordinary ones, the Brown Shirts, the evil ones, and SA were the ones who gave orders, yes? But there were all the SA men standing, and as the main man came down, they were whipping them, they were whipping them as they walked through. And as my brother went through, they knew us because it wasn't far from our shop, they did this [puts her arm up] but they never hit him. And as he walked in, there were two doors, on each side one, and a policeman standing there, and he pointed my brother to go to this door. And, as he walked into this door, there were men laying on the floor in blood and blood everywhere. And if he had gone to the other door, he would have had that treatment, so he was sent to that door, after the treatment.

BL: How do you remember Kristallnacht? Where were you?

NHS: I was already in England, yes, because I came over here in September 1938 and my brother came '39. He was two days arrested, but he could prove he had already the visa to come to England, the permit, and they released him.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 22 seconds

BL: Did you keep any religious festivals in the house?

NHS: Oh yes, yes, everything, yes.

BL: What do you remember, for example?

NHS: A wonderful Seder, with my father singing and making the Seder, and we were sitting around it, and it was beautiful, it was beautiful.

BL: When was the first time you started thinking about emigration, or it became a topic?

NHS: Oh, everybody tried to get out. And as my brother, one of my brothers, happened to be in England, he sent me immediately, somebody sent me a permit as a domestic servant to come to England.

BL: Can you tell us how did it happen that your brother was in England at the time?

NHS: My brother went on business to England and, as it happened, although he never ever was ill before, he was, for three days, he had to stay in bed, with an acute appendicitis. And he should have gone back on the second day. And the second day, Hitler marched into Austria, so therefore he didn't go back. He got me out, and he also got the permit for my other brother, and my employers got my parents out, both my parents.

BL: So on what sort of visa did you come to Britain?

NHS: Domestic service, domestic servant, ja, as a housekeeper.

BL: So what sort of preparation did you do before you emigrated, in Vienna? Can you describe that sort of time, just before?

Tape 1: 14 minutes 23 seconds

NHS: Well, I didn't have much time, but, at that time when I left, I could still pack all the things I wanted to. And we had a cousin who was married to an Englishman and she could get out a lot of things for me. Well, I mean, personal things. Jewellery had to be weighed, weighted up, yes. And there I had a very emotional experience. I heard a commotion outside and what happened, a woman said: 'Is that only for as long as Hitler is in power or can I come back afterwards?' So she was arrested, ja. That reminds me! We had to sign a declaration: 'I swear to never ever enter German soil'. That's why the woman asked, 'Is that only for now when Hitler is in power or afterwards?' So she was arrested. In fact, the man who was interviewing me said to me under his breath very quietly: 'But of course that's only for now, you can come back after'. But I didn't say anything, I just -, because I didn't know if it was a catch or serious, so I didn't say anything.

BL: So how much time did you have to prepare to leave?

NHS: Oh, I can't remember. Not long, not long. Well, everything was naturally in haste.

BL: Can you describe the journey which brought you to Britain?

NHS: The journey, the journey I also will never forget in my life. I was in a compartment with nuns. And I was the only other person, all the others were nuns. And on the border, coming to England, we stopped, the train stopped. And on the loudspeaker there was announced: 'All Jewish people collect their luggage and come out', a certain inspection. So I was going to get my case down, and we had one case, or two cases, and get my case down, and one of the nuns put her arm around me and said: 'You are not going out. You are staying with us'. And I said: 'But I'm Jewish'. So, she said: 'You are staying with us, you don't go out'. So, I was sitting down, and then on the gangway, there were a few men, led by a tall SS man, and he passed by and looked at me, and looked again, and winked, and gave me a lovely smile, and passed on. So I was safe. Looking out of the window, we had to stop a long time, all the Jewish men, women and children, with one or two cases, were walking down a line. That was so heartbreaking. They never came back. And they all had permits to go to England. They walked down, they never came back. And after the last person went there, oh, yes, that was when the inspection passed by and the train went on, but it stopped a long time, and they never returned. And this is something I never ever, ever will forget. And, yes, I have to thank the nuns for my life because I would have marched out too.

BL: So you were the only Jew?

