

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. **RV252**
NAME: **Martin Stern**
DATE: **27th April 2020**
LOCATION: **via Zoom, within the UK**
INTERVIEWER: **Dr Bea Lewkowicz**

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Bea Lewkowicz: So. Today is the 27th of April 2020 and we are conducting an interview with Mr Martin Stern. It is our first Zoom AJR Refugee Voices interview. So, thank you very, very much Martin for having agreed to be interviewed through Zoom Link. Perhaps we can start by you telling us a little bit about your family background.

My parents were both born in Berlin. My father was Jewish, my mother not. They both trained in architecture. I guess that's how they met. They- my mother, like my father, was fiercely anti-Nazi. They decided to marry, and to do that they fled from Germany to the Netherlands in 1938. And I was born in the Netherlands in September 1938. And they- the Nazis of course invaded. The point came when my father had to go into hiding. Sometime later my sister was born. My mother went into hospital and died from a womb infection - childbed fever. There were no antibiotics. So, I was kept on by the couple that was looking after me for a few days whilst my mother was giving birth. They looked after me for two years. And my sister was taken in by another Dutch family, was also arrested at the age of one year from the house of that family. The story is a bit more complicated, but that's simplifying it. I was arrested at a school that I was going to, at the age of five, in 1944 - spring 1944. Both of us went to Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands. And from there we were transported by cattle truck to Terezin – Theresienstadt, where we were taken from

amongst the other children by a Dutch woman who wanted to look after some children, and who looked after us until the end of our time there. After the capitulation of the Nazis, some weeks later we were returned to the Netherlands and were taken from this woman who had looked after us, and lived with other Dutch families until 1950 when the woman of the family we ended up with died, and we were transferred to our blood relatives in Manchester, in 1950.

[0:03:19]

So that's a summary of your early- early life.

Yeah.

I'd like to go back, Martin. Tell us a little bit about your parents. I mean, I don't know how much you know about their lives at all, and about their parents and their backgrounds. And tell us how you found out about them.

My grandfather owned, jointly with someone else, a large business which manufactured and sold ladies coats and dresses, "Graumann und Stern". My grandfather, Albert Stern was at some stage the President or Head of the Berlin clothing manufacturers' association. They exported their products all over Europe, and were looking for a possibility to start marketing in the United States. But that was cut short by the Nazi period. They lived in a beautiful architect- designed villa in Nikolassee on the other side of the Wannsee from the infamous Wannsee villa. Large garden. House full of Chinese- beautiful Chinese antiques in which my grandmother was an expert. She was an art graduate. Both my parents- grandparents were passionate art lovers. And they had on the wall a very good Van Gogh, or Van Gogh [uses guttural 'g' sound] in- in Dutch pronunciation, and a Matisse and a Klimt and Max Liebermann and other fine paintings. They loved classical music. They were on very friendly terms with their neighbours. One of their neighbours was an art dealer called Wild. His daughter, Brigitte Wild, known as Gigi Wild, fled with the whole Wild family from Nazi Germany rather than live under Nazism, although they were not Jews. And she had performed at the age of sixteen with the Berlin Philharmonic on the piano and became eventually a teacher at the Guildhall School of music in London, teaching Claudio Arrau's pupils when he was not in London. My father had a much older brother, half-brother actually,

called Wilhelm, who served in the German Army in the First World War. And I've been told by a friend- childhood friend of my father's, that when Wilhelm came home on leave, one of the first things he would do would be to take my little father, little boy into the garden and show him how to dig a trench. So, this was a Jewish family. Their oldest son was fighting for Germany, and teaching his little brother to be a good soldier. The- my grandfather's brother Sigbert, sorry, Isidor, got a job as a young man for a manufacturer of a sort of cheap German brandy, became one of its directors ultimately and changed its business to be one of the biggest manufacturers of industrial alcohol in Germany. There was a massive problem with alcoholism. Germany had had many misfortunes and people were in despair. You could go into a shop and buy industrial alcohol very cheaply. And essentially if you add water you've got vodka. And people drank it. And he played a leading role in a- a political campaign to make the sale of pure alcohol in that form illegal - against much opposition. So, he made a major social contribution to Germany.

