IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
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Interviewee Surname:	Farago
Forename:	John
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	11 March 1929
Interviewee POB:	Vienna, Austria

Date of Interview:	22 June 2018
Location of Interview:	Deal
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 32 minutes

REFUGEE VOICES
Interview No. RV226
NAME: John Farago
DATE: 22nd June 2018
LOCATION: Deal, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[Part One]
[0:00:00]

The interviewee is John Farago. And the interview is in his home, on the 22nd of June, 2018.

OK? Well. Not yet.

Thank you very much indeed for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Project. May we start by going right back to your parents, their names and where they were born and when?

Thank you, Jana, yes. I thought when I agreed to do this interview, I had a think- a little thought about it, and I thought if I ever get round to writing my autobiography, I would call it "The Lucky Refugee" and it- I was- I recalled that word when I saw an interview with the famous children's author who was also a refugee, called Judith Kerr. "[The] Tiger [Who] Came to Tea" and so on. And I saw this interview, and she'd just as a teenager gone to Paris and looked at- overlooked Paris. And she said, "Isn't it lovely to be a refugee?" And that really rang a bell with me, because with the exception of the sad loss of my grandmother in Auschwitz, I feel I've been very lucky throughout my life. And I feel that having come to England was the best thing that ever happened to me. So, I thought I'd say that before talking about my family background. My parents met and married in Vienna in 1928. And I was born on the 11th of March 1929. My father was born in Hungary. His birth certificate says he was

born in Budapest, but all his life in Hungary was spent in the city of Szeged. He was the eldest of three brothers, born 1896. His two other brothers were younger. His- he never spoke about his father. As far as I know, his father must have left soon after the youngest boy was born. His mother made a - a living as a milliner and had a quite supportive family of aunts and, and others - in Szeged. My father joined the army. He was a second lieutenant in the First- in the Hungarian Army in the First World War. And was awarded the Charles Cross. And I still have the papers that says he's entitled to wear the Charles Cross. He- after the war he moved to Vienna. And maybe we talk about that later and I'll tell you about my mother's background. My- my mother's mother was called, well, my- my grand- my grandparents were Josef and Karoline Krausz. And although Joseph manged to initiate thirteen children, ten of whom survived, no one ever talked about him. It was always about Karoline. And Karoline was still alive when I was born. And she had a shop in a little mining village some eight miles out of Sopron. Sopron was, before the First World War called Ödenburg, and there was a plebiscite in, I think 1918, when they chose to be Hungarians. And there was a small Jewish community there. But I don't think that the Jewish religion played much part in my mother's life. My grandfather I think came from a very religious sorry my, my mother's father came from a very religious family in- who lived in Leobersdorf. I think he was a coal merchant. And I suspect that he fell out with his parents because they no longer followed the Orthodox Jewish tradition. I may be going too, too slow on this. We could spend a lots of time on this. So, my- my parents moved to Vienna- my grandparents moved to Vienna, and established a furniture shop together with a partner. And my [grand] father must have died 1923 or so, so I only ever knew one of my grandparents, and that was my mother's mother. Is that the sort of thing you want to know? Right.

[0:05:33]

And your parents?

Yes. So, my- I- I told you. My father went to Vienna. He established himself as a- first as an employee, but later he was an independent stat- agent - whole-sale stationery agent. He was very popular both with his suppliers and his customers, and built up quite a successful business. My mother helped in the furniture shop. She was twenty-one when she married and she became a housewife. And they had a small apartment. There was- housing was very tight in Vienna after the war, because there was this huge influx of people, Jews, non-Jews from

all over the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And they were very lucky to have a rented apartment on the fifth floor within about ten minutes' walk of the Hofburg, the- the royal palace in Vienna. And that was the- the gardens outside the Hofburg were my playground when I was very small. We did have a maid. I don't remember much about the apartment. And I can't remember even there being a maid's room, so I don't know where she stayed. And this- they- they used to stay for about a year or two, and they loved being in our household because they were treated as human beings which in many households, middle-class households, they weren't. So, my parents had quite a busy social life. And their friends - with one exception, Max Kohn who was a religious Jew, and was Orthodox and kosher - most of them were secular Jews. And Judaism just didn't appear. I must have gone to a Seder once, in Vienna. And I do remember the ceremony of the Seder, but apart from that I was in an ordinary *Volksschule*, which is preparatory school – not preparatory – primary school. And there were four Jewish children. And we were excused prayers, but apart from that, we were not aware of any anti-Semitism. Although anti-Semitism was rife even before the Anschluss. So- we also- we had a house- my parents had a little house about half- in a place called Kritzendorf which was about half an hour out of Vienna. And it was a little holiday village, where the houses were built on stilts. And we had neighbours there. And I played with the other children. In fact, one of the photographs I'm going to show you was a little group of- of children all with paper hats and I think it's got underneath it: "The Kritzendorf Flotilla". And I mention it now although it might come up later, because there was no- no discussion of Jewish or non-Jewish. But after the Anschluss, these same children would no longer speak to me. And I didn't at the time really understand that. But maybe I'm jumping the gun by talking about that.

[0:09:40]

Did that upset you a lot?

I think so, although I- I feel that through the whole of my life, I've really been very naive about sensing emotion. So, I- I remember being upset, but not severely so. Mnn.

And were you aware subsequently of the different restrictions set against Jewish people?

Oh, yes. I mean the- the you know, one- one very significant thing, is that I was an eyewitness to the Anschluss. It was two days after my ninth birthday, and there was a party. It wasn't in our flat, because our flat was very small, so it must have been in that of a relative. And it overlooked the Mariahilfer Straße which is the main- the main shopping artery, sort of Oxford Street of Vienna, leading from the Westbahnhof to the royal palace. And on the day of the Anschluss there were huge cheering crowds in- in the streets, welcoming the Austrian population - welcoming Hitler. And I was at my birthday party, and I can't remember who was there. But I could not understand why all the people at the party were extremely gloomy when everybody outside was cheering. So-

And how old were you then?