NHS: The only person, yes. And that SS man, well, he could see that I was Jewish, that's why he looked, and he looked twice and he gave me a nice smile and he winked, so he knew I was Jewish and saved my life. Ja.

BL: And what happened then?

NHS: Well, I came to England, and my brother was waiting for me and he took me to the job.

BL: And where did you arrive?

NHS: I can't remember where. We came by train. I can't remember where that was.

BL: Do you remember any first impressions you had?

NHS: No. I was just happy to see my brother, and I still had the experience on my mind, what happened on the journey coming here.

BL: And then he took you where?

NHS: To my employers.

BL: And where was that?

Tape 1: 20 minutes 40 seconds

NHS: In Kensington. It was a doctor's house with 23 rooms, including the surgeries. That's what I had to do. That's what I had to do. And, after seven weeks, my hands were shaking, then it was really-, I couldn't do that. It was such hard work. It was from 8 o'clock in the morning to 11 o'clock at night, with one hour lunch-time and nothing else, so it was very, very hard going. And, I'm sorry to say, I don't know if I should say it, I'm sorry to say, my brother phoned my employer to say that it's such hard, long hours and so on, and she said: 'Well, if it's too much for her, I send her back to Hitler.' True. And I left. I had to leave. My next job was as a nanny with a little child. And there we were friends, they were so kind, they were really friends to me and to my brother, he came to visit, and they helped me to bring my parents over.

[Interruption]

BL: You were just telling me about your employers as a domestic, and I wanted to ask you, the first employers, were they Jewish? Not Jewish?

NHS The first ones were Jewish. The second ones weren't.

BL: And did you have any contact with any of the refugee organisations?

NHS: No, no, no. If I wouldn't have had had my brother, I would have been in trouble. But then those people were very, very nice. The husband was a French officer, a very high officer. Well, at that time, he was a professor at a college in Highgate, but, when the war broke out, he became a French officer. And all the refugees had to pass a tribunal, and so did we, five of us. And that was in Highgate. And the judge stood up at the end of the interview, that my employer came in uniform very impressive, and the judge said we had the best references in all of Highgate, Muswell Hill, and along there, and he hopes that we settle in England and be very, very happy there. He stood up; he shook hands with all of us. And that happiness lasted about five months, then the internment started. My father and my two brothers were interned. They were coming at six o'clock in the morning, detectives, and they took them away. My father came back after six weeks, but my two brothers were sent to Australia on the Dunera.

Tape 1: 24 minutes 46 seconds

And they were two years interned there, and then they were sent back. England realised they made a mistake, sending refugees abroad to Australia and to Canada. And my two brothers came back but, unfortunately, on the way back, the ship was torpedoed by Japanese and sunk and they never reached England. After survival, after all that, they didn't come back to England.

BL: Did you know at the time that they were on the ship?

NHS: Yes, because we were expecting them and then we got information from the War Office, War Office or Home Office, War Office, saying that the ship was torpedoed and they are presumed dead. That was it.

Tape 1: 26 minutes 7 seconds

BL: It must have been a terrible shock at the time.

NHS: It was more than a shock; it was more than a shock. It was something, I'm still not over it. My sons say I'm living in the past, at times, but we have been a very, very close family and how can you forget? I can talk about my parents, but, when I talk about my brothers, it chokes me because they were young and they didn't deserve it. They were good people, very good people, yes.

BL: Just to go back slightly, how did you find the second job as a domestic? You said you switched jobs-?

NHS: Wonderful, wonderful, because I was a member of the family.

[Interruption]

BL: But how did you get in touch with or find the second family?

NHS: A friend asked me would I come with her, on a job, somebody needed two people. So I went with her, and those people didn't want anybody, they were doing that for somebody else, interviewing for somebody else, but then, somehow, they must have liked me, so they asked me if I would like to stay with them. I said yes. There was a little girl and she was adorable and she loved me. There was actually, as they were not Jewish, one day I had to go with them to a church, and the little girl, she was only one and a half years old, she said: 'Who is that lady?', pointing to Maria, 'Who is that lady?' And her mother said: 'That's the holy Maria'. And she said, it was very still, and she said: 'No, that's not the holy Maria, that's Nita.' Everybody turned round and laughed. But, ya, then started the fire-watching, and we were bombed out, and when I heard the news about my brothers, I had a nervous breakdown and couldn't go on doing manual work. Oh, yes, I was in a factory, doing auxiliary war work after that. And then I had, I wanted an office job, which was my profession, and I had to go to a doctor, who gave me a certificate, I had a nervous breakdown and I shouldn't do work with my hands; I should use my brain. And I got an office job.