[0:07:58]

How did – sorry to interrupt you. How did you find out these things about your grandparents? How did- ?

The family that ultimately adopted us in the Netherlands knew my grandparents extremely well. The man of the family had worked for my grandfather's business and been trained by him, and then set up in a similar business of his own in Amsterdam with money from my grandparents. So, it was an extremely close relationship. The reason for the setting up of the independent firm is likely, according to a historian of the clothing industry, to have been circumventing the blockade in the First World War. Many German businesses set up satellite businesses as neutral countries with which they could trade. And those could in turn trade with the outside world. So, the- they- they were not special- they were Jews, but not especially observant. From my construction from what my aunt, my father's sister did in later life, they probably observed Passover and the New Year, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and probably little else, I would guess. The- at Christmas time they had a Christmas tree because it was so nice for the children and everybody else had one. If you were an Orthodox Jew you wouldn't do that. So-

And what about- what about your mother's family? Your mother's family?

[0:09:52]

Well, I know very little about my mother's family. I know that her father was a tailor, and somewhat looked down upon by my grandparents, because they were prosperous business people with high- certainly in my grandmother's case, higher education. And, you know, he was a tradesman- my mother's mother I have met, but I really know awfully little about her, except that when she visited me during the war time where I was being looked after in Amsterdam by friends of my parents, I didn't especially warm to her. I found her rather cold. And also, she introduced me to stories like *Struwwelpeter* and I found that- that was so different from the stories that were normal in Dutch children's culture. It somewhat set me on edge.

And did you speak- did you- what language did you speak at the time when you met her? What language did you speak?

That's a very good question, because I certainly couldn't speak German. So, I guess probably she had learnt some Dutch. I don't know how, because I only met her on the one occasion. It was for several days, maybe two or three days.

When would that- when- when would that have been, Martin?

Well, this would be been between 1942 and 1944. So, probably in the middle of that, probably in 1943, I guess, but I don't know.

So, did you always know your background? So, I mean, were you told?

I knew my family was Jewish, but what being Jewish meant, wasn't really explained to me.

And what- what are your- what are your earliest memories?

My earliest memories are I believe from Hilversum when I was two years old. There are single incidents. One is of being wheeled, sitting on the handlebar of my dad's bike as he was wheeling the bike across a sandy piece of scrubland, in cold rain. Not heavy rain, but you

know, the weather was uncomfortable. And another memory is of entering somebody else's house and somebody remarking in Dutch, using an unusual Dutch word - or at least you know it's not that unusual but it was new to me - to say that I looked pale.

[0:12:56]

And what was it in Dutch?

The normal Dutch word would be 'bleek', the word that was used was 'pips' which was a kind of colloquial word. And I learnt it for the first time on that occasion. But I have a kind of visual memory of that incident. And also, I have a memory of a- a flat, a ground floor flat in a row of... very modern houses, with my parents going in and out of that. And the room there, and having a bath with my mother and various little details. And then we moved to Amsterdam and I have memories of my third birthday which occurred in the flat in the Zoicherstraat in Amsterdam. And various other memories. I mean, my father bought a wind-up gramophone - I mean, that was what a gramophone was, in those days - and some records. And he would sit on the floor and play pieces of classical music to me, at least I think they were classical. And he told me that eventually that gramophone would be- would belong to me when I was old enough. And he also bought me a toy saxophone. He was very keen on the saxophone. But the toy saxophone was really- it really was just a toy. It- all it could make was a kind of rude sound because it had the kind of squeaker that people blow at parties. It was not a proper instrument at all. But he, he was keen that I should learn to play the saxophone and I think he was trying to get me started. But I can remember going for walks in the Vondelpark in Amsterdam which the flat overlooked. And, you know, to see the- the ducks and the pigeons. And I can remember one day walking with my mother in that park and there were German soldiers laying black electric cables of some sort. And I wanted to run up to it and try and do some damage to those cables. And my mother told me very sharply to do nothing of the kind and- and explained that that would be very dangerous. So, I must have known something about German soldiers not being good news.

