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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

<b>Collection title:</b>	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
<b>Ref. no:</b>	126

<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Mechlowitz
<b>Forename:</b>	Marcus
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	25 March 1930
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Hanover, Germany

<b>Date of Interview:</b>	25 July 2006
<b>Location of Interview:</b>	Salford, Manchester
<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Rosalyn Livshin
<b>Total Duration (HH:MM):</b>	2 hours 39 minutes

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

**INTERVIEW: 126**

**NAME: MARCUS MECHLOWITZ**

**DATE: 25 JULY 2006**

**LOCATION: SALFORD, MANCHESTER**

**INTERVIEWER: ROSALYN LIVSHIN**

### **TAPE 1**

RL: I am interviewing Marcus Mechlowitz and today's date is the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2006. The interview is taking place in Salford and I am Rosalyn Livshin.

Can you tell me your name?

MM: Marcus Mechlowitz.

RL: And were you named after anybody?

MM: I was named after my grandfather, Marcus Swinger.

RL: And where were you born?

MM: Hanover, West Germany.

RL: And when were you born?

MM: 25-3-30

RL: Now, if you can tell me first of all about your parents and their families.

MM: My parents, my father, came from Poland, around about in the 1920s, he came from a little, a little village in Galicia. My understanding is that he left Poland in order not to be impressed into the army there which was compulsory, and he came to Germany. My mother was born in Germany. Her parents were Polish as well.

RL: Do you know anything about, let's say your father's parents, your grandparents?

**Tape 1: 1 minute 43 seconds**

MM: No, I know very little about them. I have seen a photograph of my grandfather, and he looks very much like an eminent Rabbi, but in actual fact he was a peasant. So this was obviously the way people looked in those days. My other grandfather, no, he worked, he had a business sorting out waste and my uncle took it over. One of my dominant memories is of visiting that, it was called a Lumpenlager, a Lumpenlager is a place where waste is kept and it is being sorted. And I remember it well because my uncle, having been born in Germany was able to retain his business during the 1930s, whilst my father had to give up his business, being Polish born, and he wasn't allowed to remain in business from the age of 32, from the time of 32.

RL: Where was the waste business?

MM: It was also in Hanover, only about ten minutes from where we lived. I used to walk there myself at a very, very early age. It was very much in the Jewish quarter. Nothing is left now, I went back once and everything was bombed out. There is nothing left even for me to begin to look from, in that area. It so happens, where we lived stands complete, except in that there are no Jews any more, they are all Turks.

RL: What are your memories of your mother's father? Of your grandfather. What kind of man was he?

MM: I am sure my mother's father died at a very early age, I don't remember him at all. I never met my parent ... my father's parents, or any of his family. I should say that from the time that I was born, things went so difficult that I don't think my father could go to visit them, because he probably didn't have a living, so there were no visits between ourselves and the Polish part of the family, they were too poor and of course we were in great difficulty.

RL: How many siblings? What kind of brothers and sisters did your father have?

MM: To be honest, I don't know, I don't know. I know there were some brothers, and there was a sister I believe, but again, they all died and we never got near them, and of course we never got to talk about them because I left when I was nine years old.

RL: Do you know what kind of education your father had?

MM: I don't think his education was very cultured. He could do ... he could write, and his mathematics was very good, but I don't think his Jewish education was particularly good. In fact I wonder, I really wonder when he left Poland, he certainly didn't spend time that I heard of going to Yeshiva or something, even though he was very orthodox. So I would suspect that he probably left Poland, well as I say, he must have left in about 1920, he was 24, I don't know. No, he was very honest, full of integrity, a good business man, but education, no.

**Tape 1: 6 minutes 15 seconds**

My mother had a good education. She had a good German education. In her last years she was able to read, I was able to read Heine with her, in German.

RL: Coming back to your father, did he ever talk about life at all in Poland? Did he ever tell you about his early life?

MM: No, no, no, unfortunately, the way things were after we got to England he was working so hard, you know you come here penniless and you earn 30 shillings a week.

RL: I am just wondering what happened to him during the First World War, whether that involved him in any way.

MM: I don't think he was in it, I don't think he was in it ... of course I don't really know what happened in Poland during the First World War. You hear about people being in Russia ... no ... he certainly wasn't in the First World War, on either side.

RL: And on your mother's side ... oh, just one more thing about your father, was he Chassidic in any way? What kind of orthodox was he?

MM: I think he paid lip service to Chassidism, he davened as a Chossid, but not very much deeply involved. He certainly didn't have a Rebbe he would go to. I know when the Bobover Rav came to Manchester they knew him, but that was very much more I think because of my mother's side, because my mother's side was very much involved with Bobov, which was near Krakow. No my father, came from a Chassidic area, but he was not extreme, so he paid lip service to all this, but he wasn't really interested, although he was very frum.

RL: Coming on to your mother's side, do you know what brothers and sisters she had?

MM: She only had one brother and one sister, who both lived in Hanover, and both came to England around about the same time as we did.

RL: What were they doing? What was her brother doing?

MM: Her brother was running this what you say was called the Lumpenlager, he took it over from his family. Quite old established, where peddlers used to bring in, they used to come along with handcarts, the peddlers used to bring in all the stuff they had been collecting and they would be sorting it out, yes ...

RL: And what would they do with it?

MM: Well they probably sort it out into the various parts which could be sold for different purposes, to be turned into raw materials for different purposes, but they had to

be sorted before it could be done. So the peddler walks around and he calls out "Any old  
**Tape 1: 9 minutes 47 seconds**

waste?" You know, and people bring things down, you know they bring down a chair, they bring down a carpet, and then they all come into this Lumpenlager, and then they sort it out, and they say "What shall we do with these chairs? What do we do with these carpets?" It was quite interesting watching them. When I was a child I used to stand there and watch them. It was also something to do with a family business, because my mother's family lived in Göttingen, which was a university town, and I remember visiting them on a number of occasions, and they had a Lumpenlager, the same as we did, so there must have been something in the Swinger family.

RL: Which part of your mother's family lived in Göttingen?

MM: My grandmother's sister married somebody who lived in Göttingen.

RL: And what was the name? The name of that family?

MM: The name was Wagner.

RL: And did your mother tell you anything about her childhood? Any memories from her past?

MM: No, no. she lived, she seemed to have lived a pretty affluent, a reasonably affluent life until around about 1933, because I remember her telling me that she had various ... she had a maid, and different people who ... later on they still used to come along, even when she couldn't afford it afterwards, they still used to come in and ... she lived quite an affluent life, and the flat where we lived seemed to be quite high class, even now, when I saw it from the outside, yet after 33 she seemed to be borrowing money all the time in order to keep alive. Especially I think her brother must have been very helpful to her, because his being a German he was able to remain in business, and I think they were very much dependent on, and of course he lived right up to it.

RL: Have you any idea how your parents met?

MM: No.

RL: When would they have married?

MM: I would say it was around about the early 1920s.

RL: And what was your father doing at that point? What was he doing when he left ... you know you said he left Poland and he came to Germany.

MM: I think, when he came to Germany, I think he went out peddling, peddling ... how shall we call it? I think sort of furniture for beds, and night clothes, and table cloth ... I remember him telling me a story of how they went along, and they were knocking on doors and this lady called him in and he opened his cases and she selected lots and lots of things. He always told me this story ... and when she has finished ordering, he was going to tot it up, and she said "I am so pleased you have been, because all this here I would have bought if my daughter would have been alive." And he said how disappointed he was that he had brought all this stuff out, for this purpose, and I think after peddling he then set up his own business, around about 1930, with his brother in law, not his brother in law but his, my mother's sister's husband, and they called it Mechlowitz and Schwinger and they were just getting going in 1930 when the license was taken away when Hitler came and they were not allowed to trade, and from there onwards everything went to bits.

**Tape 1: 14 minutes 17 seconds**

RL: What was he doing from that point on?

MM: It seems he went from the country, many times by train, to be peddling in Belgium and France, and to come home on a Friday evening and I think he was also being forced to work on the streets and do jobs which, which the Germans demanded. Things were tough.

RL: What children were born? What children did your parents have?

MM: Well they had Issy of course, they had Isadore, as I said to you before. And there was Danny. They were the two older boys. They, in nineteen ... they went to school. I think they had a reasonable education because later on, when they ... around about 1927 or so there was a possibility of children being sent to Holland, out of Germany. My sister and I couldn't go, we were too young, but the two older boys were sent away for safety into Holland, because remember Holland was not in war in the First World War so they, it was thought they were going to be safe there. Later on they wrote us letters, when we got to England. Of course the Nazis went into Holland and they ... they wrote, in a very nice English, there was a German part ... and there was an English part, and they wrote these English letters to a cousin in America, who sent it on to us here. They wrote in English, so they must have had a reasonable education at their age.

RL: What were they doing in Holland?

MM: In Holland they were, they were in a youth camp of some sort, set up by well meaning Amsterdam Jews, in order to save young Jewish boys from Hitler, but I don't think, I think when the war came, what I was told was they weren't looked after, they were just left, and of course they were caught up with and they were sent to Auschwitz.

RL: And when was your sister born? Where did your sister come in the family?

MM: She was two years older than I, so therefore she couldn't go either in 38, so she must have been about ten years old. So she stayed with us. And we were together all of the time.

### Tape 1: 17 minutes 2 seconds

RL: What is your earliest memory as a child?

MM: That is difficult to say, because you know I have certain pictures as a very, very young child, I had a picture of myself playing in a little sandpit, next to my house, there I must have been about five years old. I believe I had ran away from home or I had got lost and I was brought back, that was a memory. I think things started coming together, when I was around about seven, that is when I started, because I think, you know there was this ... there was this ... this, the way the Germans picked up all the Polish families to send them on to ... on to the Polish frontier, that will be around was it '38 or was it '37? There were two lots ...

RL: '38.