I was nine. I was very naive for- I've met many other refugees who have very much better recollections of the situation. So, it was really only after the Anschluss that I became aware, because my parents started applying for visas. And there was a very efficient cultural- Jewish cultural centre called the Kultusgemeinde. And they- when- when people- some people left in a hurry, others couldn't get out because there were visa restrictions. At that time there was- there was no- no talk of killing or hurting Jews. But they were just prevented from earning a living. And strongly encouraged to- to emigrate. So, I remember that my parents- my- my father lost all his employment. His agencies. He was not- no longer allowed, they were no longer allowed to be employed. The- the little hut in Kritzendorf was confiscated. But we- we still had our flat. And my father was very, I don't know how to say it, sanguine or whatever it is. He said, "Look, I fought for this country. Nobody is ever going to do anything to me." And that was widespread among the secular Jewish community. And then I was no longer allowed to go to my school. I had to take a bus to go to a Jewish school on the other side of town. Same thing applied to things like Wolf Cubs. You know, Boy Scouts. Again, where- segregation. And I have very little memory of that time. Yes. So, the really gradual- the gradual awareness of the plight of the Jews but still that of a- a young child.

[0:13:48]

Did- did you feel that all these restrictions didn't really apply to you somehow? That you, you know- you didn't-

No, I- I, I took it all in. I- I didn't really know much about it, as I say. I wasn't among practicing Jews. So, the only thing I knew about Jews is that- is that people around me didn't like them. Didn't like Jews. And wanted them to get out. But it- the- the real crunch came on Kristallnacht which you, as- as you know in the November 1938, the anti-Semitism took a turn with the burning of synagogues and people being told to scrub the- the streets with toothbrushes.

Did you see that? Did you witness that?

I don't remember it. Now, my- my friend Clemens said that he'd talked to my mother and she- she was subject to that. But I don't believe it, frankly. So, I don't- I really can only continue to say that I wasn't aware of the implications of what was going on. But what did happen then is- it was the beginning of the Kindertransport, and my parents put my name down for it. But not, as many other children had- went into the unknown. My father had a friend who had married a Czech glass importer who'd established himself and did- had a very nice business in Brussels. And they asked whether- my parents asked the Hugo and Liesl Neumann whether they would accept me. And that's what happened. So, in March 1939, I went on the Kindertransport to Belgium. And it- it's generally thought that the conversation in Jewish refugee circles here, is that the Kindertransport was only for England. But I think certainly the people in Belgium, Holland and France, also took children at that time. So- so that's- that's what happened. And I- one of the photographs I'm going to show you shows me dressed in knickerbockers, all ready to- to go to Brussels. But the- the implications for my- I just, wasn't aware of the implications for my parents.

How did you feel about going to Brussels without them?

I didn't-

Did you? Were you nervous?

[0:17:04]

No, no. I just- I- neither. I just- dispassionate about the whole thing. And then, when I got to Brussels, they- they were very- the Neumann family- they had two small like children of their

own. And they treated me as part of the family. They did send me to a local public school and I can't remember whether it was French-speaking or Flemish -speaking. But that- I had a few horrible weeks. And the Neumann's realised I wasn't settling in. And so they then sent me to the private school where their two little ones were- where their two little ones were. So I- I felt quite comfortable. And in fact, one of the chores was- I was always a bit lazy. And I was made to write home to Vienna. And I thought that was a bit of a chore rather than something that I was keen to do. The only time that something went wrong- well- the only time I felt alienated, so to say, was when I caught mumps at school. And Liesl Neumann, my- let's call her foster mother, was anxious about her own little children. And so, I was- they had- they lived in a 1930s house, with a room upstairs and a- an open- a flat roof. And- and it was very hot. And the roof was tarred. And I remember being exiled to this place. And I really felt unhappy. But that was the only time. Otherwise, I- I had my first girlfriend, which was a- the niece of Hugo Neumann. And we went to the cinema. I learnt to ride a bicycle. I went to this rather modern school. I got some very bad reports which I still have here about my misbehaviour, but apart from that.

How did you cope with the language?

Now that was interesting, because I didn't speak any French or obviously, not Flemish. And I picked it up very quickly. And I- I spoke it fluently I think within weeks or months. Except for those first few weeks in- in the state school. There, there I was totally lost. But afterwards, it went very well.

And your mother joined you in Brussels?

[0:20:08]

Well, no. My- my parents were left behind. And they were desperately trying to get out. And in August '39, three weeks before the outbreak of the war, well of course they didn't know it was, they got a visa to come to England as a butler and cook in the household of a doctor in Basingstoke. And then, they spent, I think, a couple of nights in Brussels. And I met them at the time. And I- again, I think there was- I- I already felt a little estranged from them which must have- in retrospect must have been quite hurtful for my parents. That's- that's me thinking about it now. And I was very happy to see them. One of my photographs with my-

my girlfriend, the niece of Hugo Neumann, she was great actress and so on. And for some reason or other, my- the- the only time I've ever in my life been any cross dressing, there's a picture of me, with my mother in a- and me wearing a tutu. So… So, it was all- I- I just took it in my stride. But later that year- this was August. By October, the situation, the war, the war was broke- had broken out. And Hugo Neumann wrote to my parents who were then in service, in England, and said, "Look we don't like the situation. Of course, if you- if you want us to look after your child, we will go on doing so, but we really recommend that you should take him to England." Well, they couldn't take me to England. But, my father's cousin, George Schatz, who is also Hungarian, but had emigrated first to Berlin and then to London- they had no children, and they said they would take me in. And after war broke out, they- they moved to Amersham, which is about twenty-five miles out of London. And so, I got permission to go to England. And in- this was in February 1940. It was a very, very cold winter. And I still remember a horrendous journey from Brussels to Ostend, where I was put in- in the hands of the captain. I think it was a ferryboat, or it might have been a naval ship. But I think it was a ferryboat but I could check it out 'cause I landed in Folkestone on the 6th of February 1940 and I was greeted by my uncle George, known as Gyuri. And I went to their home in Amersham. And at that time my parents were still in Basingstoke in- in- as butler and cook.