BL: Where did you live?

NHS: In Muswell Hill.

BL: When did you move to Muswell Hill?

NHS: Oh, about two or three years after I arrived here.

BL: When your parents came, did they move in with you, or did you move in with them?

NHS: Oh yes, yes, we were bombed out, so I had to find a flat, until, until, there was no war on yet, there was no war on. My brothers were interned, my mother died, within six months she died, and there was only my father and I, and that's when I applied for the office job, when I heard the news about my brothers, yes, there was only my father and I.

BL: And you lived in Muswell Hill?

NHS: With my father, in a flat.

BL: Were there other refugees there or how did you get to Muswell Hill?

NHS: Because I was working in Highgate, so I was looking for a flat there, ya. And there was another, a friend of mine, and she took, I had the upstairs flat and she took the downstairs flat. And she was a great help to me, when it happened.

BL: Were you in touch with any other, I asked you before, refugee organisations or anything, any cultural organisations?

NHS: No, I was too busy working and looking after my father.

BL: Did you support your father?

NHS: Yes, but then he became from the State a pension of £1 a week, because my brother was keeping the family. So, as my brother was keeping him, so they gave him a pension, after it happened, after my brother died, £1 a week, so I had to work and keep my father. So, ya.

BL: And your experiences of the war-work, can you describe them a bit more in detail, please?

NHS: War work, yes. First, I was working in a factory, machining uniforms. And the next job was auxiliary war-work, painting lamps for aeroplanes, and that's when I heard the news about my brothers, and then I got the office job, ya. The office job, there were 98 people and I was the only Jewish person, but I was very, very happy there. I had a very kind manager and I found the work very easy. Mornings I had to take correspondence, letters, with German shorthand, writing English with German shorthand, but it works fine, and I had to type the letters, and in the afternoon I had to do book-keeping, and it worked fine. I was very, very happy, until one day, after three and a half years, a released soldier came to the office. And lunch-time at the canteen, oh yes, we had been bombed out and we were forced to buy a house. Well, the house did cost £1700 but it had no curtains and very large windows. So I told them at work: 'I'm so worried, so many windows'. And, as everything was on coupons, I couldn't buy curtains. So, that new man said: 'Well, don't worry, hang ten candles in each window'. That was 1942. So, I said: 'Hang candles into the window, what does that mean?' And he said: 'Well, hang ten Jews into each window'. And since then, after that, I started getting very, very unhappy, and I told my manager I couldn't work here. He tried to talk me out of it. He said: 'He's a silly man, he doesn't know what he is talking about'. But I couldn't, I left. And my next job, for another four years, was the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

BL: As a secretary you worked there?

Tape 1: 35 minutes 57 seconds

NHS: Ya.

BL: So that was quite an interesting time to work for them?

NHS: Very, because I was working for the information office, and there I got to know all the big people, Professor Burdetsky, and Chaim Weizman, yes? That was actually another thing I will never forget: when the Israeli State was established, we were invited to Professor Burdetsky's, no, that was a separate meeting, it was a meeting where only invited guests were, so I was working there, so I was invited, and my husband. And, at that meeting, I met

the doctor I worked for in the first place, my first job. And I went over to him, but this time I was a different person, not a domestic, and I said: 'Do you remember me?' And he said: 'No'. And I said: 'I was working for you'. So, he said: 'Oh, we had so many girls, I can't remember anybody'. So, nobody stayed long there. Ya. But I'm sure he went home and told them: 'Your domestic is now a different person'. That was a nice experience, yes.

BL: So when did you work at the Jewish Agency?

NHS: How long? I worked 'til the end of May '48, and going back four years, that was '44, ya, 1944.

BL: Did you have any relatives left in Austria?