MM: '38 ... I remember the first lot, that I remember simply because I was sent with a message to my uncle, to my two uncles, that somebody had sent a message to say they were picking up the Polish Jews and the men should run away, which they did, but I remember that I remember, being told to run along. And of course the men ran, they went as far as Hildesheim, I believe, which was only about I think thirty miles away, but the Germans seemed to do only one sector at a time, and on that first transport, if the man of the house wasn't around, they only sent families together, they wouldn't send them away, so ... and then I remember quite vividly staring out of the window, with my nose against the window, and there was a Gestapo man on the other side of the road in a doorway, watching our house, and at the same time, where we lived on the Goethe Platz, you can imagine it was called Goethe Platz, you know the Goethe Square, you can imagine they don't, Goethe was such an eminent German, it was ... you know the Schiller Platz and the Goethe Platz and the not Heine, of course, chas v'challila, were the dominant places and this was quite a dominant place, and I remember this group of SS men and the flag flying and the band coming, coming walking down the splendour of the, of the band and the flags, and these all dressed in black with bits of red and I remember to this day, I had no hate for these people at all. I just admired the music and the splendour of it all. To this day when I hear a band playing, I was once in Tel Aviv and outside Yerushalayim, and I heard a band and I saw some banners and somebody carrying a flame, and I got quite frightened actually, because I remembered this. It was only B'nei Akiva having a B'nai Akiva day. So you can imagine, on the one hand the Gestapo man was facing me there and on the other hand they came along and I was wrapped with admiration of what a wonderful spectacle, so there was this ambivalence. I never really, I don't think the reason that I hated them, was that these SS men were always very polite, they did their job very politely, the once who I didn't like were the Brown Stormtroopers. They were the savages who were sometimes running down the street.

Now, my next memory, very vivid memory, was of Kristallnacht. Now, you tell me was Kristallnacht before the second time we were sent ... Polish Jews were sent away, or was it afterwards. There were two stages, the Kristallnacht I remember vividly, simply

**Tape 1: 21 minutes 52 seconds**

because ... now I can't understand my parents, whether they knew about the Kristallnacht, they must have known, but here I was, an eight year old coming to school, right, coming out of my house and walking down the street, and I remember seeing the smashed windows and going along and I came along to our Temple ...

RL: You have got your microphone ...

MM: That is the temple ... you can imagine it stands independently in the middle ...

RL: Do you want to just hold it up so the camera can get it? ... Ok ...

MM: And the German police were standing around, holding hands, around the temple, to make sure that nobody ... a crowd of people, watching it in flames, and I watched this and then I continued on towards my Jewish school. To this day I can't imagine that my ... we must have felt very safe, for me to be ... for a boy to just be able to walk out like that.

The other thing was the second time when the Polish Jews were picked up and they came along and they asked us to come along to the police station. My mother was ill, she had gallstones, and she was in bed, and so they just took my father and my sister and myself to the prison, that is a very, very, when I went back to Germany I went to look at the building, I could just look straight there you see, everybody was holding the bars, and everybody was sent away and on Friday, we were the only ones left in the cells, because everyone else had been sent away. But they couldn't send us away because my mother was still ill. And the SS man, there was an SS man called Von Papst, I remember his name again, tall beautiful, tall SS man, in his uniform. And he said to his men, as they were looking at us "Send them home, their mother has died." So, so we went home, and of course she was there, she was alive, with candles on the table. Many ... many years later I asked my mother, about this fellow ... firstly, how she knew his name was Von Papst anyway. She said yes, she said "Van Papst lived on the other side of the street and my father and he passed each other on the street and they said "Good morning" to each other. Whether that was enough for him to say a lie and send us home, or whether he was just fed up on a Friday and ... get rid of us, and that is how we came to remain in Germany, when lots of the Polish Jews, most had been sent away, and then we were just waiting how to get out of course, that was in '38.

RL: Just going back a little bit, if you can describe your home, what it was like? A description of where you were living ...

MM: Well, we were living on the Goethe Platz, which was a very central point ... how would I compare it ... Well, it was in a nice part of Hanover, quite central, we had as far

as I can see, we had, yes we had a living room and we had a parlour actually. One of those places where one never went into. Apart from three bedrooms, yes very spacious, in actual fact, to have lived like that in the 1930s, but I suppose in Germany one always

**Tape 1: 26 minutes 40 seconds**

lived that little bit better than one did here. I know when we came to England we lived in a little semi – you know, it was far less convenient of how we lived in Germany.

RL: Was it part of an apartment block?

MM: It was first floor of an apartment block. Not a big one, I suppose there were two flats on every floor and about maybe four floors.

RL: And were there other Jewish families in that apartment block?

MM: No, I don't know of any other Jewish families in that apartment. There may have been, there were certainly other Jews around. I know that on one particular place on the other side of the square where a family lived, and I remember we watched them all leaving. These people went to Australia, only recently I came across them you see. We watched them all one by one leaving, we were sort of desperate at the end, we were the only ones left. But of course, lots of German families remained. But in Germany at that time there wasn't much intercourse between the real German Jews and the Polish German Jews. The Polish German Jews were the sub class, that is how the Germans ... but I suppose the Germans always thought that they weren't going to be attacked, the only people who were going to be sent away were the Polish Jews. And I don't think we ever, I don't know of any friends that we had who were not Polish, or of Polish parentage somehow.

RL: So where did your father daven?

MM: This temple, over here ... was on the same street as a little Shtiebel, which was called the Becker Strasse Shtiebel. It was simply a house and a forecourt, and I don't think, maybe about a hundred people davened there, that is where we davened. We did go along to the temple on the odd occasion, we weren't completely ... it wasn't a reform temple, it was a Germanic Jewish, with a choir and a wonderful chazzan who went off to Johannesburg, I heard about him years later. And I think we did for odd occasions go along there, but we didn't daven there.

RL: Who was the chazzan?

MM: Chazzan Alter was his name.

RL: In the Shtiebel was there a Rav?

MM: I have not heard of any Rav in the Shtiebel, no, nor a Rebbe, no ...

RL: Was your father involved in Shul affairs, did he help in any way?

**Tape 1: 29 minutes 56 seconds**

MM: No, I don't think so. My father was never, I think my father liked to sit oiben on, he liked this idea, it was a very, very particular in those days about who got shlishi and who got shishi, and it made all the difference to his life if he did get shlishi or shishi, he ... as a result of this I am exactly the opposite, because I have seen what it does to you. But he actually wasn't, I don't think he would have had the time, if he was travelling all week anyway, you know, he had enough problems, without wanting to be involved in that sort of thing.

RL: How Jewish an area was the area that you were living in?

MM: I think it was the Jewish area. It was slightly on the outskirts of the very essence of the Jewish area, but within five minutes of it.

RL: What kind of community was there in Hanover?

MM: According to this thing over here there were about two and a half thousand Jews in Hanover. It was one of twelve centres in Germany.

RL: You say that The Temple was an orthodox Shul. Was there a reform Shul or other Shuls as well? Did you know of other ... ?

MM: I wasn't old enough to know the differences between the one or the other.

RL: What about Jewish shops?

MM: There must have been Jewish shops, simply because, I was thinking now about ... as I walked along the street and these windows were knocked in, I mean, they were Jewish shops, except they didn't look like Jewish shops. If we go down Leicester Road we know what is a Jewish shop, somehow, but in Germany this was not so. A Jewish shop would have been as clean, as modern, as a non-Jewish shop. On that basis, I remember walking down the street and seeing these windows knocked in, there must have been quite a few.

RL: How did your family get on with the non-Jewish neighbours in the apartment and around about?

MM: Very well actually, very well. Quite surprisingly so, because I am just thinking of a lady who lived opposite the Lumpenlager and she had, she had a fruit orchard outside town, and she was non-Jewish, and I remember to this day that when we went away she used to be sending letters to us, she was non-Jewish, about how my grandmother was faring, she was by herself. And so it was this case, and I believe there were other cases, I don't believe we had difficulties with the non-Jews as such. I, when I went to school, I

am thinking of one particular corner where we crossed the road in order to go to school, it was quite normal for kids to be waiting there to shout "dirty Jews" at us and to try to

**Tape 1: 33 minutes 44 seconds**

clobber us, not seriously, you know the way schoolboys fight, except in that there was a policeman there who wouldn't get involved, unless we hit them. So we got ... there was no talk there of your own self defence, it was just a case of hunching your shoulders and trying to get past. It wasn't a case of fighting back, you daren't fight back. I think everybody knew that you don't fight back otherwise you get a bloody nose. A Jew is not allowed to fight back.

RL: What school did you go to there?

MM: It seems to have been a Jewish nursery. There was a school opposite us, where I think my brothers had been, but they excluded Jews at a certain stage, so I always went to this Jewish ...

RL: Who did you play with as a child? Who were your friends?

MM: I don't remember that.

RL: Did you play with any of the non Jewish neighbours?

MM: Not that I know of. The funny thing is that I don't remember much of my childhood at all. The things that stand out are the burning of the Temple and those things. Those seem to have ... but some children can tell you exactly what they did at the age of seven ... I believe I used to like semolina, and if I used to run away, they offered me semolina, so my mother tells me and I came home straight away, you know, things like that and so on, I can't even remember it, its just that my mother told me about it. That I was found by a ... again by a maid who used to be with us, and she found me walking around the centre of Hanover, and she told me that there was semolina, but I don't remember it, I was just told about it.

RL: Did you belong to any clubs at all, or did your older brothers belong to anything?

MM: I don't know.

RL: Any youth organisations?

MM: No, I don't know that. No, my memory ... my brother is, I mean you saw the photograph of him, on his bicycle, over there you see. There is a place called the Waterloo Place, a big parade ground, next to the prison where I was actually. And in the middle of it there is a huge statue, to the German general who helped to wind the Battle of Waterloo, and I always remember that bicycle and my brother and he put me on the crossbars and cycling around the Waterloo Place on his crossbars. That is really all I remember about my brothers as well. It was the odd episode rather than anything more.

**Tape 1: 37 minutes 7 seconds**

RL: Just going back to the prison for a moment ... How long were you actually in that prison?

MM: Well, it couldn't have been for more than two or three days.

RL: What did you do whilst you were there?

MM: I don't know. Excepting I am told that my sister cried all the time and I never cried for a moment. I do remember holding onto the bars that is a memory. The rest is hearsay.

RL: Did the family ever go away on holiday?