Yeah. It's amazing that you have these memories, so you were so young. But tell me a little bit- how did your parents manage? I mean, they came to Holland. You said they couldn't get married in Germany. They were both architects. Why did they come to Hilversum?

Yes.

Why did they come to Hilversum and what did they- how did they financially manage?

[0:15:56]

I- I don't know. I guess the problem was finding somewhere to live, and maybe houses in Hilversum were cheaper but that's just me guessing. You know, I've never speculated about that before. Or maybe there was a job. And actually, I do know that my father trained for some time with a Dutch, a very well-known Dutch architect-

OK.

Together with another young architect also training there who became- and the two became great friends. And that friend and his wife were the people who later looked after me when my mother died.

OK.

So that was near Hilversum. So that may have been a reason. You know, possibly he may have been living there whilst he was in training – that place.

And did he manage to work in Holland, as an architect?

Yes. Yes, I mean, certainly I remember that when we were living in Amsterdam the front room of the flat was devoted to- was an architectural office. And both my parents worked there. My father more than my mother. My father used to go out to work, so he obviously went to an architectural office. But he also did some work at home. And my father- my mother, I think, was trying to help him by doing some of the work for him in that front room. It- eventually it became impossible for my father to work as an architect and he started making wooden toys. And I remember my mother taking me down the stairs to the basement of this block of flats, where my father had a a table or a- you know, something he was using as a small workbench. And he was making wooden toys. To sell. And some of those toys were drying on the window ledge, you know, the paint and the varnish was drying. So there

were little animals on wheels with a string to pull them. They- they were very beautifully made, though. And at the age of three I wanted to play with them, of course, and wasn't allowed. So, I was very upset with my parents. And it took them some time to try to explain why I shouldn't touch them. So- and I also remember my father coming home one day with a black eye. And when I asked my parents why this was, my mother explained that he'd been boxing. But I don't actually know what happened. I mean, he may have been beaten up in the street.

[0:18:40]

So, when- when, because you have these memories, when- do you remember when you had a sense of something being not good, or, danger lurking?

Well, the incident, seeing the German soldiers happened fairly early on, so, I clearly did then. I must have had some idea from the age of three, but in many ways, I led a very normal life.

Yes.

Apart from the fact that, again, still at the age of three, my mum then stopped me from playing with children in the street. That was what we did! Playing with each other in the street. It's not that I had no toys. I did have a hoop- a hoop and a little scooter. But no television, no computers, no iPads, no mobile phones. You know, unimaginable to children now. But we- we- we played in the streets and that was- became too dangerous. And my mother kept me inside except when she was sending me- to-

And did this- sorry-

Yeah. First to nursery school and later, yeah, a sort of pre-school really, rather than school. Yeah.

And was it a- a Jewish school or was it a- just a local-?

Not at all Jewish. No, no, no, no.

A local-

[0:20:05]

Yeah, there's no way my- either of my parents would have sent me to a Jewish school. They would have been proud of being atheists, I think. And they certainly supported communism. Whether they were party members, I've no idea, and how deep that went I have no idea, but I think they were fervent supporters of communism. And, and- if anything, anti-religious. But then my father disappeared, and my mother, no- no matter how much I asked, she wouldn't tell me where he was. And then one November day, 1942, I saw my father for the last time. He came home. First time I'd seen him for ages, and the last time I saw him at all. And my mother had gone into labour. And he came home to help get me off to his friend and his wife, his friend's wife, for a few days whilst my mother was giving birth. And no doubt to help her get to the maternity hospital. There were various people involved, but my father was there first and was very active in this. He must have known that there were Dutch people who hunted Jews and got the equivalent in today's British money of thirty-eight pounds for betraying a Jew. All it took was picking up the phone to the Dutch local police station. And the Dutch police would then arrest the Jew, and hand them over to the Nazis. There were Dutch police officers who would try and warn the victims if they could. There were Dutch policemen who worked against the Nazis. But there were more who just worked with the system, with the Nazi government. My father must have known about that, because the place where he was hidden was a farm in the same area where Amsterdam airport is. And the farmer he was- on whose farm he was ultimately caught was involved in the Dutch resistance. So even if ordinary Dutch people weren't terribly well informed about these Jew hunters, people in the resistance would have been well informed. They were better informed than other people. It- one of the main things they did was to spread information.