NHS: No, no. Well, now everybody would be dead anyway, but nobody survived. Nobody survived. We were very lucky. Well, our tragedy hit us here, but we were all lucky to get out of Vienna, ya. Nobody survived, except for those who emigrated to America, to Canada. Ya, very, very terrible times.

BL: When did you become naturalised?

NHS: When I married. My husband was born in England.

BL: Can you tell me a bit how you met your husband?

Tape 1: 39 minutes 25 seconds

NHS: Yes, that was a very, very strange coincidence. We lived at the time between Manor House and Finsbury Park, that's where we had to buy the house. And there was a lovely park. And my father, well, I say now 'old man', he was only 59, 60, something like that, went into the park, and next to him was another Jewish man sitting. So they started talking. But the other one was not a refugee, he was English. So they were talking. So, my father brought out of Vienna a very, very valuable violin. And something, you know the thing that holds the strings fell in. And my father was a perfectionist. Everything had to be just like that. And he asked that other man would he know someone who can repair it? So, he said: 'Well, my son is a violinist. He's got a violin. He could have a look at it'. So, the son came and looked at the violin. And, being, you know continental people are always making tea, so I made tea for them, but then I left them. And he said: 'I can't do it now, I need some instruments. Can I come again?' So my father said yes. So, he came again, and he invited me to a concert, Yehudi Menuhin in Haringay. And so I went with him and that was the beginning of the end. We got married eight months, nine months later, we got married.

BL: And where had he been during the war?

NHS: Oh, he was in the army, ya, all the time in the army.

BL: So he had been recently released?

NHS: That's right, that's right, yes. He was six years in the army, or nearly six years. He wasn't old enough.

BL: So where did you start your married life?

NHS: Where? Well, we had that house, so he could move in. But not that he had to, because they were established English people, but he moved in. We started life there, and I was working at the Jewish Agency at the time until my first son was born nearly two months before I stopped.

BL: And what was your husband's profession?

NHS: Well, he actually was a musician. But he took a job for, I don't know, what did he do now? He worked for Heinz, well, he was sort of, what would you call him, to hand out the work, what do you call it?

BL: A manager?

NHS: Ya, sort of a manager, yes. And you can still see the pictures with the violin.

Tape 1: 43 minutes 30 seconds

BL: But he was a professional violinist?

NHS: Ya, ya. And he was very, very good, ya. That's in a nutshell my life story.

BL: And when you had your children, what sort of circles did you mix in?

NHS: Well, when the children were small, they came sixteen months after each other, naturally I was very, very busy, and until I really, well, I couldn't go out, we couldn't go out, we wouldn't leave the children on their own, and until they were already teenagers, then I joined the Wembley, where we lived, Wembley Friendship Club and Emuna and what else was there? Well, that's about all, yes, Friendship Club and Emuna. And I was there, over twelve years on the committee, and worked for Emuna and I was happy doing it.

BL: Can you explain what Emuna is, please?

NHS: Emuna? Yes. That's previously Mizrahi, was Mizrahi, and they took on the name of Emuna later on, but there's still a Mizrahi in Israel. And I started travelling; I went on fact-finding missions a few times.

BL: To Israel?

NHS: Yes, and twice with Lady Jacobovitz, and I'm happy and proud to say that we are still friendly. Every Yom Tov she phones, I write to her or she writes to me, or she phones me. And she is a most wonderful lady, hard-working. What she has achieved in Israel, you can't imagine. She has done wonders for young people. Ya, and she is a really most wonderful person.

BL: And when did you move to Wembley? You moved away to Wembley?

NHS: Yes, I moved to Wembley, when was that? '56. Well, let's go that way. I lived in Golders Green now for five and a half years. I lived in Wembley 34, 35 years. And, after my husband died, I moved into a new retirement place, warden-controlled. And was extremely

happy there. I had friends, close friends. Unfortunately, one after the other died, and I couldn't take that. I had to get out of that place. And now I'm here, I'm happy here, very happy, but it's not warden-controlled, it's a very private place, and you only meet people coming in, going out, and all the conversation is: 'How are you?' and 'The weather is so and so.' And there is no real community, no communication. But everybody is nice and friendly, you don't get too close. Like in Wembley, it was the Martins, a lovely place, but, as I said, I lost all my friends there and I couldn't take it.