MM: Yes, if we went on holiday we went to Göttingen, to visit, at the back of this Lumpenlager was a river, I remember being told that somebody had fallen into this river and had drowned and I must keep away from it, and it ran right at the back of this Lumpenlager, that was the only holidays we ever had. I think my mother went to Karlsbad in Czechoslovakia because she suffered from the gallstones, but she always went by herself and I don't remember going with her or going anywhere in fact.

RL: What about reading? Did you read books or magazines or comics or ... whatever children ... ?

MM: I remember nothing. I know, I know we learned to read the German script, you know there is a special German script, I learned that, I was able to read it, I don't remember reading any books.

RL: What about music?

MM: No. I don't think in those days from 33 to 39, things were so desperate, I don't think we did the normal things that normal people did. Because my father was away and my mother was busy borrowing money to try to buy bread, borrow here, pay back here, borrow there ... there wasn't the sort of atmosphere conducive to music or reading.

RL: How aware were you of the news? Did you have a radio or newspapers?

MM: We didn't. My uncle was that much more advanced than we were in everything. He had the latest things. He had a radio, and I remember we used to go along there and listen to this radio. It was a wonderful thing, we had never heard anything like it, so we didn't have it, but he did.

RL: Do you remember any discussions between your parents about the situation?

MM: No.

**Tape 1: 40 minutes 15 seconds**

RL: How aware were you? What did you feel about the situation, about what was going on? What were your feelings?

MM: I was out of it. Apart from as I told you just now, those odd occasions, I don't think I was really aware, to me it was normal. Remember from the age of two or three onwards this was normal. It is only people who realise it is abnormal who start to think about it. To me this was normal life, if a German boy came along and hit you, you just run ... and ...

RL: So how eventually did your family arrange to leave Germany/

MM: Well you could only leave when you had permission to come to England. It seems, the way it began was, there was a family called Greenberg in this town, one of them was a school teacher, and it seemed that for his education they went to Göttingen to the university and he ate, and oh yes, my grandmother had two sisters in Göttingen, the other sister was called Kahn. The Kahn's were a much more cultured family than all the rest of our family, they must have been involved with the university, Göttingen ... and they had a student eating there, and he was there, I think around about 35 or so, and he went home, and his sister, Bella Greenberg, she lived here and she was Bella Kahn afterwards, she corresponded with a family and then when all this happened she got in contact with some people in Manchester, a family called Singers and Adlers. I think Singers were the people from the dry cleaners here, and they started taking things very seriously and they tried to get people to ... and between them the Greenbergs and the Singers and the Adlers they first brought over the members of the people from Göttingen, the Kahns and the Wagners. And then from there onwards they then went on and brought the men over from Hanover, my father and my uncle, both uncles, because getting the men away seemed to be so important. And then in the end, just before the war, our, what were the called, our permission came through, our permit came through to take us. My mother didn't want to leave because her mother remained by herself. The British authorities wouldn't allow a lady in her, in her seventies to come, and my mother didn't want to leave, until my father sent her a threat and said "If you don't want to come at least send the children." Then we, I remember, Jack Kahn was one of the members of this family in Göttingen, who was more outward looking, he was used to travelling around, and he actually came over to Germany in order to help us to cross the frontier. Jack Kahn was a very, very, very cultured person. Later on he dealt in antiques, he understood virtually ... he understood German culture. Later on I could speak to him on any subject. He was quite different from the rest of my family, he came and he took us through the frontier. Then we went to Arnhem, where my brothers were, and we stayed with them for a day, and then we, then we went on the boat, not knowing, not knowing, of course my two brothers weren't allowed to go because they didn't have permits. Of course, years later we were told that the Captain was taking anybody.

RL: Your mother came with you?

**Tape 1: 45 minutes 27 seconds**

MM: Yes, my mother came with us. And we came to Harwich, and then we went on the train, and as we were on the train, war was declared. We went to London. I believe that we first went to the Refugee Committee. I think that they were in ... what was that street in London? A very famous street where the Jewish Refugee Committee were. Bloomsbury House. And then they put us on the train.

We came to Manchester ... another memory was of driving down Market Street, all the lights were still blazing, even though the war was on, and turning into Corporation Street, I just don't know why I can picture what was there, and of all those lights, and being told we were free. We never knew what freedom was really. Again, we came to a house in Fenney Street, Salford, and we came together with my mother's sister and her two children and now we were joined by the men, and we each had two rooms in the house. I don't know how we fitted in, at least three families that I know of that were in that house. And Singer came along the next morning and he says, he said "I am only a poor mechanic, I have no money, but I can give you a sewing machine, and I can get you some work, and I can lend you a sewing machine." That was it. From there onwards it was a slow climb up, first a bit of sewing at home, and then my father, my parents went out to work in the waterproof factory, they used to work for ... they used to work from ... they used to go out at seven, and I used to wait on the corner. At eight o'clock, then you grew up, you know, you did a bit of cooking. And then bit by bit .. they ... it was very hard for them, 30 shillings a week, the ... the Jewish community was not of much use, the orthodox community. I know my father wanted to, not to work on a Friday evening, he didn't work on a Friday evening, and ... he asked for his wages and he was told that, by the man who owned the factory who was I believe the president of the Synagogue, and he said "If you want your cards, if you want to go early on a Friday then everybody will want to go early, you can't, if you go you get your cards." "And he came and he got his cards." That was in the second week when he went to the factory. Then he went along to Machzikei Hadass to see if they could help him on the Sunday, and they asked him if he was Aguda or Mizrachi and he said Mizrachi ...

The people who did everything for us was the Refugee Committee. I think it is now called Jewish Relief. I am trying to remember the name of the lady ... Mrs ... it is always on the tip of my tongue, I will remember it soon. "Whatever you want, always come to me." They were on Brasennose Street. Mrs Phillips, they were wonderful.

RL: How did they help?

MM: They just helped with anything you needed. You told them you had a problem. I am not saying they would help the same day, they couldn't do a lot, but whatever you needed, they were there to help. They didn't ask you whether you were frum or not frum. Anyway ... right ...

RL: What work did you father find?

**Tape 1: 51 minutes 11 seconds**

MM: Pardon ...

RL: What work did your father find? You said when he was told that he could take his cards ... What work did he go on to?

MM: Oh, he had to go to another factory. But in those days the labour laws were so difficult. You can imagine, he worked in a place called Weinbergs in Southwell Street, and they, the stairs were very high, and they came to take the parcels, they came to take the parcels of ... They were shmeering (?), they were doing this waterproofing you see, and he would take my mother's parcel. He would say he would take it down for her so that she could work, and the manager would say "No, she has got to carry her own." And, you see people ... there was a chappy called, do you remember? Was it Sidney Baker? Counsellor Baker? Do you remember Alderman Baker? He was ... I remember my mother telling me, when my father was refused the right to carry it for her, he was a cutter, in that factory, and he must have had some pull there as you would say, and then he would go and carry it down. He was always very helpful, in everything ... in everything because if I remember right, later on he became Alderman Baker didn't he. He already at that time seemed to know the ropes, and he was very helpful. Then of course there were the Singers and the Adlers.

RL: Where did your father daven?

MM: Oh he went straight ... he davened in the same place as I daven now, in the Rumanian, in the North Salford, which was, which was at that time it was in Broughton, so we could always walk down from Fenney Street. Later on we moved around the corner from the Shul. In those days we were the Jewish refugees in the Shul ... and again ... there were, there were ... there was a lot of class consciousness going on. I try to feel ... after the war, when those boys came over from the concentration camp, in Northumberland Street and nobody wanted to have anything to do with them, and I thought, this is a normal thing ... the same thing happened to me.

RL: Were there other refugee families who joined that Shul or were you the only ... ?

MM: There were other families. My feeling was that it was, it was a fellowship of refugees in this town. One didn't really feel at home as well, and they couldn't really understand. They weren't having suffering in the same way, there was a fellowship of refugees.

RL: And you say that you left your grandmother behind. You haven't actually told me anything about her. If you could just tell me your memories of her.

**Tape 1: 55 minutes 3 seconds**

MM: My grandmother, she lived in the next street to where the Lumpenlager was, there was something called the Grosseduffen Strasse and the Kleineduffen Strasse. The Kleineduffen Strasse was a little street to where the Lumpenlager was, and she was around the corner, in Grosseduffen Strasse. I remember we used to go there for Shabbos, and I always remember sitting in the room with her as the lights went, as it went darker outside. For some reason or other, I don't know, it was going darker all the time outside, it was going darker inside as well, whether they never kept the lights on or not, but you could sit there in the evening, and behind you there was this grandmother of mine with a Tzeno Ureno, she was praying in Yiddish and outside it was going dark, you know it was this feeling, this feeling of Shabbos going out, which I have never felt since then, it was very much on our minds then, you could feel Shabbos going out as it got dark and the Tzeno Ureno and that sort of thing. There was still a bit of this when we got to England, because when we used to go to the Romainische Shul on Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur, the women were sobbing upstairs, I mean you don't hear that anymore, in those days, maybe there was much more to sob about in those days, maybe it was their way of davening. Today our women have been to school and they have been to sem and they know how to daven, in those days maybe they didn't know how to daven, but they were always sobbing and you could hear that, and that was, that was one of my memories of, and my grandmother, she wore a sheitel, as you can see in that picture there ...

RL: We can look at the pictures later ... yes ...

MM: She looked older, I think she looked older than she was. But when you are young everyone looks old. She spoke mainly Yiddish, I don't think she spoke German, my family spoke Yiddish mainly, although my mother was very fluent in German. My mother was quite cultured. My father spoke Yiddish, his German always had this Yiddish inflection about it.

RL: Now this film is about to end I think we will just stop there.

## TAPE 2

RL: This is the interview with Marcus Mechlowitz and it is tape 2. I was just thinking that I hadn't asked you if you had had a religious education while you were in Germany? You spoke about going to a religious nursery school ...

MM: Well I should imagine the nursery was a Jewish nursery. What does a child up to the age of eight learn here?

RL: Well, to read Hebrew ... and ...

MM: Yes, all that was part ... it was an orthodox Jewish school or nursery ... I certainly wasn't deficient in Jewish knowledge when I came to this country.

**Tape 2: 1 minute 18 seconds**

RL: And were you, was the family involved in any Zionist activity, or belonged to any Zionist organisations?