[0:22:45]

Yeah. What prompted him to go into hiding?

Well, Jews were being arrested. I- I don't know. He obviously went into hiding before November '42 because you know, he came out of hiding to help my mother. But Jews were of course already being arrested and deported.

Yeah – yeah. But did they- it must have felt that it was safer for you, for your mother and you not out while he must have been in more danger than he went by himself?

Well, my mother- my mother was not Jewish.

Your mother was not Jewish, of course. So, the assumption that you were- you were under her protection.

Yes, and also both I and my sister were baptised - no doubt to try and protect us. I'm not entirely sure whether that was whilst I was still living with my mother, or whether it was later when I was living with my father's- my parents' friend. Or, friends. I know exactly where the baptism happened. I have a visual memory. It was in the church which is-

Tell us about it.

It is next to the Royal Palace in Amsterdam. The- and, and I- it was crowded. I remember being carried by somebody and taken through this crowded church right to the front where the font was. And you know, very quickly some water was put on my sister's head and my head. And we were quickly taken out again.

[0:24:34]

And when was that?

Well, it clearly was after the birth of my sister.

Yes.

So, I mean, I guess probably early '43. I mean, that's guesswork from how I remember my sister as a little baby. And you know it obviously- I don't think it happened when she was a new-born. I think she was already living with another Dutch family in a village called Santpoort which is west of the city of Haarlem, near the seaport of IJmuiden.

So, when you- the- the couple who took you in when your father was- were they Jewish or not Jewish?

[0:25:18]

No, they were not Jewish.

They were not- and what were their names please?

The woman's name was Katrien, so, a Dutch version of the name Katherine. The surname was Rademakers. And the husband's first name was Johannes which was always abbreviated as 'Jo'.

And did they take- did they take your sister in as well?

No. My sister was of course in the maternity hospital in the- in the I think Sint Lucas [Andreas] Hospital in Amsterdam. When my mother died, she was taken in by another Dutch family. The husband had been picked out by a sales rep for my grandfather's firm, in a very provincial Dutch town where this man had been working as an assistant in a haberdashery shop, in a- in a cloth and clothing shop. And he was taken to Berlin, trained by my grandfather in the clothing business, and eventually set up in a business of his own in Amsterdam. After the war, the business was based at- next to the Central Station in Amsterdam on the east side of the station, facing the water that the station also faces, on a- a quayside called De Ruijterkade. It's very near the Central Station.

So, did you-?

They took my sister in, and looked after her, until in 1944, the family was raided by Dutch police, to arrest my- actually, wait a minute. The story was always that she was one year old and she was born in November '42, so- wait a minute. She would have had to be- she could still be one year old.

Yeah. She could still be-

Anyway, probably about the same time as I was arrested. So, spring 1944, probably. And it's actually quite a story. Do you want me to tell you that in more detail? I mean, it's quite dramatic.

Yeah, let's- let's just go back. Let's go back to your sister in a second, but just go back to you a little bit.

Yeah.

What- what were you feeling? I mean, were you aware that something had happened to your mother and that you had to be with this family? Do you have any memories of that?

[0:28:22]

Well, I had visited my mother in the hospital, including during the period when she was ill - dying. And then when I was told that she had died, you know, at the age of five I asked, "Yes, but when is she coming back?" You know, the idea of my mother dying was so impossible to assimilate, that it was- it didn't penetrate.

And how did you adapt then with the- living with this couple?

[coughs] Sorry?

How did you adapt, or, I don't know if you have memories of that, of living with- with this couple?

Yes, absolutely I do. There are lots of memories. I mean, they were absolutely wonderful.
[coughs]

Take a drink. Take a drink.