Tape 1: 47 minutes 55 seconds

BL: And how come, why did you initially move to Wembley?

NHS: Why? Yes. My two sons, young teenagers, they were in a happy holiday camp during the summer, and they met friends in Wembley, so to make it easy for them, I moved to Wembley. I sold the house and bought a house in Wembley. But also I had to sell the house, compulsory purchase. It was a beautiful house, but it was wanted by the council, and we had to sell, we had to, so we moved to Wembley. We had a beautiful house. The trouble was there was a large garden and there were only 25 houses there. And, at the end of the garden, there was a water reservoir with white swans swimming there. It was really beautiful. And the council built 120 flats on the place where there were only 25 houses. So, we had to give that up and go to Wembley. Yes, I moved quite a few times since I am in London.

BL: And how do you perceive yourself today in terms of your identity?

NHS: Now that is a very good question. I have got a chip on my shoulder. The moment I open my mouth to strange people: 'Where do you come from?', you see, although I am extremely happy in England, it's my home, they have accepted me, it's my home. There in Vienna, I went back twice, I have no accent, I'm one of them, except that I'm Jewish. Now, now I'm one of them. I'm no foreigner, that's what I mean. Here, here, I've been here now 64 years and I'm still a foreigner. 'Where do you come from?' First, first I said, ya, Austrian, Vienna. Then, I thought I was clever when somebody asked me 'Where do you come from?' I said: 'From Wembley'. But I didn't win, because the next question was 'I mean, no, originally.' Can't win! So I feel at home here, naturally I feel at home, I've got children here, ya, but I'm foreign. As long as I'm living here, I'm foreign.

Tape 1: 51 minutes 19 seconds

Although I've got friends, and non-Jewish friends as well, and they don't consider me foreign, you know, but I feel it. Ya. I don't feel belonging to Vienna. God forbid! My children, as long as my father was alive, they spoke German as well as English, but I hated the language, as you can imagine. Now I regret it. Because the moment my father died, my children only spoke English, now they speak Hebrew as well, but they don't speak German. And that's a pity, because it's a language, but-

BL: So you spoke German to your children when they were born?

NHS: Naturally, naturally, yes. Not Jewish, German. I have learned Jewish, well I don't speak it perfect, but I can make myself understood. I have learned it here, not in Vienna.

BL: How good was your English when you came here?

NHS: Well, I learned it at school, so I could speak when I came here. That's why when I started my office job I had a dictionary in the drawer, German-English, English-German. So, whenever I needed a word, correspondence, I could look it up. So I'm better in writing than in talking, because I still have an accent. I'll probably have it 'til my dying day.

Tape 1: 53 minutes 20 seconds

BL: But what do you mean when you say you have a chip on your shoulder? So it bothers you when people ask you where you are from?

NHS: A chip on the shoulder, I can't feel English, and I can't feel Austrian. I can't feel Austrian. God forbid! It's finished. But I somehow don't, I feel foreign, ya, I feel foreign.

BL: How important is your Jewish identity to you?

NHS: How important? Well, I would like to have no accent.

BL: How important is your Jewish identity to you?

NHS: The Jewish, oh, very much so. I feel with all my heart Jewish. Naturally, yes. You know, I get very upset, concerned, when people say: 'Oh, you live in Golders Green, where all the very Orthodox people are?' So I said: 'Hitler didn't make a difference, why should I?' Well, OK, we haven't got very much in common, most probably. But I feel Jewish with all my heart. And Israel could be my home, with my heart, you know? But I'm foremost Jewish, yes. And English. I mean, it's my home, they've accepted me, my children are born here, and I would fight for England. I did fire-watching and I was told I was the first woman to volunteer fire-watching.

BL: What sort of identity did you want to transmit to your children?

NHS: Both, ya. First, never to forget that they are Jewish, never forget, and they don't. And they are English. Actually my older son, during the fighting, he volunteered to go to Israel. And he has got double nationality, Israeli and, being born here, he is British. British, I am British, not English, British, yes.

BL: You said that your sons tell you that you live in the past. Do you talk about the past with your children a lot?