MM: I don't know. I do think that the family were, they were certainly Mizrachi, there is no question about that. One of the members of the Wagner family was very prominent in Zionist matters, Kali Wagner. There was, there were about four people, five people, in Berlin, one of them was later on the Minister for Religion in Israel, he only died two years ago, the other one is Rabbi Altman here, and then there was a group of them who were the big Mizrachists in Berlin, and they all went off to Israel in 1933/34. So they actually did go to Israel, but the rest were certainly very sympathetic, but whether there was a movement in Germany at that age I wouldn't know, my father always regarded himself as a Mizrachist, to his ... to the fact that he couldn't get any assistance because of it.

RL: How did you feel when eventually the family left Germany? What were your feelings about leaving ... as a child ... how did you view this episode?

MM: I think without knowing anything, you see it lifted a weight off my shoulders, you see when we arrived in England I remember the feeling of joy as we drove down Market Street into Corporation Street. It was just like ... you know ... arriving, arriving in heaven, you know. So I probably didn't know enough about what was going on in Germany, but I did feel that something had been taken off my back, and that feeling has never left me, I mean, even during the worst period in England, when things were very difficult during the war, I was always feeling very elated, somehow that feeling of having left Germany has been with me ever since.

RL: What were your first impressions of this country, besides that feeling of elation. I mean the difference between what you were used to there and what you found here?

MM: I think in Germany I always had to be careful in whatever I did. I could not relax. I had to make sure I didn't do this or didn't do that etc. and here you could do whatever you want, as long as it was reasonable, you didn't have to worry.

RL: You commented on the houses being different.

MM: Yes, I think Germany at that time was already far ahead than we were. So, Hanover seemed to be a much more civilised place, developed, and when I think about the main roads in Germany at that time, the main stores, I remember that, today, in my mind I can walk up towards the centre of town, and the huge big buildings and stores and they remind me very much of what England is like today, whilst England at that time was nothing like it.

RL: How were the stores different?

**Tape 2: 5 minutes 55 seconds**

MM: They seemed to be more light. It was cleaner looking, more modern looking, I always felt that it was superior in that respect to when I arrived in England. On the other hand in England we were free, we can do, and there was no stiffness here. The stiffness in Germany was still there. In so far as I say, the Germans were very courteous, always very courteous to us. We knew they didn't like us, but they were always very courteous. But it was a sort of formality, whilst here we didn't know what people thought about us, but it was informal, it was relaxed, we didn't care what they thought about us or what we thought about them. The atmosphere was quite different.

RL: What luggage were you allowed to bring over with you?

MM: Well ... actually, there was even I even believe a lift with our furniture, I don't know, I don't know. Well we had no money so it didn't make any difference, we had no money left. But I believe there was a limit, but we had no money anyway, but we did have our belongings, our furniture and I remember my mother still having furniture from Germany in our house here.

RL: As a child, what did you bring with you?

MM: I had nothing that I remember, no, I can't remember playing with any toys at all.

RL: Did anybody have to supervise the packing of the cases?

MM: I am too young to know that.

RL: And then, coming over here, when you first came, how long was it before you went to school, where you ... ?

MM: Virtually within days of the war and evacuation seemed to be very, very quick. So much so that we couldn't speak a word of English and the four of us, my two cousins, who came with us, and my sister and I, the four of us, only knew one word altogether that we were told to say when we got to Blackpool when we were evacuated, so it must have been a few days after we arrived.

RL: What was the word?

MM: Altogether. Well my sister and I, no, I think all four of us, we were first with an old couple with a dog who were deaf, and they really did treat us like evacuees, because the dog had to eat first, he was on the table, he had to eat first, and then we were given. And the next few words that we learned were "no more bread" "no more tea", those were the next few words of English.

**Tape 2: 9 minutes 38 seconds**

Then we were thrown out to walk around Blackpool until it was time for tea, and we couldn't have been there all that long, I think we were there for the winter, we may have been there a bit longer. The only bit of daylight in all this was, we were miserable, very miserable, the only daylight was that there was a family, the family Hammelbergers, who, who, because I think, because Mr Hammelberger was ... I think he was the shammas or something, but he was evacuated with his family and we met them there and they invited us round for Friday evening. I remember that, that was wonderful, because Michael was also very young, so I don't think he remembers too much because he is younger than I am. They were very, very nice to us. Apart from that there was a Jewish school there, but I have no memories very much of that school, but then things ... we were very miserable and my parents would come in on the Ribble bus to Blackpool and we would sort of be weeping as she went back, and in the end she decided that ... I think also they used to treat us quite well in the winter, but when it came to the summer there were boarding houses everywhere, which was a bit better than these old deaf people, but when it got to the summer they really did want us out because they could take in paying guests, and then it suited everybody that we went back to Manchester. So we got back to Manchester well in time for the blitz.

RL: Where was your family living?

MM: They were living in Fenney Street, so you had the Rabbi, Rabbi Ochs opposite, he was the Rabbi of the Shul. And Chazzan Gross of course, you know Moshe Gross. They lived two doors away, and there were soldiers, and I was a sergeant and he was only a private. That is the only time I was ever able to give him any commands, ever since then it has been the other way round.

RL: Did your father have to report to the police?

MM: Yes, he used to have to report to the police regular, but it was ... they were very, very special people, the police, they were very, very nice to us. And there was one time also when we were called in. My father and uncle were called in because they wanted to bomb Hanover and they wanted to know the layout of everything on the map. So we were called in for that purpose as well. Of course we had stateless passports, because all the passports were taken away.

RL: So when you returned to Manchester ... What did you do then? Were you sent to school?

MM: Then of course the Jewish school was working until it was blitzed. I remember going up Derby Street, when ... during the day, funny enough during the day after the blitz, because there were fire hoses, we were actually jumping over the fire hoses, stretching all across, all the way up Derby Street and we actually saw our school burning and the teacher collected us as we were standing outside and he said "Well, we have to go on with our lessons", and we walked down Derby Street and there was a school on the

**Tape 2: 14 minutes 13 seconds**

corner of Derby Street, on the other side, called the Waterloo Road school and we went in and we managed to get them to give us a classroom and then we were, we went on with our work.

RL: How long had you been attending the school in Derby Street before it was blitzed?

MM: Well, I suppose it was blitzed in 41 wasn't it, so I must have been there for about a year.

RL: How did you get on with the other children at the school?

MM: They were ... in Derby Street in those days, they were a rough lot, oh yes, they were pretty rough, I am sure there must have been quite a few criminals amongst them. It was quite different from later on, from when I went to ... to ...to the other schools. I think Derby Street in those days was a rough area, Cheetham Hill was a rough area, and the Jews were rough.

RL: Did you make friends there?

MM: No, no, no ... I had no friends ... I think ... Moshe Gross, was my friend, at that time, and then we started picking up one or two people as we went to cheder.

RL: Where were Moshe Gross's family from?

MM: They were from Hungary, he came over in 38 I think, and he lived with his uncle, Chazzan Gross.

The next thing I remember actually, this was quite a bit later was, but there was a Rebbe, a little bit down from Fenney Street, half way towards the Shul, on the other side, and he gave Bar Mitzvah lessons, and I think I was already learning with him before that. I used to go in there, and he had his old fashioned methods, you know, of slapping you, you know, in a nice way, when you weren't learning. His name was Solly, yes his name was Solly, he was a cripple, and he was giving lessons, he was actually giving lessons in quite ... quite elementary, Chumash and reading and Chumash and Rashi, that was what we did then, until the Bar Mitzvah.

RL: Which children were attending that Cheder?

MM: I can't remember any of them. But they were local children.

RL: Derby Street ... How was your English at this point?

**Tape 2: 17 minutes 17seconds**

MM: Well, it was improving, because, let me see, yes the eleven plus only got me as far as Ducie Street, which was not a full secondary school, it was the next stage down, and it took me another year for me to sit again to get to Central High, which was ... which was not quite to the standard of Manchester Grammar, but it was pretty good, a very good school, so my English must have been improving.

RL: What language did you speak at home?

MM: German and Yiddish.

RL: Did your parents pick up English?

MM: Very slowly.

RL: How did you pick up the language, was it informally? Or did you have any lessons?

MM: I picked it up informally, but funny enough, I have been told this by others, we always did better in English than the other pupils, simply because we were more aware of it, it was always my best subject, English, and later on English Literature and I have been told this by others.

RL: What were your memories of the blitz? Because you said you came back to Manchester just in time for the blitz ...

MM: We had in Fenney Street, at the bottom of Fenney Street, on the corner of Great Clowes Street, there was a park called the Great Clowes Park, and there was a library facing the entrance of Fenney Street on the other side backing onto Great Clowes Park, and under the library was a big shelter, there was one shelter, and there was another shelter just about 200 yards away on Fenney Street. First we used to go along to the shelter on Fenney Street, I remember it was a wonderful experience, we used to go in the middle of the night ... because there was a girl singing there with a voice like Gracie Fields, and it was wonderful, the way she used to entertain, and there were people coming in and out, and for some reason, I don't know why, when the blitz came we were in the shelter underneath the library. Maybe it was supposed to be a better shelter, because a landmine fell on Great Clowes Street, facing the library, and the library fell in, in fact I got a little cut here ... from the thing falling in, and of course I wasn't injured otherwise. That was my memory of the blitz.

RL: So the library that was on top of the shelter ...

MM: It was actually ... it didn't actually get a direct hit, it was a land mine on Great Clowes Street in front of the library, but the shock of it was such that the library fell in and so the shelter had some damage to it. I don't think we were dug out ... I think just

**Tape 2: 20 minutes 47seconds**

some things fell in, it wasn't very serious.

RL: Were the houses intact?

MM: Our houses were intact, at a certain stage, well we always went to the shelter ... my uncle ... my uncle wouldn't go, he stayed upstairs, he said he wasn't going. We used to run, we used to come back, it became a nightly event. Later on we moved from Fenney Street down to Bedford Street which was right the street past the Shul, from Ramsgate Street onto Bury New Road, now there already we had an Anderson Shelter. We had a shelter, one of these ... it wasn't an Anderson shelter, it was one of these steel structured tables, you sort of, you went to sleep inside that steel box, so then I don't ever remember there going to any shelters because we had our steel box that we just climbed into.