[0:23:34]

Did you find these moves and changes very unsettling?

I was still very naive. I took it all in my stride. I can't say I was blasé about it; I was just in retrospect very silly about it and didn't take it all in. And again, because Magda and Gyuri were welcoming, I was happy to be in their home. But a few weeks or possibly a couple of months later, Basingstoke was declared a- a…

A security zone.

A security- well, enemy aliens. Because my parents were then called 'enemy aliens' and they could no longer stay there. So, through my uncle Gyuri we were able to rent a small bungalow in Amersham, and I was reunited with my parents for a couple of weeks or so. But in May 1940, my father was interned as an enemy alien. I think it's well known that Churchill

issued the order. Because there was a- there- there was a scare that among the refugees there might be Nazi spies. So, Churchill ordered this- and there's a book about it, and-

"Collar the lot"-

"*Collar the lot*"- so- so, my father went- was interned and finished up in the Isle of Man.

Do you know which camp he was in?

He was in Warner camp. Warner.

Warner?

Yes, Warner camp. And I mean he- he hated – he hated being separated from his family. And I still have a lot of the letters that he wrote. I think they're- I think I sent them to the Wiener Library, but I did have them, and I can't find them at the moment.

Was your mother interned?

[0:25:52]

No, she wasn't. She stayed there. And she was just a housewife at the time. And because we had this little bungalow, we took in a London couple called [inaudible] who, I think they were a previous wave of emigres from Poland or Russia. And they were Orthodox Jews. And they said to my mother, "You've got a Jewish boy here-" Oh, by the way I've- I was circumcised at birth. That was just traditional, that- that Jewish boys would be circumcised. Anyway, they said, "You've got to bring your boy up Jewish." And Amersham had a small Jewish community, and they in- in a converted garage they had a synagogue. And so, I started going to the synagogue. And there were a few other refugee families, fairly prosperous middle-class people, who were my friends. Among them was a very well-known conductor called Walter Goehr - G O E H R. His son, Alexander Goehr, is a world -famous composer. He was- became professor of music in Cambridge, but that's a digression. Anyway, because of that, I- I went to the synagogue. And I really loved it. I really enjoyed the singing and the communal spirit and the procession and this ritual of opening and closing

the Torah, and so on. So, I did my Bar Mitzvah, but …at the time my- I don't think I had very many Jewish friends. I had mixed friends from- a lot of them from school. And it sort of faded. So-

[0:28:12]

You mention your friends. Were they, did you have English friends as well as…?

I did, yes, yes. But the English friends were mostly from- from school, at my age. But the other, the continentals, the refugees were mostly my parents' age, and they were friends of Gyuri, et cetera. There is- I- I must mention a young girl called Hilda, who- who was a- a refugee from Vienna. And her aunt was in service, still, when we- when- was in service in a house across the road from the bungalow where we lived. And her mother had committed suicide on the day of the Anschluss. And Hilda was sent to boarding school. And during the holidays, her aunt couldn't take her, so she stayed in our house. So, we became very good friends. And she eventually married a Gunt- Günter Herzberg, who was another- from a textile family, who lived in Amersham. And I've kept up with them. They are now living in Australia and she's a few years younger than me. But- she's like a sister to me.

Did you feel at this stage, homesick, at all? Or did you adjust? Did you feel homesick-?

Not at all. No, I, I- I- I, I wasn't in the least interested in what had happened, my past life in Vienna. I- I must say that my mother was a great correspondent. And I had friends in kindergarten. And my mother kept in touch with the parents what - of my kindergarten friends. One was in Argentina. Two were in America. One was in Australia. And so, that was the only link with my past life. And I did keep that link for many, many years. One of the interesting things is, we think of Kindertransport as people- children coming alone and losing their parents. Of all the children that I knew, all of their parents- as far as I know, all their parents survived, although they were separated. And Teddy Ellington – [inaudible], became Teddy Ellington, his- he- he spent the war in England with his Quaker family. But his parents somehow or other made it, and they were reunited in California after the war. So… Do you want to have a little break?

Do you want a break?

Yes please.

Ok.

[0:31:36]

[sound break]

You've come from Vienna to Brussels and to England. Did you become quite a linguist, learning English?

Well- I think when I landed in England, the only English I knew was "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean", but I seem to have picked it up quite quickly. And unlike other people of my- contemporaries of mine, I'm told that my English is fairly 'English', so- although my first wife always was laughing at the way I said "clothes" [pronouncing cl-oth-es] but maybe it's- maybe that's disappeared too. No, I- it- it wasn't a problem. And in fact, I enjoyed English and even did some amateur dramatics after my school career. But, small walk-on parts and so on. Yes-

How did your parents cope with the language? And what did your mother do while your father was interned?

I frankly don't know. She might- she was probably unofficially helping my uncle's business. I- I think that was- that was it. Maybe she didn't. Maybe she was just a mother at the time. It's funny. There's a lot of things one- I- I just can't remember. I don't have a very good memory.

And was your father released in 1941?

He was. He was- he was interned for longer than most people. How soon you got released depended very much on- on who you knew. And our local MP was a Jewish man called Maurice Edelman. And he did try to intervene, but we were not too high up on the queue and

so that was- so it was a long time. He was- a lot of his contemporaries, younger people, joined the army. Some of them…

The British Army?