Tape 1: 56 minutes 40 seconds

NHS: Only about my brothers, otherwise nothing, only about my brothers. They always, whatever, whenever they come to my mind, I have to bring them in. That's why they say I live in the past. But there was so many wonderful things, about my brothers, what they did, and to other people how helpful they were, and how kind, and loving to me, I was the little sister. How can one forget that? I think they understand it more now than before, ya.

BL: Did you give your sons the names of your brothers because you have obviously, you have two sons?

NHS: My daughter-in-law wouldn't have it. She is actually a Yemenite, but she is Israeli, born in Israel, and even her parents, and her grandmother was a pioneer to Petah Tikva, so they are Sabras, but they don't believe in that. Meaning, I would have loved my two boys, after my brothers. She wouldn't have it. And she's got four boys. Now my other son, he has got a girl, and my husband died just before she was born, so he called her two names, Genevieve and Sarah, and Sarah is after my husband.

Tape 1: 59 minutes 0 second

End of Tape 1

TAPE 2

Tape 2: 0 minute 6 seconds

BL: We were talking about naming. And I asked you whether you actually named your sons after your brothers but you didn't?

NHS: No. That was something I was very, very upset about. No. My daughter-in-law would not have children named after dead people. I would have thought it would have been an honour for them, after what my brothers have been and what they did in their lives, what good persons they were. Still, probably the Yemenites don't believe in that.

BL: But obviously your brothers live in your memory.

NHS: Oh yes, oh yes. Yes. I have their names in the synagogue, Wembley Synagogue, both their names, and also my father, my mother, my two brothers and my husband, they are both in a memorial book of Wembley.

BL: What were their names, just for the record, your brothers' names?

NHS: Jewish names or? Yes. The older one was Siegfried. Jewish name as well? No.

BL: Yes.

NHS: Schlomo, after our grandfather. And the younger one, Wilhelm Wolf, also after a relative. Well, Ashkenazi people do believe in that, children after dead people, but not Oriental people. Still, she is a very good mother, she's a very good wife, and that's all that matters. They are both happy. In fact, it was their 25th wedding anniversary, and they are very, very happy. And the children are very, very good. One has graduated with honours. The next one goes to university, and the third one has been accepted to university, and the fourth one is still young, but he takes it for granted that he will go to university. They have a better chance in life, a better start than our children, because they had hard work, hard work, yes, evening work, that's how they got their titles behind their names, evening classes, not university. But the children, they all go to university.

BL: What sort of impact do you think being a refugee had on your life?

NHS: I couldn't say it did. Only, I always did feel an outsider, being a refugee. But, thank God, thank God I have always been independent; I didn't have to go to a charity or things like that. Because, as I said, one of my brothers, he was working when we came over and he kept

the whole family. He even wouldn't let me go to work. I should help my mother. But afterwards came all my jobs. No, no, office jobs. Before, I had, as I came over, domestic servant, and nanny, and auxiliary war-work, a machinist, and then the office work.

BL: Did you ever receive any restitution from Austria?

NHS: Yes, yes.

Tape 2: 4 minutes 53 seconds

NHS: I also get a pension from there.

BL: And today you go to the AJR day centre?

NHS: Yes, I love it, I love it. The people are sweet, caring, loving, they are wonderful. And going there is coming home, from home to home.

BL: Can you describe a bit what you do there?

NHS: What am I doing there? I'm doing nothing there.

[Interruption]

BL: We were talking about the AJR day centre.

NHS: Ya. That's the most wonderful thing that can happen to us. You asked me what do I do. Well, I get transport to get there. We are received with a cup of tea, or coffee, or whatever. After that, we talk to people. It's nice to talk to one another. Next thing is lunch, an excellent three-course lunch, meal. And, after that, half an hour bingo. And, after that, it's entertainment, really a nice entertainment, concerts, singing, but really good singers, and it's very, very enjoyable. And, after that, tea and transport home. So that's the day there. The day is full and it's really lovely there. Do you know the people? Sylvia? They are angels, they are so lovely. Sylvia and Suzie.

BL: Is it important for you to meet other refugees? Is that important?