RL: When, how long were you in Fenney Street before you moved to Bedford Street, when do you think that move was?

MM: I think it was already, it must have been already been about 42.

RL: Do you know why the family moved?

MM: Well we got our own house, as I explained to you, in Fenney Street I think there were two rooms to a family of four people to do everything in and all of us, all the three of us, the minute were able to ... my auntie moved to two doors away in Bedford Street ...all the three of us were able to move to a proper house, one up and one down,

RL: What other wartime memories do you have?

MM: I don't think I felt there was a serious problem, I don't remember food or rationing ... the things that stand out were when the Germans invaded Holland, that was a shock. You know sometimes you say "Where were you when Kennedy was assassinated?" Now I can say the same thing about where was I when the Germans invaded Holland, because then we realised ... we thought actually that my brothers would get away, we kept waiting, but they never did.

The next time round was when Germany attacked Russia, that was another ... then we knew things were going to improve ... but that ...the stress was going to be taken away from this country. Those are the times that particularly stand out, apart of course from listening to Churchill. Those were the big memories.

RL: Did you have your own radio ...

MM: Yes, oh yes. We were glued to it.

RL: Where were you when Germany invaded Holland?

MM: Well, when Germany invaded Holland, I had just gone across the street, we used to go to a bakery shop in Fenney Street, so I came in there and they told us "Did you

**Tape 2: 24 minutes 35 seconds**

hear?" I am just trying to remember exactly where I was when Germany invaded Holland, I remember it, it affected me.

RL: So you had been receiving letters from your brothers. When did those letters stop?

RL: Well they stopped in 42 when they went into the camps. Since then I haven't read the letters, my sister sent them to me, I was bequeathed them when she died, but they wrote ... they wrote "why don't you bring us across?" of course the English government didn't see any point in taking people from a neutral country into a country at war. They couldn't have known ... "Why don't you bring us across?" Of course we tried but we couldn't get permission, and we are well etc ... later on, one of my cousins survived, and he wrote a book actually, Walter Schwinger , he wrote a book, I don't know if you remember Ruth Feuer. Do you remember Ruth? She married Walter Schwinger. Well he wrote a book, I have given it to my children to read, I haven't read it, but in it he writes that whilst they were writing to us that they were well and everything, they were actually starving. They used to send their letters to a cousin in America who would send them on to us.

RL: When did you find out what actually did happen to them?

MM: Well that is another ... they went to Auschwitz and Birkenau, we have got all the dates. There is a museum in Nahariya where my sister found all the details.

RL: And your grandmother?

MM: She went to Theresienstadt, we were getting letters from this lady I was telling you about, in this fruit orchard, she was trying to keep in touch with her, and then we lost touch, but we understand ... at one time we thought she had died of natural causes in Theresienstadt, but later on I think we felt ... that she didn't.

RL: So, during the war years and going to school, did you join any clubs or do any extra activities?

MM: Well after school, after school we came home ... my father had started up in business, and I used to help him, I used to go first to Machzikei Hadass Shul, I was thrown out of there because I went to B'nei Akiva, they gave me ... they gave me adequate warning I must say, but the Yeshiva ... so really the only people I knew were the people who went to school. We had a Jewish room at school, where we used to eat, I must say the Central High School was very tolerant, everything was done for the Jews,

we had our Jewish room, we had our own Jewish prayers, we could hear the hymns next door, and I don't think I made any friends at school, just acquaintances, my friends really were made from Moshe Gross and that crew from B'nei Akiva. Not that I am ... I am not a very friendly type, I don't make friends very easily, I am a loner.

**Tape 2: 28 minutes 59 seconds**

RL: Were there other refugee children at B'nei Akiva that joined B'nei Akiva?

MM: Yes ... Do I know any refugee children? Not many, no, I don't think so. I don't remember any.

RL: You mentioned that there was like a refugee community that the family mixed in.

MM: My father, when he was working at the factory, there were others who came across at the same time as he, and they had that kinship because they had the same experiences. And they all went in different directions and into different businesses etc, and one still knew them. But there was no close friendship between any of them.

RL: Do you remember any of them by name ... these families ...

MM: I remember, I remember Leo Stein was always, I think he was working, working in one of the factories. By name, we just put names to them ... apart from which I mean .. most of them, most of them passed on. If you take people like the Englanders, whose ... the children and the grandchildren are still around, but of course my father knew the grandparents you see, so they all passed on so long ago ... that ... we are talking about the grandchildren.

RL: You say that your father opened his own ... ?

MM: He started making hand bags, I mean in those days it was shopping bags, during the war, out of rexin, he started working from home, I used to come home from work in order to help in the cutting room before I went to cheder, that was my job.

RL: Was this at home or ... ?

MM: At home, yes ...

RL: At home ...

MM: At home ... we used one of the bedrooms upstairs, it was turned into a cutting room, and then ... it was outdoor work, it was only very much later that we moved into our own premises, I was trying to remember when it was, it was certainly after the war.

RL: What gave him the idea to start doing that?

MM: I think there were other refugees who were doing the same. It was, in so far as, during the war, there was no way of carrying anything, there was no leather around, because it was all used for the war effort, so they had to find what sort of material. They couldn't just have paper bags, so then it was a case of ... for some reason rexin

**Tape 2: 28 minutes 59 seconds**

whatever that was, was available, either in off cuts or in rolls, and then you had to cut something out of it, sew it together and hey ho you have got a shopping bag and you can go shopping with it, so these were the needs of the war, and since prior to this there were only ladies handbags in leather, they then moved from rexin onto plastic and then it was a new industry.

**Tape 2: 32 minutes 36 seconds**

RL: So in the house, were there people actually working for him? Or was he doing this for himself?

MM: No, no ... we used to get somebody in to do the cutting, I remember Issy Steinberg, he used to come along cutting, and, there was no machining done in the house, that was all taken out ...

RL: And did he build up customers, a customer base ... How did he build up a customer base, or how was it passed on once it ... ?

MM: Yes we had ... specially after the war, from 45 onwards, people came back from the war and they were looking for things to do, so they went on the market and they would come along and buy these things and sell them on the market, so all the people I knew, when you see the young people starting off after the war. Because it was a new trade, and everybody was looking for something new, and this was obvious, I mean the raincoat trade and all those trades were in the hands of people who were established, so a refugee would always be looking for something new, that offered him the possibility of coming in at ground level.

RL: So, they were really involved with the making up of the bags and not the selling?

MM: ... as well ...

RL: They were involved with the ...

MM: All you did, you really had market men coming in who would buy them, later on I suppose there were wholesalers, but that was very much later. It began as a market trade.

RL: So you learned how to cut?

MM: That is right ... putting studs in was my speciality, you had a little machine with a treadle and you would put the studs in, so they would wait for me to come back from school to do my, the amount of studying I have got to do, and putting these studs in the handbags etc etc, and then I would go off to cheder.

**Tape 2: 34 minutes 56 seconds**

RL: How long did you attend cheder? When did you actually leave cheder?

MM: Well I never really stopped I never stopped, I never stopped cheder ... until I was ... when I was sent away from Machzikei Hadass I attended evening classes in the Yeshiva and that continued right up to, shall we say right up to 1947, and in 1947 I went up to London, and spent a year where we did Yeshiva in the morning and we did, in the afternoon we did Latin or Roman history, those were my subjects, German literature, French literature, so this was done at ... with an external course from London university, and then we took exams at the University, but I was only there for a year, I got my inter and then my father called me back because the war in Israel had finished and he wanted to go to Israel, I think it was in 19 ... just after the war 1949, just come back and look after the business for a bit ... and that was the end of my studies.

RL: Right ...

MM: There was a point in it, why I went to London, you see, when all this happened in 1946 or so I was in B'nei Akiva, and of course I wanted to go, I wanted to go onto the kibbutz in Israel. Everybody at that time wanted to go on the kibbutz in Israel. We were all fighting with our parents ... and my father, preferred me to go either to ... either to Yeshiva ... there was also the teacher at Central High School, who one evening knocked on the doors and came to see my father and my father said "Was will er?" "What does he want?" because he couldn't speak proper English, it seems that he wanted me to go and sit for Oxford, I was quite good at literature and English and he felt that is what I should be doing, and he wanted to speak to my father about it. So here I was, I wanted to go to kibbutz, he thought that was a good idea for my education and my father wanted me to go into business anyway and if anything go to Yeshiva. So in the end a compromise was ... my father didn't want me to go to Israel, simply because I had lost my two brothers ... so, he felt that was it. So that is why I went to London really, it wasn't because I really wanted to study, it was just a compromise between all of them. Between the teacher, the Yeshiva, and my going away, so ... and that ... once the war came to an end in Israel father wanted to go to Israel. I came back here and then I started working in business and I never left.

RL: Just going back to your days in B'nai Akiva, can you tell me a little bit about B'nai Akiva in those days and what you did and how it was run?

MM: B'nai Akiva in those days was the way it is today. We had some wonderful madrichim, I remember Benno Penner and Herbert Laster, who was later on killed on an El Al plane over Milan, over Italy. And then there was, then there was a chappie called

Alan Miller who later on became the head of ... of the Reconstructionist Synagogue in America, an amazing change over, but these were charismatic ... I very rarely meet people with charisma, but all three of them had charisma, and of course Zionism was such that your charisma showed, there was, in those days there were Rabbis of those days, like Kopul Rosen, there was charisma there, there was Rabbi Ordman, there was

**Tape 2: 39 minutes 44 seconds**

charisma there, these were people, I have never, ever seen the likes of them. Over the years, maybe the nature of life has brought it out, Israel and the war etc, but you know ... so therefore I wanted to go to Israel because of that.

B'nai Akiva in those days consisted of a number of reasonably religious people, but a vast number of non religious people who were interested in B'nai Akiva who actually ended up in going to Israel and forming the kibbutzim. They were the ones, not the religious ones, the people who came from non religious homes and became religious and they went on to Lavi and they were the ones who really survived everything. The religious ones I don't think, I think they never went to Israel. The others sort of embraced it totally.

RL: What sort of activities did you have?