[0:34:00]

…like my cousins- yes. They, they were- they were they were allowed to join the Pioneer Corps, which was not- they weren't allowed to carry weapons. But- no, he- he was too old- he was too old to do that. Fortunately, he wasn't shipped abroad. And eventually he came back. And started work as a clerk for my …my uncle, or his cousin, Gyuri. And travelled to London. Took an hour to get from Amersham to London every day. Yes. My- my father also he- he joined the fire watch service, can't remember exactly what it was called the fire- the Volunteer Fire Service.

As part of the war effort?

That's right. Yes – yes. And one interesting consequence of that, is that he shared his duties with a man called Tooley - Mr. Tooley, who was probably the best expert on antiquarian maps in a bookseller called Francis Edwards. And as a result of what the conversations between Mr. Tooley and my father, my father started- collected antiquarian maps. And he had maps of Hungary, maps of London and so on. And I thought this was a crazy thing to do, for a teenager. And then, when I started travelling around Europe, and I began to realise what made up the shapes of places like Antwerp, and Copenhagen and so on, I started appreciating that. And I've adopted that as a hobby. And I- that's- I've stopped collecting now, 'cause I've got too many things but it's still some- it's something of great interest to me.

Did you feel at all alienated, distanced from your father, because of the year's gap, or had you got used to being away from him?

[0:36:37]

No, you see he was- he was, as I say, assiduous. He wrote every day to my mother and to me. So, he kept that link. And again, like in Brussels, I was a bit tardy in replying to him and I got

a bit scolded for not- not being as attentive. No, I suppose- my father might have been a bit of a disciplinarian. But I didn't feel it. In- he- he was very keen for me to get on. It was only through his efforts that I managed to get into grammar school, because I was- I arrived in England too late to take the 11 Plus, which selected people for [inaudible]. So, my uncle enrolled me in a private school called Amersham College. But my father wrote to the, the- the local authority, the Buckinghamshire County Council and said, you know, "You've got to give my boy a place in the grammar school." And he kept on writing to them until eventually they- they gave way and they did see that it was unfair that I wasn't given the opportunity to take the exam in the first place. And so, surprisingly, I did quite well at school. Surprisingly because I don't remember working very hard and the teachers at the time were veterans of the First World War and they seemed to spend more of their time talking about their exploits in the First World War than teaching maths or geography. But it worked out alright in the end.

[0:38:40]

And when did you leave school?

I took my school certificate in 1945, and the higher school certificate in 1947. And I spent the- I don't know whether it was before I left or after I left, several months, trying to get a university place. But my heart wasn't in it. I didn't really want to. So eventually, again, through my father's influence, he said, "Look the future is in plastics and you should get a job in plastics." And I did get a job at a company called Combined Optical Industries in Slough, which was twelve miles away. And on good days, I used to cycle there for my first job as a laboratory assistant. They were making acrylic lenses. They worked in the- during the war on bomb sites and so on. Yeah.

And did you feel accepted there, or were you an outsider?

Yes, I don't. I think- in the whole of my school life, there was- I never- I had one anti-Semitic incident, where I was bullied and hit by an older boy. But on, but on the whole, no. Not, that- I was accepted- I didn't- I had this- this split between the refugee community and my English friends. But I didn't- I didn't see it as a split at all.

And you didn't have problems with your colleagues in the laboratory?

No, no. No, it was- it was- it proved to be a bit of a dead-end job. And again, my father intervened. And I don't know how he first made contact but there was a man called Maurice Curwen who was the editor of a magazine called *Plastics Monthly* magazine. And through Mr. Curwen, I then got a job in a laboratory in Ewell in Surrey. Doctor [Victor] Yarsley. And, again, no, I, I- not being accepted didn't- I didn't feel that at all.

You became a journalist.

[0:41:34]

Right, well then at- there are two other little bits that go in between there. Doctor Yarsley, was the famous technical management consultant. He was the Chairman of the Plastics Institute. And fairly early on in my career, I don't know whether he wanted to get rid of me or not, but he put my name up for a scholarship or a bursary from the Plastics Institute to go and study. So, I was awarded a hundred pounds bursary to study chemistry at Battersea Polytechnic. And, I did a year of that and I was quite hopeless. And I gave up after a year. And I felt really stuck at that time. I really wanted to work for the BBC. I wanted to do some-something else. And my father again, went to this man, Maurice Curwen the editor of *Plastics*, said, "What shall I do with my son?" And he said, "I've- I'll give him a job." So, I had- This was a company called Temple Press Limited, which- they had loads of different journals. And I was the assistant-assistant-editor. There was quite a Victorian set-up that these two old men- and I was- you know, I was twenty or twenty-one. And I was paid a pittance. It was I think less than five pounds a week. But I did alright. And – yeah, so that was my journalistic career. Not particularly good. And then I thought, well, this is- ah! What happened then was the- the assistant editor who used to, as I say, used to be at a Victorian stand-up desk and so on, he died. And I realised almost immediately that I wasn't going to be mature enough to take his place. So, they recruited a thirty-year-old. And I didn't like that at all. So, I started looking around for jobs. And it was actually about three days after my father died that I saw an advert in *The Times* for the job which I then- that was in March. I got the job in July. And I was with them for thirty-five years. So that was- yeah.

[0:44:38]

And did that take you up to retirement?

Yes.

Yes.

That's right, yes.

And- but you mentioned your father, and that he committed suicide.

Yes.

Do you know what caused– [phone rings]

Sorry.

[0:44:54]

[sound break]

Right.

You mentioned your father-

Yes.

…and that previously you mentioned that he'd committed suicide.

Yes.