They had no children of their own at that time. They had a baby whilst I was living with them. He was eight months- I was with them for about two years. And he was eight months old when I was arrested. Yes. It was a first floor flat on a street called the Rozengracht. It's a

radial road coming out from the centre of Berlin, of- of Amsterdam. The- it comes from- it starts under a different name near the Royal Palace in Amsterdam. And it was number 185, and it was, I believe, the first floor. So, there was a window looking out over the main street and then a- a balcony at the back. And windows looking out over the sort of space between a square of houses. So, gar -gardens. Beneath it there was a paint shop, which at some stage during the time I was living there caught fire. So, we were living above a paint shop on fire. And paints- emulsion paint wasn't so popular. This would have been mainly oil paint which was very inflammable. So that was a big drama. But, during the day, the husband, Jo Rademakers went out to work as an architect. And I spent the day with Katrien Rademakers who did not have an outside job. She took me shopping. She even, on occasion, took me to a children's play. She took me to the circus at least once. She- both of them took me out to a park or to the zoo in Amsterdam. So, I wasn't physically hidden.

And school? School? Did you go to school?

[0:31:33]

It is certain- I went to at least two different schools. One was more a nursery than a school. I don't really remember being taught anything in particular, just playing, really. And- and younger children. And then I went to what in modern British terms would be a pre-school. In other words, we played games, sang songs, folded paper - but no reading, writing or arithmetic, or anything like that. So, yes- so I wasn't physically hidden.

You were not told to change your name or, you didn't pretend to be their son? They didn't pretend-

Well, you know, I had no occasion to use my surname. You know, I- when I went out of the house, I was either with Katrien or with both of them. Or I was at the little school. And I was always known by my first name. So, I don't think the question arises- it certainly didn't arise as far as I can remember. The- but it's five -or -six minutes' walk and, and not specially fast walk, from where Anne Frank was being hidden at the same time. Although of course the first time I heard of Anne Frank was when her diary was published in the early 1950s. And I didn't realise I'd been living so close to her until, you know, two or three decades ago, I would think. But all the neighbours knew I was there, and I think they just pretended I was

their son, but all the neighbours knew I- they had suddenly acquired a four-year-old son. And given the circumstances, it wasn't hard to guess why that might be. I mean there were Dutch children who'd been displaced by bombing. For example, the bombing of Rotterdam. But then I'm sure the Nazis were well aware that everybody who was trying to hide, claimed they had been bombed out of Rotterdam. So, they probably wouldn't have taken that story too seriously. They- they were not stupid in the sense that they couldn't spot an obvious thing like that.

Yeah. And did you see your sister in that time, Martin? In that-

[0:33:54]

I did, yes. At times I was taken out to the village where she was living with a different family. And I saw her as a little baby in her cot, yes. Yeah. Yeah. Several times. So, you know, I remember walking in the street with Katrien out shopping, and her working at the kitchen sink, you know, peeling vegetables or washing the dishes, sitting out on the balcony having lunch with both of them. Both of them being horrified when I was cruel to a fly and they told me I shouldn't be cruel to flies. I remember planes flying overhead and leaving straight vapour trails. And I believed these were bombers and I believe this was an attempt to intimidate the Dutch population who of course would know all about what had happened to Rotterdam, if not to Warsaw and Guernica - in which a lot of Dutch people were involved. So- yeah, and I remember a brass band marching down the street below the window at the front of the flat. And, you know, a little boy, I was enthusiastic about the brass band. And Katrien Rademakers trying to explain to me that these were not nice people. They were the Dutch Nazi party, the NSB. And she had to tread a very careful middle path between not having me cheering the Dutch Nazis and not telling me too much. Because I was going out of the house; if I repeated what she said, that would have been the end of her.

[0:36:00]

Martin, we need you to move a little bit back to the middle. Yes, thank you. You were moving out of the picture.

So, again- so you were living there, not in fear? Not in fear?