MM: Oh, we used to have the ... of course later on it went on to TVA, it moved on as we got older, to the age of 18, but you had, you had Shabbos morning, the Shabbos morning minyan. I was the Gabbai of the minyan for years. It is something I cannot understand to this day, and in fact chose a different atmosphere, I went along to the Rosh Yeshiva, Reb Yidel's father in the Yeshiva, I asked him "I have come from B'nei Akiva, and I would like to know the dinim of how to put on, how to put a separation between the boys and the girls ... and quite unlike his son, he said "Oh you have come from B'nei Akiva", he put his arms around me, and he says "Come on son, let me show you what you want etc. etc." completely different atmosphere from the days of the tzaddik and later on when everyone went berserk. Nothing like that, no one went berserk. Rabbi Jacobs was very prominent, giving us shiurim. Casper ... Bernard Casper. They were all very tolerant, very tolerant.

In the afternoon we would have an oneg Shabbat, we would have speakers, I always remember, Sidney Hamburger was always available for anything we needed, he always helped, he was always there for us. And that was all afternoon until the evening, and we used to walk down from Singleton Road, right down to the bottom of Bury New Road. We used to pick up Gubby Haffner on the way, Gubby Haffner was one of the crowd, one of our crowd, Moshe and I used to pick him up on the way up, of course he went off to Israel, off to the kibbutzim.

RL: Did you have outings during the week? Did you used to meet during the week at all?

MM: No ... nothing much happened during the week, we couldn't really, when you look at my timetable, there was nothing much there for during the week. Maybe Sunday? Possibly, I don't know. Yes, obviously there was camps. Camp was a big thing, camps and weekends and conference weekends, and lots of going down to London and staying with the London people. Or sometimes even places like Hull in those days, B'nei Akiva used to go down to Hull in those days for meetings and Liverpool, because these small communities were still there, but everything was over the weekends.

**Tape 2: 43 minutes 49 seconds**

RL: Did you go to camps?

MM: Oh yes.

RL: Do you remember which camps you went to?

MM: No. I remember picking potatoes ... down in Bickerstaff which is near Preston. No, I am afraid to get them mixed up with the summer schools that I went to later on when I was in TVA you see.

RL: So would you say that B'nai Akiva really formed your social circle?

MM: Oh, very much, very much. And Zionism was everything to us. And I don't ever remember there being any real Chassidism as such, I mean, the ... obviously the Machzikei Hadass was there, but you take a man like Dayan Golditch at that time, very outward looking, very helpful, even Rabbi Feldman, who was again very outward looking, it was only after the war that the Manchester that we know today came out. I think possibly this is what Judaism is all about, the gedorim, the fences go up as they are required, and after the war when we came onto this modern age, post modern age, where anything goes, the community raised its gedorim, its fences, so that we became more inward looking, because we had to. I suppose this is how it works. I am not a sociologist, but I can imagine that, unfortunately we needed to build these defences, because we used to go to non Jewish schools, I had no problem, we used to go to non Jewish schools, excepting that very few of the children remained very frum. I mean the sons of the Rabbonim and the Dayonim all went up there, and they were standing on soap boxes and spouting communism, everybody was a bit pink in those days, only we were pink in a Zionist way, whilst others were pink in a non Zionist way, but everybody was pink ... that was taken for granted.

RL: Where your parents, was your father interested in politics?

MM: No, no, no, the only politics he knew was, was it good for the Jews or was it not good for the Jews?

RL: So what did you do ... was there ever any time for entertainment? You know for going out ...

MM: Yes, there was the cinema at the Rialto, and there was one on Great Cheetham Street further along ... further up, and there was another cinema on Broughton Lane, which had rats running across the screen, and I used to go a lot to the cinema, yes. Generally they were war films, you know in which we served, that sort of thing.

RL: What about other forms of entertainment? Dances or the theatre or ...

**Tape 2: 47 minutes 40 seconds**

MM: Well you couldn't really ... there was Maccabi and Waterpark, as I grew older I used to go along to Maccabi and Waterpark and later on we used to go to South Manchester Maccabi, yes, there was Jewish dances, and of course dancing was acceptable at weddings. In those days a wedding was still a very, very pleasant occasion to go to.

RL: In what way?

MM: The dancing and the music etc., you know, not like today, today where the men and the women are separate, and the whole thing is just obscene.

RL: When do you think that change started?

MM: No, I don't think I can put this down. It certainly started, it certainly started after the war in Israel. It certainly started bit by bit from 48 onwards. I know why. I don't know when. I know why it happened, because I know that we couldn't afford in our dangerous world any more to fraternise away the way we could before.

RL: Do you remember the day when the state of Israel was declared? What you were doing? Where you were?

MM: No I can't remember where I was at that time. I think I was in London actually. I was already in London, throughout that war. And then of course in 49 my father wanted to go to ... that is when I came home of course ...

RL: So how long did your father go for?

MM: Oh, in those days it wasn't how long you went for; it was how long it took. Because I went, I first went over in 1950 that was when I asked my father, you go, as long as I can go. You travelled ... you travelled from here to London, across the channel, across France, and then you went to Marseilles, and you took a boat across, and then a train and you go to Haifa. So the travelling alone could take at least a week, and travelling back took a week, so if you went you automatically had to go for four weeks.

RL: Was his just a visit? It wasn't with a view to staying on?

MM: Oh no, I think it was with a view of buying a plot of land if he could. Look, he had come out of hell, and then to come to Israel in 49, nobody else could feel it in the same way as he did.

RL: Did he buy his plot of land?

MM: Well I think he put money in the bank and it had devalued, Israelis found a way of emptying his pockets, as they still do.

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RL: So he came back but you continued on in the business?

MM: Yes, I stayed on in the business, and this was 1950, and he died in 1959. Well he became ill three or four years later and then of course I realised that we didn't want to carry on the business the way we did, dealing with markets and that sort of thing, I think he just, he just was happy to sink into the background and let me run it.

RL: How did you change things?

MM: How did I change ...? Well for one thing I tried to ... well ... the first thing, my father came back from Israel and before he came into the business he met somebody, this fellow Englisher, who said to him "Ha ha, you're going to get a shock. Your son has been replacing old for new", and I have done the most dreadful thing, which nobody ever thought about, that if a customer came along to complain that there was something wrong with it, then I would replace it. And I would go along to a customer, one particular fellow, and I would go along to visit him, and he had taken his stock off me and it wasn't selling. And I said "I will tell you what, let me take it back and I will give you something else that will sell." And he came back, and of course it was a big joke in town that I had done this, but actually it was a trick, because if you look after your customers then he looks after you. I don't think even Marks and Spencer had thought about at that stage just taking returns, and from there onwards I didn't want to deal with people who ... you know market men who didn't live up to their ... I went out into real shops and stores and by the time I had finished in the bag business it was one of the biggest in the country.

RL: When did you finish?

MM: I was running a store within a store in Woolworths, about a thousand shops at the very end. And then when Woolworths got a takeover in 1986 it was time to say goodbye.

RL: And did it have a name? What was the name of the business?

MM: It was Northern Leather Goods, was the end product. I had gone through various stages, you know, but that was the end, sort of, when I took over the complete handbag business, purses and shopping bags and things, and..... I was the biggest buyer in the

country, because I was running a thousand shops on their behalf, with my own stock. ... and I was going to retire, but I didn't retire, but that is another story.

RL: Before you became their main supplier had you been supplying other retail shops?

MM: Yes, I had started off, I started off by, by getting the shoe companies, who had never had handbags before, getting them to take handbags into their shops, and then, and then there was this company in Littlewoods, in Liverpool, John Moores I knew personally, and he thought I was his blue eyed boy in his shops. And then of course when

**Tape 2: 55 minutes 36 seconds**

Woolworths came along, and they couldn't, they didn't know how to run the handbag business, and I had to give up all the other things to take over Woolworths handbag business until the very end, and that lasted ... that lasted for about 15 years ...

RL: So from about 1971ish ...

MM: Yes ...

RL: You were just supplying Woolworths ...

RL: Right ... right ...

So the handbags by then were not ... they were made of all different materials?

MM: Oh yes, of course, we had moved on, by that time ... we started off making rexin shopping bags, and then plastic came out and we made plastic shopping bags, and then plastic handbags and then of course after that the manufacturing finished because we started importing from China, and then I used to go to China, I took Dolly to China three times, maybe 20 years ago, we haven't been, it is time we went again.

RL: So you would buy them in?

MM: Oh yes, we virtually bought everything in Hong Kong and China towards the end.

RL: And supplied the shops?

MM: Uha ...

RL: So when did you cease manufacturing?

MM: Around about in 1974 ...

RL: I think this film is about to end, so I will stop ...

**TAPE 3**

RL: This is the interview with Marcus Mechlowitz and it is Tape 3.

So, coming on to meeting your marriage partner and how that came about ...

MM: Well this came about by a shidduch. In a very secular way. There was a young man called Gaby Rosenblum who used to go for Pesach to Knocke, and he sat in the hotel, he and his wife sat next to a lady and her daughter, which was Dolly here, and they used to meet every Pesach, and as she was coming to marriageable age, 17, 18, he said

**Tape 3: 1 minute 2 seconds**

well, for some reason he knew about me ... he knew about me in Manchester, I think he knew my father, he didn't really know me well, but he said "I have a feeling I have someone I would like to introduce you too." Gaby Rosenblum was a secular Jew, although he was very learned, he had learnt in his youth but he was an atheist. So it wasn't one of those frum shidduchim. The mother said "Yes", of course she knew nothing about it, and I was in touch with them, and then I said "Ok", I was already 30. And I was going to Israel regularly and I said "On my way back from Israel I will drop into Brussels and we will meet." And so I was in the Hotel Metropole carrying the Financial Times as was agreed, her mother drove in her car, she was driving a little Topolino car. She drove up towards Brussels to see friends, and on the way the mother said, "By the way, whilst we are in Brussels I want you to meet somebody." And of course she was going to turn back, because she wasn't interested, but she was prevailed upon, and they then came to the Hotel Metropole. I was sitting in the garden and I think they went around and around and around, looking me up and down to decide if there was any point at all in saying hello, which they did. And we were talking. And then a very, very interesting thing happened, after we were talking for some time, I said "Where are you going on holiday?" And she said "Well we are going down to ... I am going to summer school in Italy and I am going to Paris on such and such a day in August." This was around about May. And she said when she was going, which day, and I said "That is funny, I am going on the same day, I think ..." And I went upstairs to my room and I came down and I bought the ticket, and in those days it was difficult to leave England because there weren't enough planes ... and you had to book just to get out. I had for some reason booked myself a plane to go to Paris on that day in August, not knowing what I was going to do. But to get out of England and to go for a holiday somewhere, and it was the same morning, and that set things in motion. I then met her again in Paris and then ... not having booked my holiday, people would say I was getting keen. So I decided – you are going to Italy, I think I may go to Italy. I phoned a friend and I took a car in Milan, and I posed as her older cousin, coming ... who was in Italy, and I was going to take her out. And I took her out every day; that was in August. And so it went on until Christmas. New Years eve I proposed, and that is the end of the story.