Do you know what caused him to do that?

Well, he had been injured in the First World War and he had stomach ulcers from the First World War. But he was a very active and sociable person, et cetera. And I don't know at

what stage, was it before or after the internment, that he …that he suff- suffered from clinical depression. And he had medical treatment for it, and in fact he was one of the early guinea pigs for electric shock treatment, which did seem to help him. But in the end, I don't know- I- I don't know what happened. So, it came as a shock to me. Yes.

Yes.

[dog barking - sound break]

[0:46:14]

Yes, just a minute.

Your father took this action.

Yes. He-

How did he commit suicide? What did he do?

He jumped– this is what I- I don't know whether I was recording it or not, but… he- he jumped off a railway bridge onto a- in front of a train, which- it was very uncharacteristic of him, because he was extremely polite and courteous - almost to the point of being obsequious sometimes. So, the idea of disrupting somebody is- is very strange. But I suppose I never- I suppose I was in denial. I didn't really sort of go into it. And of course, after a suicide, people feel guilty. My mother would have felt guilty.

Yes.

I wasn't living at home at the time. I'd- I'd gone to live in London. I was living in what was then called British- West Hampstead was the sort of- where- the refugees' community, community was there. And I was sharing a small flat with an Australian Romanian refugee- was a young man who was a few years older than me. I was, well I was just under twenty-five. I was twenty-five when my father died.

[0:48:04]

So, you would not have known if there was something that really drove him to this action?

No. No. I think –

And you were saying that he also had this special electric treatment.

That's right, yes. Yes, that was- I mean the- clinical depression was around at the time it was recognised and it was an- electric shock treatment helped people. And it did, apparently, help him. But I wasn't- I wasn't that aware of his depression. He was- at the time, he'd left the employment of my uncle. He'd set up his own textile agency with my mother, who worked with him. And I- one of my better memories is going to- by that time, at the time, my place of work had moved from Clerkenwell where Temple Press had its headquarters. They were expanding and they took a small office in Soho. Right next door to the Windmill Theatre. I don't know if that means something to you. But it was a sort of strip-tease artists. And it was round the corner from Leicester Square. And there was a Lyons Corner House there. And the- on the first floor of the Lyons Corner House was called the 'Old Vienna Café'. And it was the gathering place for refugee business people. Mostly in *shmattes* and the textile industry. And there would be a dozen or so people gathering for lunch. And occasionally I used to go and join them. And I was impressed by how- there was a wonderful, positive, cheerful atmosphere. You know, we'd won the war and we'd escaped disaster. And many of us had lost loved family. But the mood was very positive. So, in a way I- I didn't think of him as being depressed. And I suppose he wouldn't- he wouldn't have shown it very much. And again, it's the same naiveté that I was talking about when I was a child, even at the age of twenty-five, I wasn't that aware of what was going on.

[0:50:56]

How did your mother take the news?

Very badly. She felt guilty of course. And - very badly. But eventually I- she'd lived in that house in Amersham from 1940 to 1954. And I talked to her, and I didn't- I didn't have a serious girlfriend at the time. And we agreed that we'd share a house in Wembley. So that

sort of compromise between being twenty-five miles away or being in the suburbs. And so she bought with the proceeds of- from my father's, well, from the house in Amersham, she was able to buy a house in Wembley. Wembley Park. And I shared with her. Had the room downstairs, and I lived there for about six years, until I had my own- until I got my own place again, and a new girlfriend.

And when did you marry?

Well, I- I was telling you that during my early days in London I had Jewish refugee- I moved in Jewish refugee circles. And I had one non-Jewish English friend. He was- I always called him 'my English friend'. And one of- and I had a- a girlfriend called Marian Tietz. And we were sort of going along, and it's possible that we could have got married, but it wasn't really going anywhere. And I went to a party at her- Marian's house. And her brother, Stephen, had a girlfriend at that time called Joanna. And this was in September '56. And - fabulously beautiful young lady. At the- I'm sorry, this is going to take me a little while. But it- at the end of the party I sort of said we must meet again. And then I went off for a three months' trip. It was my first intercontinental trip as an export salesman for cigarette filters for the company I worked for – for Bunzl [PLC]. And the February of the following year, I went with Stephen and Marian and a few other people, we went on a skiing trip. And this was the day of night flights. And we were going to- and- and Stephen said, "Joanna's giving a party. Why don't we go on the way to the airport?" And we did. And I met Joanna again. And I was sort of, very attracted to her. And for one reason or another I didn't do anything- didn't meet her again until July. And so, 19- July 1957, I phoned her up and asked her for a date. And then we had a- a seven-year courtship. And eventually I said, "Well, you know this has got to go one way or the other" and she said, "Yes." She never really took to my mother. They- they- my mother would sort of go on talking about things that Joanna had no interest in whatever. And there was that tension. And that actually persisted throughout- throughout their lives, which was a pity.

[0:55:22]

Was Joanna Jewish?

No – no she wasn't. Joanna was an interesting English, working-class girl. She was the same age as me. And she had been evacuated into a family in Somerset. A- a prosperous lawyer with a with a wealthy wife who had a country house. And she was- she and her cousin were evacuated into this house. And after the war, when Joanna went- she was called Joan at the time, when Joanna wanted to go back, her father had met somebody else. And she was sort of stranded. And by then she'd- I suppose it's wrong to- she wasn't an Eliza Doolittle exactly, but she'd become- she'd gone to grammar school. She'd become a, a middle-class girl and sort of adopted by this- this family in Bristol. And so, no, she wasn't Jewish. And-

Did your mother regret that? Would she have preferred you to have married someone from Vienna or Germany?