Not- well... Not totally without fear either. I mean, I clearly did get an inkling of some bad things going on. I mean, as an illustration, there was one occasion when a Nazi- when a German Army lorry stopped right below the window of our flat. And soldiers jumped out of the back and ran to my right and then disappeared round the corner on the same side of the street into a side street. And I could hear noise, and some shots, some bangs. And then eventually the soldiers came back dragging some men by the collars and shoving them on to the back of the lorry. And I was told that some people were shot dead. And the story I was told was that it was a black market which was raided by the Nazis, and that they had killed some people. So, I was not totally ignorant. And I think there must have been other things which made me realise something of what was going on. But it was- as far as I can remember it- it was quite nebulous.

And your sister's arrest, was that something you remember?

Not at all.

No-

I only know about it from the story given to me by that family.

[0:37:37]

OK.

And not by the people who were directly involved, but by their children.

So, who-

The, sorry, the children of the older couple. They were the same generation. It's- it's the- the fiancée of one of the sons of the family was involved. She was sixteen years old. And the people who told me were of that generation –

Right.

As the fiancée.

So, who was arrested earlier? You or your sister, in terms of the chronology?

I don't know.

OK.

Because I don't know the exact date of either.

OK.

I mean, there may be records at Westerbork about when we arrived.

Yes – yes.

Because after my arrest, I certainly didn't spend a night in Amsterdam, as far as I can remember.

Right.

So, the date of my arrival in Westerbork would have been either the day of my arrest, or you know, possibly the day after if I'd slept in a cell below.

And how- how old were you when you arrived at Westerbork?

Five. Yeah.

So, what- can you tell us a little bit about your arrest? I mean, 'arrest' sounds to me like a weird word.

Yeah.

Because, how can you arrest a five-year-old child? You know, but-

[0:39:07]

Yeah, yeah. I- I was at a little [inaudible] school which was just one of the canal-side houses. So, a terraced house, a rather typical house, fairly near the centre of Amsterdam. So, the school hall was pretty small. The teacher had taken my class there. She was on a chair behind a table on the little stage. She had told us to line up against the side wall. And the sort of things we did that it would have been a preparation for some exercises, or some kind of game. The door at the back of the hall furthest from the stage opened. Two young men walked in and one of them said, "Is Martin Stern here?" And the teacher answered, "No, he hasn't come in today." And I didn't understand what was happening, so I put my hand up and I said, I had come in. And I was taken by the shoulder and led out of the back of that little hall. And I looked around as I was being led out, and I'll never forget the ashen face of the teacher. They took me outside. They were just probably eighteen-year-olds. You know, just of military age, at a guess. And - civilian clothes, raincoats. It was a grey, very slightly drizzly day. They put me on the back of one of their bikes which they had leaning against the lamppost and they cycled with me on the back of one of their bikes through Amsterdam talking with me in perfect Dutch. No trace of an accent. They were definitely not German, because Dutch is difficult for- for anybody to pronounce if they're not Dutch. But it's known to be difficult for Germans. My parents spoke Dutch with a bit of an accent and made mistakes. These guys spoke absolutely flawless Dutch. And we arrived at a big red brick building. I remember approaching it across a square with a, you know, great area of grass in the middle and marched into this red brick building up some steps. Up the stairs to the first floor, I'd been handed over to a man at the- the entrance to this place. And made to wait outside a door guarded by a man. And that door eventually opened. And I was led into a large office with just one big desk in the middle, behind which sat a man in a green military type of uniform who started asking me questions. And I asked, you know, "When can I go home? When- when can I go back to school?" And he said that was not his job to answer those question. He had his orders; that was not part of his instructions. And, you know, his job was evidently just to find out if I was the little boy he was looking for. You know, almost as if, you know, a bureaucrat expecting me, a five-year-old on the other side of his desk, to be sorry for him. Now, that building was the headquarters of the SD [*Sicherheitsdienst*], the - for

those who don't know - the secret police arm of the SS. Extremely Nazi- nasty organisation. You had to be a fanatical Nazi to join it, and you were made more fanatical during training.

Yeah.

And in western Europe they had, amongst other things, the task of rounding up and deporting Jews. And in the middle and east of Europe they were murdering them on an industrial scale.

[0:43:03]

Yeah.