NHS: Not necessarily, no. I get on very well with English people, very well. And they make me feel that I'm no different from them. Ya, ya. I've got English friends, I've got no problem there. It's only with strangers I feel an outsider, looking Jewish, talking with an accent. But, that's OK, ya.

BL: What would you say is the most important aspect of your, let's say, continental identity?

NHS. No, nothing, no. That's behind me. That is behind me. I was young when I came here. Well, as I said, I'm sixty four years here, or sixty five years. From 1938. And we live here sixty-five years, in September.

Tape 2: 8 minutes 24 seconds

BL: Is there anything we haven't discussed, which you would like to add? Anything I haven't asked you?

NHS: No. I'm very happy here now. Here, as you see, displayed, my family, and they are with me all the time. And I come to the end now. Like it or not, I'm coming to the end. But no, I'm grateful for England. Yes. And I was happy here. I've got a lovely family and I'm proud of them, and they are good to me, they love me and naturally they are all my life, that's all I care for. And I've got friends, I make easy friends, I'm not quarrelsome or argumentative, or something, I never had this at home.

BL: Is there any message you would like to have here, on tape, relating to your experiences?

NHS: A message? To whom?

BL: Future generations.

NHS: People should really try to get on with one another. Life is really too short to be otherwise. One should try to get on with one another, and be kind, and be good. And one example is the AJR, they are the most wonderful people there. I mean that, yes, and I love them like my family. They make you so welcome when you get there. And again a tribute to Lady Jacobovitz, she is a most wonderful and successful hard-working person. What she has done in Israel, one couldn't believe, I saw it, I saw it on fact-finding missions. May she live long, long, long. She is wonderful. One of my dearest, beloved friends, she is.

BL: OK, Mrs Hass, thank you very, very much for the interview. We are going to finish here and we are going to show the photos of your family. Thank you very much for the interview.

NHS: Thank you very much. You know, it's a long time that I am here, we have a lot of experiences, and memories, some good, some not so good, some not so good, but happy ones as well. And now I'm content. I get great pleasure from my grandchildren, and I'm grateful people showing friendship and being kind to me, that's what I really need, kindness, love. To make up for all the losses I've had. And they were severe losses, obviously. But thank God the whole family came out. We were all happy. And my mother was a saint. As we had a flat, we had an open house to everybody from our district, everybody who came, and my mother gave tea, and people I met now, they even told me they spent a week with us before going to America. I forgot all that. And my mother was not only a mother to us, she was a mother to everybody, she really was a mother to everybody, a wonderful lady.

BL: Thank you very much indeed.

NHS: Thank you, thank you very much.

Tape 2: 13 minutes 42 seconds

End of Interview

Photos

1. From ca. 1903. A wedding photo of Mrs. Hass-Smikler's parents, showing the mother and father, on the mother's side is her mother's mother and aunt; on the father's side is his mother.
2. Mrs. Hass-Smikler's father is on the left, then her younger brother, her mother, herself when she was seven years old, and finally, her older brother. Her father's name was Herman Hirsch; her younger brother was Wilhelm, Wolf; her mother was Rosa and other brother was Siegfried, Schlomo.
3. Natalie and her older brother, taken ca. 1936 or '37. Nathalie is wearing traditional Austrian dress.
4. In England, shortly after arriving and being reunited with her two brothers. Taken in 1938.
5. Younger brother, Wilhelm, taken in London. He was the one who got her and her older brother out of Austria.
6. Mrs. Hass-Smikler's wedding, on 14th November 1948. Her husband's name is Sam Smikler; his Yiddish name is Schmul Leib.
7. Family picture, showing Nathalie with her her younger son, Leslie; her older son, Raymond, and her father. Taken in 1953-54
8. Family picture of eldest grandson's bar mitzvah. The picture shows her eldest son on the left, then her grandson Daniel; his mother, Iris; Nathalie herself in the middle; the other daughter-in-law, Achsa; Natalie's younger son, Leslie and the other three grandchildren, Ronnie, Bennie and Simon.
9. The eldest grandson, Daniel's, graduation, in 2002, showing her son, Leslie; his wife, Achsa, herself, her grandson, Daniel, her son, Raymond, and two other grandsons, Simon and Bennie.