Possibly, but I don't- not- not really. I think my mother- my mother was very open. In fact, she was, yes, she didn't mind who- who I was with. There was a whole variety of people and I- she might have- I'm sure she would have liked a nice Jewish girl but I don't think it really mattered to her at all. On one occasion I brought- I- I was on a flight from Beirut to London and I- I brought a couple of Lebanese air hostesses with me to stay the night on the sofa. [laughing] And no, she was very open that way. So, of course she did regret not having a closer relationship with- with Joanna. So eventually, as I say, we- eventually got married in December 1964. And - yes. And Robert was born a decent eighteen months later. Or something like that. March 1966. Yes. And -oh, sorry.

[0:58:06]

And your daughter?

My daughter was born in 1969. And there were- we lived, at that time, when- during my courtship with Joanna, we'd always lived in London. She had a flat in Sloane Street. I had a flat in Clerkenwell behind Sadler's Wells Theatre. And then we met a colleague who had a house in Ham Common. And he told us of a house for sale, and we moved to this house which was a new- new development of ten houses, and- called Beech Row. And we moved there. And it was all professional couples. People in showbusiness, and so on. Famous film director Richard Lester lived there, and people in TV. Billy Cotton's son, and- and my children grew up there, and at one time there were twenty-two children playing in the

communal garden in- there. So yes, so Jane was born at the time of the moon landings, 1969. Yeah.

But then you've re-married.

No. Well, I- I did. But- but- no, we, we, we- then we went to Aus- we went to Australia. My- my work took me to Australia in 1982. And we lived in Australia for six or seven years, until I retired. And we then came back. Bought a house in Wimbledon. By that time, my son was working for a bank. He eventually worked for Schroders but I think at the time he might have been working for somebody else. And my daughter had been to Cambridge. And at the end, when she graduated from Cambridge- she'd gone to school in Australia. And when she graduated from Cambridge, she said to her mother, "It's too cold here. I'm going back to Australia." Where she is- still is now. And, so, but Joanna never really enjoyed Australia that much. And didn't settle down after she came back either. And she died of liver disease in 1997. She died two days after Princess Diana. And my mother died exactly two weeks after that.

Oh, gosh. That's a lot to deal with.

Yes, well, yes. And my daughter came back at that time from Australia. And so, yes, and then after I was- I was on my own then. And I had- I did a whole variety- after I retired, I did a whole variety of quite interesting things, which I don't suppose there's really time to talk about today, but-

Perhaps some of them.

Right. Yes. I immediately after I retired, I- I resented the idea of retiring at sixty. And I said there must be things for me to do. And I looked around for an organisation that encouraged people to work in retirement. And I found this organisation, and applied to them and finished up as their director. And we re- we re-invented it as 'The Third Age Network'. And for six months or so, I was their director and used to go out to Romford in Essex, so-

[1:02:24]

What did the organisation do?

Oh, it was- it was supported- it was supported by- initiated by BP, but it was supported by Marks & Spencer's and Lloyd Bank and ten big companies. And it's- it was an employment agency specialising in finding work for people who'd retired from a corporate career. But it came at the wrong time because there weren't any jobs. And eventually I gave that up. And that's when I started this idea of work- earning… learning, earning and leisure. Lifelong learning and leisure. And eventually I- I started- I was one of the directors of something called the Society for Organisational Learning in the UK, which is an offshoot of an organisation started in America at MIT by a man called Peter Senge who's very well know. But I did that for a couple of years.

That's very worthwhile.

Also, I- I never- as I never finished my degree, part of my slogan of earning, learning and leisure, I signed up for a master's- master['s] of science degree- external at London University for something called Life Course Development, which was about the psychology and sociology of people post-retirement. So, I- sorry, I'm mix- mixing up my periods a little bit, because all of this came through my having- while I was a director of Bunzl PLC, I joined- I became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, the RSA. And they had a- that was while I was still in Australia. When I came back here, I got involved with them in something called the Tomorrow's Company Enquiry. And we started really a different look at what – what is the company for? And I became the chairman of a work group called Learning Individuals in Learning Organisations. It was all part of the same- same thing. So, I did my master's degree. Graduated in 1993. And - yeah.

[1:05:22]

Congratulations.

Thank you.

That's brilliant.

Right. Oh, and- so- sorry- so, anyway, Joanna died in 1997. And as part of my various volunteer works, I went up to Leeds where my mother's cousin or second cousin, Ernst Kohut, who's a refugee from Vienna, he lived. And I met- I had met him many years before, but during the time of my marriage with Joanna, she wasn't really interested in any of my relations. So, I picked up there, and I met Ernst who'd been married to Donnie. And Ernst was at that time in his nineties. And I helped- I helped Donnie both before and after Ernst died. And then sort of we became an item and we- I sort of inherited her. And, yeah, got married in 2002 and we've been married, well, that makes it sixteen years, isn't it? Yes. Yeah.

Do you have any regrets at all in your life?

Hmm. That's a difficult one. I think in, in - in retrospect, knowing what it takes to be a good husband I probably wasn't as good a husband to my first wife as I might have been. But …no, I think- I think on the whole I've been I've been reasonably successful. Circumstances helped a lot in that, rather more than any huge talents.

Is that where you feel that you were a lucky refugee?

Absolutely, yes. No, but not just that. I mean, the idea that I was lucky that I came in the first place. And that I've had, as I say, my- I'm very sad that my only- the only grandparent I had at the time of the Anschluss, my grandmother, died in Auschwitz. I wasn't very close to her. There were other people I could have talked about from, from my people in Vienna. Other people that- relations of my, my father's and my mother's, who lived in Vienna whom I knew. I've- I'm sad for them. But- and I suppose I could have I- I could have done more after the age of sixty. But I did quite a lot of different things, which I did enjoy. I've always – I- I've always felt the need for belonging. So, wherever I lived, I was involved in local affairs like planning committee of the local civic society in Ham Common and also in Wimbledon. And in Australia. No- no.