RL: You say you used to visit Israel quite often?

MM: I used to go every year.

RL: Did you ever think of living there?

MM: I couldn't really, because I was the only son, and my parents were here and getting older, it just couldn't be done, it just wasn't the right thing to do. I would have loved to have gone, obviously.

RL: Where did you get married?

MM: We got married in Antwerp.

**Tape 3: 4 minutes 56 seconds**

RL: What is your wife's background?

MM: Her parents were in the diamond trade. Her mother's father once lived in Amsterdam, also in the diamond trade and they moved over. They also came from Polish parentage. I think her father, he was also Antwerpian? Wasn't he? I think he originally came from Russia, he was in fact in the Russian army during the war, and they had hidden during the war, my mother in law, being blond was able to walk around, and of course the boys were actually working, in between moving and hiding. I think my father in law wasn't allowed to go out, he looked so Jewish. And they survived.

RL: Where did you go to live after marriage?

MM: Right here ...

RL: Which street? Which house?

MM: Here.

RL: Into this house itself.

MM: Into this house. We found this house a week before we got married. At the time it just consisted of ... there was no real upstairs, it was just like a flat, and she was living in Belgium, I didn't even wait, I just bought it on the spot.

RL: Right ... and that was 1960 ... '60/'61 ...

MM: Yes ... 2 ...

RL: 2 ... 62 ... ok ... and what children do you have?

MM: Sylvia, who is now 44, and there is Guy ... Gigi, Guy, who is 43 ... and then there is Avi, who is 37, and then there is David who is 27.

RL: And which schools did they attend?

MM: Sylvia went to Jewish High, then she went to Manchester University, first to Bar Ilan and then to Manchester University.

Guy went to Jewish Grammar School in those days, and Manchester University. They all went to Jewish Grammar School and Manchester University.

RL: Did they belong to any youth groups?

**Tape 3: 7 minutes 53 seconds**

MM: No, no ... they didn't go to B'nei Akiva. It wasn't frum enough in those days for them. Mainly Ezra.

RL: What did they study at University?

MM: Sylvia studied linguistics. She is now finally, last week she got her gown ... she did ... what was it? Jewish subjects? Yes ... And Gigi did business. They all did a business degree at Manchester University, apart from Avi. He never finished, he was going to go to London Polytechnic but then he went straight into business.

RL: Did they go to Yeshiva as well?

MM: They all went. I thought for one year, but I am told they went for two years. I am sure Avi didn't go for two years, Avi went for one year, so we are improving along the line ... oh David went for two years as well. Sylvia didn't go to sem, we tried sending her to Bar Ilan, and then she went to Manchester University, I didn't allow her to go to sem.

RL: Why was that?

MM: Because I think it is a total waste of time. And it is even worse than the Yeshiva. Because at least a boy has got to have certain basic knowledge, he can do without indoctrination, whilst a girl doesn't need that knowledge, and certainly she will get indoctrination. She hasn't got the same responsibilities as a boy. I am not saying she shouldn't get educated, she can get educated at university, she doesn't have to go to a sem.

RL: And did your boys go to Yeshiva in this country or abroad?

MM: They all went to Israel.

RL: And then after university what did they go into?

MM: After university, they all went into various businesses. And they are each involved in separate businesses on their own. All to do somehow with importing, mainly from China or that area.

RL: Where are they living?

MM: One lives just at the bottom of my garden here. Another lives on Cavendish Road. Sylvia lives near Broughton Park and Avi lives in London, Hendon.

RL: And whom did they marry?

**Tape 3: 11 minutes 5 seconds**

MM: Sylvia married a local, Josh Newman. Gigi married a local, Jane Spieler. David went to Belgium to marry a Belgium girl and Avi went to America to marry an American girl.

RL: And what grandchildren do you have?

MM: We have eleven grandchildren. Sylvia has five, Gigi has five, Avi has one and David hopes to have one very soon.

RL: And are any of those married? Are any of your grandchildren married yet?

MM: No. The oldest is 23.

RL: Ok, coming on to how you feel living in England. First of all how accepted did you feel when you first came.

MM: I always felt, I felt totally accepted when I first came, but of course in the community socially speaking there was a difference between the people who had their roots here and the people who came new ... which I suppose is quite normal.

RL: And did that change over the years? Did you become more ... ?

MM: We became the ones with the roots. And the next lot are the ones who didn't seem to feel accepted.

RL: How long do you think it took to be accepted as the ones with the roots, how long did it take?

MM: I felt more accepted straight away, simply because of my education. So amongst my friends it was by choice that I stuck to people who were also refugees. My parents probably never really felt themselves totally accepted. I think they probably, most of their friends tended to be refugees who spoke in this half English ... Yiddish etc ...

though, not in a bad way. There was never anything feeling second class because people wanted it deliberately. It was always just ... so ... we were not the same.

RL: Did they belong to any clubs, groups ... did they join anything at all?

MM: No. They paid lip service I suppose to Mizrachi, and the Synagogue and things, but no, they didn't have that sort of a social life.

RL: Did they belong to the AJR at all? Did they get any newsletters or ... ?

MM: No ...

### Tape 3: 14 minutes 15 seconds

RL: Nothing like that ...

MM: No, no ... I don't think they got any literature of that nature.

RL: And have you ever come across any anti-Semitism in this country?

MM: I actually have not. I really have not. Many times it is how you look at it ... many things happen where you could say it is because of anti-Semitism, maybe I just don't see it that way, I can honestly say I have never felt any anti-Semitism.

RL: How safe do you feel here?

MM: I feel very safe. I mean you have the odd person driving down Singleton Road shouting out something, you don't know because they are driving so fast, but you know they are calling for some reason. I don't think my wife likes it but I would walk with my yarmulke anywhere and everywhere, by myself. I never really did feel ... I mean, you can always come across an idiot somewhere, and a yarmulke could just, could just set him off, I suppose, but I reckon statistically chances are so small so why give into it.

RL: And, what are your feelings towards Germany?

MM: Well, as I said to you, they were always very courteous. Having studied history, I know that the anti-Semitism wasn't just there for me, it was embedded into their language as it were ... in their culture. I also know that, I feel that the young people are trying to get rid, they are working at it, but you just feel that underneath it that a person cannot run away from everything that is part of his language and his culture. So that could come out again at any time, and I am always aware that it could happen again, but at the same time, when I meet a German of a young age, I always feel a bit sorry for him that he has had this sort of inheritance, but I don't feel that he is anti-Semitic by choice, I don't hold it against him, even though I cannot forgive them.

RL: When did you go back there? You mentioned having returned?

MM: I went back once, because my mother had some problem with a German office with the pension she was getting from Germany, so I went back. And I also went back on business on the odd occasions, driving from Belgium into Germany, I have never really been, I've driven to this and I have been to visit my mother in law when she was taking the waters, but we have never really been on holiday in Germany or for an extended period. But then the Austrians are just as bad, or were just as bad ... I somehow feel the Austrians are not trying hard enough. But we do go there. We have been there skiing.

RL: How did you feel when you went back to Germany?

**Tape 3: 18 minutes 17 seconds**

MM: I thought, when I went to have a look at my ... at me ... at the place where I lived, the house where I lived, I realised that the whole area had been taken over by immigrants, mainly Turks etc. I felt a bit like a schadenfreuden, do you know what schadenfreuden is? Schadenfreuden is where you feel vicarious pleasure at somebody else's problems, and you say to yourself somehow, you know, this is what we exchanged it for ... and you know most of the better class Germans had moved out of town when they could afford it, simply because the immigrants had taken over. So there was this bit of schadenfreuden, at what they have got. They have certainly not gained by it.

RL: Did you come across anybody that you knew from the past?

MM: No. I didn't come across anybody I knew from the past. When I was walking around Hanover nobody spoke a proper German. Whoever you asked anybody spoke German with a Turkish accent or some accent, and it is only when I went into the office of the reparations people where somehow these men had been sitting there for the past fifty years shifting papers around, and they spoke a beautiful German, and they were the only ones left, as if they had been isolated in their offices, and this was the old German and they were still sitting there. I couldn't even ... even the town itself, it was very difficult to make anything out, because it had been so bombed, and the whole area had been completely rebuilt. I mean, I was looking for the temple, and later on I was told, that this old temple I was showing you about, later on I was told that there is a little stone to say where it was. There is nothing left.

RL: You mentioned earlier that your father was asked to help when the British wanted to bomb Hanover. Do you know the extent of what he was able to do ... or?

MM: No ...

RL: He never spoke about ... ?

MM: No, I think they just asked him on the map, the various places what they were, and he would tell them.

RL: How did he feel towards Germany?

MM: We never discussed it. But he couldn't feel the same way as I did. I was the next generation.

RL: Do you feel that there was ... psychologically how do you feel? Have you been affected by having to uproot and come to this country? Do you think it has left any psychological mark?

MM: I suppose I wouldn't know if it did. I should imagine that the immigrant who comes has to try harder. I have always had to try harder. And then you get used to ... you get used to coming across obstacles and you surmount them. I suppose by coming to England it has helped me to have a better standard of life, because had I been born here, I would simply have relaxed because I have got it all. But once you learn to overcome problems you never stop, and from that point of view I would imagine that immigrants had a better chance of going up the ladder from that point of view. Also, being continental, I think I have been able to appreciate more different cultures. I am a great, great wanderer around the world, we just never stopped. I mean, because we speak all these different languages, I mean I did German, I did French ... and my wife speaks a number of languages, we imbibe a different culture with it, so we are not satisfied simply to have one culture, but once you are open to them ... it is different. So I think we have suffered a lot, obviously, terribly with these losses, but in some ways being transplanted is possibly from another point of view ... a boon ...