[1:09:04]

It is a basic human need, isn't it?

Belonging. Contributing. That's the other one. I think belonging and contributing is probably more important than achieving, although- I- yes, there are- there are other regrets. As I say, the relationship with my father was- could have been a lot better. I'm very sad that I never explored why he didn't talk about his father. Why his father left. And it's quite possible that somewhere around the globe my grandfather, my father's father, might have- I don't know whether he survived the First World War, or whether he survived and he started another family. So, it is possible that I have half relations, half-brothers and half-sisters in the world. And, I've never done a lot of work to- to find them.

Have you been back to Vienna?

Oh, many times, because when, in 1954, when I joined Bunzl, they were a Vienna-based company. And I went there. And then I went- I went back to Vienna with Joanna before we were married and that was a- a very strange experience, because it was 1955. And it was just come out of the Russian occupation. It was still a very grey city. The sort of thing portrayed in *The Third Man*. And I have a great memory of taking- Joanna had this idea of Vienna being the place of waltz and music and so on. And we went- the hotel- we stayed in a very shabby hotel. And I was too mean- too mean to take her to the top hotels and so on. And we went to a little so-called gypsy restaurant. We were in a cellar. And it was not at all touristy. And there was a little three-piece orchestra there. And they played rather lackadaisically. And while we were waiting for our food, they stopped playing and opened their little briefcases and took out their sandwiches. [laughing] So that was a little- that was my first taste of Vienna. And then in-

Were you bitterly disappointed?

[1:11:55]

No. For her – for her. No. I- and then after I became a director of Bunzl, we had an anniversary gathering in Vienna. We had a new non-family chief executive, James White, a Scotsman. And he organised a huge get-together in Vienna in 19- oh goodness…I can't remember…

Roughly.

Eighty- ’87. That’s when the big storm came and the big- and the big crash was in, in- in London. And I think, yes, I was, I was living in Australia at the time. And so, the- the- that was the opposite end. We stayed in a top hotel. And had meal in the- oh, the Schloss, whatever it is. And went to the opera and so on. So that was- that was the music. And then again, I went to Vienna in 19…what is it? My eightieth. For my eightieth birthday, with Donnie and with my cousin. With- Donnie’s step- step-son and his family. And that was really sort of again, the Vienna of art and art and music and chocolate and Sachertorte. So, I’ve seen it in all- in all guises and so on. And, never really comfortable about the Viennese. My mother used to go quite regularly. And my mother had a wonderful relationship with at least one of the young girls who were servants in our house. And they were sort of personal friends, and so on. Yes. But we did go back to- to Sopron. And because- you’ve done an interview with my cousin Marietta. And in the year 2000, after my- soon after my mother died, my mother had kept in touch with all her various relations. And one of the cousins had gone back to Sopron and lived- was- still lived there. She died this year - at the age of- was it this year? Yes. Anyway. - at the age of ninety-six. And her brother, Laci still lives in Budapest at the age of ninety-nine. So, we organised this reunion. We got the addresses through my mother of all the people who were descendants of my great-grandmother. And there must have been about thirty of us, including my son and his wife and my daughter who wasn’t married at the time. And we did an excursion to Vienna from there. Yes.

[1:15:24]

Did your mother or your father ever apply for restitution or compensation?

Yes. Very unsuccessfully. In fact, Marietta’s second husband, Hans Marcus, acted for her. And they were very shabbily treated. I think we got a few hundred pounds for that house in Kritzendorf- our holiday home in Kritzendorf. She did get a pension, and so do I. I get a- because they made a rule that if you, if you qualified- I don’t know how they- they worked it out, but I had to pay in a few thousand pounds and they still pay me a pension. I have to go and tell them I’m a- tell the Austrian government that I’m alive every year. And my local council has just written to say they can - since the Data Protection Act, they can - no longer certify my being alive. So, I’ve got to go to the AJR and ask them about that. Yes. So- so, restitution. Well, no, I think- I think they were- they felt very shabbily done by.

And how do you feel now, in yourself? Is- is there a lingering element of being a refugee, or do you feel completely British now?

No, I- I have. It's- it's certainly a- an- a part of my identity. And it's a greater part of my identity since my mother died and I- since my wife died, I lost some connection. I tried quite hard at the time even to res- restore my Jewishness, after my wife died. Because, Joanna and I were sort of in a 'no man's land' of no religion, was better than- than that. And my two children were both brought up in Church of England schools. One at St. Pauls in England and my daughter at Melbourne Girls Grammar school. Both of which are church foundations. But they haven't sort of, found God, unfortunately. Unlike my cousin Marietta's son, who is a devout Christian. Yes, so- so multiple identity is one of my- one of my big themes. I- I'm- I, I belong to Deal, where I live now. I've always had this sense of local belonging. I'm certainly a British subject. I'm a passionate European. Anti-Brexit. And so- and I- and I'm a descendant of the, you know, of the time of, of Mozart. I have a link with the Austria of Mozart.

[1:18:44]

Culturally?

Culturally yes. Musically, et cetera. Yes. I mean I- during the war, one of the things I didn't tell you I think in- information you sent me, were in my experience of the war was seeing London ablaze at twenty- far away- with the red glow and, and hearing incendiary bombs. I know I'm outside my chronology now. But- but- no, so- so obviously during the war I was passionately for this country and- and have been ever since. I became a British subject and – yeah.

And you re-married.

I married two English ladies.

And the name of your-

Not…

And the name of your second wife?

She's called Donnie. She's Sidon- and her name is Sidonia, but everybody knows her as Donnie. Yeah.

And when did you marry?

I married Donnie in 2002. Yes. Sixteen years ago. Yes.

Is there anything that you would like to add that perhaps we touched upon earlier but you'd like to expand upon or - something different?

I think as I say, this- this business of belonging is very important to me. Local belonging. British belonging. European belonging. Even Jewish belonging. Although I've tried to recreate my Jewish links. And through the Association of Jewish Refugees, I've been to one or two of their events. Possibly will go to more of them. I did sign up- so- no, I- I just come back to the fact that I- that perhaps through not being as involved in my faith as, as being conscious of my faith is a- I never thought of myself as a victim.

[1:21:14]

No.

And, and I do come back to this business of: Isn't it lovely to be a refugee? And I'm very lucky. Lucky to be married. Lucky to be healthy and alive. And walking, unlike my cousin Marietta. I don't want- I'm- I'm very fearful of becoming dependent. And I've got my own views on wanting to die in good health.

For the recording, and for your family, is there a message that you would like to pass on?

Not really. No. No- I. As I say, these are- my- my themes are very much about the sense of belonging to many different- many different things. And- and contribute. Contribution, I

think that's important. And if after that, there is some achievement well that's- that's good as well.

I think that's a wonderful note to end on.

Right.

Thank you very much indeed for-

All right, Jana.

- agreeing to be interviewed. Thank you.

Good. Right. I look forward to seeing it. I suppose I do see it?

Yes, you'll receive a complimentary copy.

And you still want to do photos, do you?

Please.

Right. OK, Donnie?

[End of interview]
[1:22:54]

[1:22:58]
[Start of photographs]

Photo 1
This is a photograph taken about 1910, judging from the fashion. The lady in the centre is my grandmother. My mother's mother, together with Julia Kohut, who was born Salzer and was my great-grandmother's sister. On the left is Elsa Krausz, who was my grandmother's sister.

The gentleman is called Max Kohut and he is- well, I have various relations who are his descendants.

Photo 2
This is Josef Kohn, my grandfather, my mother's father. And his father was called Max Kohn, and they lived in Leobersdorf in Austria. He was in the Austrian Army during World War One.

Photo 3
This is a photograph of Paula Kohn, my grandmother, my mother's mother at the age of about nineteen- age of about forty, in 1925. She was the eldest daughter of Josef and Karolina Krausz from Sopron. She returned to Sopron in 1939, and was then deported and gassed in Auschwitz, under the name- she married again, a convenience marriage to get her into Hungary and was then known as Doctor Reisman Sandor.

Photo 4
Yes. This is my grandmother. My father's mother Rozsa, she was born Rozsa Wolff and with her are her three boys. My father is the one in the middle. He's called Miklos, the one on his right is Jóska, and the little one is called Pista or István or Stephen. So Jóska is Joseph - is another word for Joseph. Taken in Szeged in 1910 or 1912.

[1:25:55]

Photo 5
This is my father. His Hungarian name is Miklos Farago and the German or English name is Nicholas Farago. Photo was taken in Vienna in 1929, the year I was born.

Photo 6
Yeah, this is me. I was called Hans Farago at the time. In 1932 I would have been three years old and it was taken in Vienna or some- or close by.

Photo 7
This is a group of children in the holiday village near Vienna called Kritzendorf. I'm on the left. All the others are Aryan children, and we played happily together for many years. But

after the Nazis came in, they started calling me 'dirty Jew' and wouldn't play with me anymore.

Photo 8

This is me, Hans Farago, in Austrian costume, in 1938. I think I was before my ninth birthday. And it has a swastika stamp on the back of the photo.

Photo 9

This is a picture of myself, Hans Farago, with my father Miklos Farago and my mother Hilde Farago taken in Vienna between the time of the Anschluss and Kristallnacht and shows the great anxiety about being Jews in Vienna at that time.

Photo 10

This is a photo of me, Hans Farago, in March 1939, in an outfit specially bought for my going on the Kindertransport from Vienna to Belgium, to Brussels in Belgium.

[1:28:14]

Photo 11

This is me, Hans Farago, aged eleven, in the Brussels home of the family who took me in when I went from Vienna. The two boys are called George and Claude, and their cousin, my first girlfriend, was called Nicole Pollitzer. And the family were Hugo Neumann who was from Czechoslovakia and Liesl Neumann his wife, who was from Vienna and known to my parents.

Photo 12

This is Hugo Neumann and his wife Liesl, and their children George and Claude, taken after the war, after Hugo survived Buchenwald concentration camp. And this is the family that saved my life by taking me in to their home from 1939 until February 1940, when they made it possible for me to escape to England.

[Yeah… I'll try…]

Photo 13

This is the only time in my life that I remember being cross-dressed in a nice ballet skirt on the occasion of a performance organised when my mother came to- my parents came to Brussels on their way from Vienna to England, and stayed with us. It's very significant, because they stayed with us for just two days. And this is a picture of my mother and- and me.

[1:30:34]

Photo 14
This is the only picture I could find today of my first wife Joanna, outside our home when we lived in Australia in the 1980s.

Photo 15
This is the wedding photo with me, by then John Fargo, and my wife, Donnie- Sidonia Farago, at our wedding in Wimbledon in April, 2002.

Photo 16
This is a photograph taken in Deal Town Hall in Kent, near Dover. My grandson George, my grandchildren, George and Freddy congratulating me on my eightieth birthday in 2009.

Photo 17
This is my grandmother's sister Olga, who was a survivor from Auschwitz, visiting the grave in the Vienna's Jewish- well, the *Zentralfriedhof*, the Jewish cemetery, visiting the grave of Katharina Salzer who was the mother of my great-grandmother Karolina who married- Karolina Salzer, who married Josef Krausz. She was- that Katharina Salzer was a descendant of someone called Wittmann, and we can research some more about this ancestry for a further generation.

[End of photographs]
[1:32:51]