### Tape 3: 23 minutes 17 seconds

RL: How would you describe yourself in terms of identity?

MM: What do you mean by identity?

RL: Well, looking first of all ... let's start with nationality. How would you class yourself?

MM: Oh, very proudly British. More proudly than the average.

RL: Do you feel different to the British in any way?

MM: Yes, I do feel different, as I say ... because ... because ... because I am more interested in the rest of the world. But because I am more interested in the rest of the world I feel more proud to be British.

RL: And in terms of your Jewish identity? Where does that lie in the spectrum of who you are?

MM: I am a great believer in comparative religion. My perspective is that I am Jewish by birth. The important things in life are the main things like food, shelter, sex and also

feeling of belonging, and I think I am Jewish because it gives me a sense of belonging, which stops me being alienated. So I know who I am, and if I am a religious Jew it is because nothing makes sense, and this makes as much sense as anything else and so you do it. My children of course, they have been to, they have been much more ... dominated by their schools and so they feel their Jewishness more, but for me it is a sense of belonging. I like it, I feel proud to be what I am, I don't think it is the end of everything, but then I am philosophical, and nothing is ...

RL: Do you think your religious beliefs have changed at all over the years? Your religious beliefs, or religious observance, have they altered over the years?

MM: I think so ... I think they have weakened a little bit. As you grow older nothing is as important as it was before. I think the ... I think the essence of my Jewishness is to ensure that my children continue to be orthodox Jews. That is the only thing that really matters. As to whether I end up with 1,000 virgins or not ... no ... that is not of the essence.

### Tape 3: 26 minutes 16 seconds

RL: Have all the children followed along that path?

MM: Yes, yes they have. They are all very sincerely religious.

RL: And your grandchildren?

MM: The same. I would have preferred them to see the other side as well. But you can't have it every way.

RL: Coming on to ... I know when you spoke about your work last, you had taken us up to 1986 when you thought you were going to retire, but didn't ...

MM: Yes, well, I was going to retire, but then I realised that my children had all been brought up in a very, very wealthy environment, and none of them had taken up professions. I got the feeling, and I think the headmasters tended to agree, and they would tell me this ... that when children think there is a good job at the end of the line, they don't try too hard, you know ... The son of a shammash has to work hard because he doesn't want to become a shammash. The son of a business man, who is doing well, seems to be successful, so on the one hand I wanted them to be self sufficient and to build themselves up, but on the other hand I reckoned I had to give them a helping hand at the beginning to be fair, because it was I who was responsible for the fact that they didn't take life all that seriously. And then I got myself involved in various businesses, and so did all of the children, etc ... and that is ... and that ... sometimes the child wasn't fit for one business, he didn't like it, and I ended up having the business ... so I am still in business now, simply because ... I just kept it. I am not worried about it ... I try to, I am happy to be there simply because it keeps me in touch with everything that is happening,

on the other hand it has always been very important for me to be free, and I have managed to get that balance, between being free and being in business.

RL: Why do you think it was important to be free?

MM: The reason is because, because ... as I told you, I did Roman history, and it goes straight into philosophy ... and when you started with Socrates and the nature of the good, and then you realise that freedom, freedom, as far as the Greeks were concerned, being free, was the beginning and the end of everything, and I have always continued being interested in philosophy, that is my reading ... and so ... being free, is number one for me.

RL: And how does that translate into practicalities?

MM: Well, I must be able to go away whenever I want. I must be free to, to ... to change my mind ... nothing must be written in concrete in such a way that I can't change it. I must be my own boss. What else does it mean to be free? Very much ... I must be free in my opinions. I must make sure that I am not dominated by somebody else's views, I must have my own views. And then ... most important is, they must be based on reason. You can have so much revelation but ... if it doesn't, if it isn't reasonable, then I want to be free to change. That is my freedom.

RL: Does this conflict in any way with your religious beliefs?

MM: Not really, it may conflict very much with the current, current ... it certainly does not conflict with the views of Maimonides or any of the figures of ... of before the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It does conflict with 19<sup>th</sup> century rabbinic thought after the Baal Shem Tov, but to my mind that is an aberration that is necessary, because of the environment, of the political environment of the city, and the social environment that they were living in, and I tried to be free of that.

RL: And do you have any hobbies or activities that you are involved in?

### Tape 3: 31 minutes 19 seconds

MM: No ...

RL: Or have been involved in?

MM: No, not really ... no, as I say my reading, philosophy, and travelling ... is very much part of my philosophy. There is no point in reading philosophy unless you see all the different cultures. We have been right through South America, we have been to every place in the world, to China three times, we travel everywhere ... and more than that, we don't go in a group, we do our own cooking, we cook, we take our own little stoves with us, we cook ... We travelled very slowly through India for instance, and we try to imbibe the culture. Comparative religions are very important to me ... I look at all the religions

as being, you know, necessary evils, but they are part of life you see, and it is very interesting, it helps me to back up my philosophical thoughts ... yes ...

RL: In terms of ... sport, have you been interested in any sporting activities?

MM: Not watching sporting activities. We have been skiing all our lives. Dolly has just broken her femur, two years ago, going over from Switzerland in..... into, into and since then it has been a bit more difficult to travel around.

I built a tennis court here, about 27 years ago, when I felt this is part of my philosophy. I wanted my children to be on a tennis court at six. They can have their school, they can have their work, they can have their Yeshiva, but there has got to be the ying and the

### **Tape 3: 33 minutes 19 seconds**

yang. Do you know what I mean? There has got to be a balance. So I was playing tennis until my hands had given way recently. So we tried everything, I am not a natural sportsman, yes ... I am not a natural sportsman, but I don't watch sport, that doesn't really do very much for me.

RL: How interested are you in politics?

MM: Well, I am very interested to hear what is happening. What is the point? Politics is very much ... a ways and means of keeping peace in the world and making peace between those that have, and those that haven't. It is a necessity, it certainly isn't an art. I admire one or two people, I admired Thatcher, I admire Blair ... I like people who are sincere in what they are doing, and ... I believe in a, to my mind we live in a world that is not complete. It is an evil world, and politics is a way of trying to keep things moving. I certainly wouldn't be a politician for anything. It just doesn't fit my frame of mind.

RL: Talking about your children, have they ever shown any interest in your background and in your ... you know, story?

MM: No, my grandchildren more. But I don't think I have ever held a long enough conversation with them. I am not one of these ... some people can just sit down with children, play with them, talk to them ... and they can just go on for a long time. I am not one of those. I have a good relationship with them but we never really have long conversations.

RL: Ok. I am just wondering if there is anything else that you feel we haven't touched upon, that you wanted to speak about?

MM: Not really, no ...

RL: Have you ever had any connection with any refugee organisation? I know you mentioned the Refugee Committee when you first came over ... but since that time?

MM: No, I have never, no, I have always veered towards supporting organisations more or less where they deal with hardships rather than religious teaching, I once had offices in Russia, at one time I felt sort of that we ought to be helping ... but it didn't work out. No, I don't get involved, that is the problem. I am a person who wants to be so free that really I am not a very nice person, because I won't get involved. I realise it, so I try to make up for it by giving charity, but ... no ... no ... I admire a few of my friends who really do get involved, who really do things, and I just spend my time thinking and reading. No, I am not a very nice person really, I just have to admit that.

RL: Is there any message that you would like to end with?

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MM: Yes, I think the message is that we should realise that as Jews we are not liked. One of the reasons we are not liked is that economically we are usually, we tend to be better off, and ... I always say to my children, always be aware of that. And, make sure that you don't get caught, make sure that you don't get caught out. Be free to be able to move if these things happen again. They are not likely to happen in this country, this is one place that I don't think they are likely to happen, is this country, but we have learned that ... you never know.

RL: Thank you very much.

### Photographs

#### Photo 1

MM: That is my grandmother, Rosie Schwinger, and it was taken in Hanover around about 1935.

#### Photo 2

This photograph must have been taken around about 1935 in Hanover. At the bottom left is myself, next to it is my brother Danny. Then my sister Margot, and then my oldest brother Issy. And of course behind is my mother on the left and my father on the right.

#### 3

That photograph was taken, I would say around about 1937 in Hanover, and that is my brother Danny on his bicycle.

#### 4

That photograph would also have been taken in 1937, it looks like ... as if it was taken in the Herrenhausen in Hanover, and it is my brother, my oldest brother, we called him Bubbie, Isadore was called Bubbie.

#### 5

That photograph is of my father and mother in the early 1970s in Manchester.

RL: Can you just give their names?

MM: My father, Solomon Mechlowitz, and my mother Clara ...

The previous picture should have been in the 1950s rather than as I said the 1970s. As is this picture which is around about the same time. It is my father Solomon, my mother Clara, and at the back, there is my sister on the right, Margot, and myself on the left. It was again taken in Manchester.

6

This is a picture of our wedding day. My wife, her maiden name, Deborah Dolly Kanner, and myself and it was taken on our wedding day in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1962.

7

This picture was taken in New Jersey, America, in 2002 at my son Avi's wedding. It shows my son Gigi on the right, the next one on his left is David, on his left is Sylvia, on her left is the bridegroom Avi and then there is my wife and myself.

8

This picture is taken in 2003 in Manchester. It is a picture of my wife and I, my children and their spouses, at the front row on the right is my son Gigi, then on his left is Avi and

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David. On the row behind on the right is myself and my wife, my daughter Sylvia and then my daughter in law Jane, next to her is my daughter in law Elianna. Then there is my daughter in law Dalia and finally my son in law Josh Newman.

9

This picture was taken around about 2003. It shows my wife and I and our grandchildren. On the right in the front row is Rafi, and then on my wife's knee is Yonni, my wife and myself and next to my own head is Sophie, and then below on the very bottom left is Ari. Going back again to the extreme right, the one just behind Rafi's head is Elianna ... is Ilana ... and next to her is Tania and then there is Danny and then Nadia, and then Tania and finally Natalie.

RL: And where was this taken?

MM: This was taken in Manchester in 2003.