This guy sitting in what I now know was the headmaster's off- had been the headmaster's office of what had been a school - as it is again today - he was clearly not the most junior officer in the SD. Whether he was the head, I don't know. But that raises a question. I mean, here's a five-year-old boy, son of a Jew: why should he be questioned by, you know, a top SD officer? That was not normally what happened.

No.

But I think it's explained by other parts of the story. I think there's an explanation for it. Anyway. The- the, you know, when the guy had satisfied himself that he'd got the little boy he wanted, he ordered a man who'd been waiting by the door to take me out. So, I was led into a school corridor. Doors off each side, of course, and all of them shut - except one. And as I was led past this one open door I could see into a smallish classroom. On the far wall was a map. And standing there looking at the map with his back to me was a man. The man I'd been living with for two years on the Rozengracht. And I called out to him. And I wanted to- of course, to run up to him. "What's happening?" But I was dragged away, physically. I wasn't allowed to say anything else. They just wanted me to give away the fact that I knew him so well that I could recognise him from behind, when I wasn't expecting to see him there, so that he couldn't deny under interrogation that he and his wife had been harbouring for two years the little son of a Jew. He was sent via Vught- the- one of the concentration camps in the Netherlands, to Neuengamme outside Hamburg. And his wife got just his spectacles back with a false death certificate lying that he had died of natural causes. As was

of course routine. And I don't know if you want me to say a few words about Neuengamme, but it can be looked up. I mean, it was a place where people were destroyed in every sense by starvation, horrific labour and in- in- in terrible clothing in all weathers. Digging clay and making bricks. And, beatings and every form of maltreatment. Disgusting conditions, and it was horrific.

But then she survived, the-

She was-

...his wife?

[0:46:04]

She was also arrested, but released the next day. The eight-month-old son had been left alone in the flat. He had been rescued by neighbours who heard him crying. But she was let out. And there's a whole story about that. I mean, she tried to get her husband released, and believed until the end of her life a few years ago that she nearly succeeded. But in the chaos of an order from Germany, he was amongst men loaded on a train going to Neuengamme. Yeah.

And did you ever find out, was there a tip-off, or how come they were looking specifically for you?

Well, I have somewhere a little card which shows that I was registered at the town hall in Amsterdam. The card has the address where I then lived, and it's an address of which I don't have a real visual memory. Because it's not either of the addresses I've mentioned. It was on a canal-side street called Apollokade. And I've visited the place, I mean, you know, the- the address exists and the population register in Amsterdam confirms that I lived- that my family lived there. But Jews, of course, under Nazi law, were required to register as Jews at the local town hall. Pay for the privilege. Receive a big letter 'J' in their cunningly designed Dutch identity card, which the Dutch resistance never managed to forge properly throughout the war. It was that clever. Invented by Dutch people for the Nazis. As a child my identity card didn't carry the photograph and thumbprint which the adult ones had. But it contained my

name, and address, and date of birth, and religion and the fact that I had two Jewish grandparents. So- and the punishment for not registering was deportation. And whilst people didn't know exactly what happened at the other end, they knew enough. And so, I had been regist- so in principle already the Nazis knew about me. The- it wouldn't have been hard- I mean, once they had arrested my father, to track down that he had been friendly with, and trained with the man who had been looking after me. So, I don't think it would have required a great deal of detective work to find me.

But-

There was always speculation about who betrayed me. You know. Was it one of the neighbours? One of the neighbours was known to be a member of the Dutch Nazi party. But Katrien Rademakers didn't think it was him who betrayed me- or- or them, for that matter because they were both arrested. They were also betrayed.

Yeah- them. Yeah. And after two years-

Yeah.

You know. That was interesting. Because your father was-

[0:49:40]

Well, he'd been hidden-

Yeah.

On a farm. He was accompanied to his initial hiding place by a member of the family - one of the sons of the family that had adopted my sister - who cycled with him across- you know, in 19- you know, when this happened, a tree-less landscape; the trees had been chopped down for fuel. And you know, flat land. You could see people cycling from miles away. So, it was quite a dangerous thing to do. And if, you know, a vehicle with some Nazis in had just, you know, stopped and enquired what these people were doing - there were three men. So, it was my father, this son of that family and a third person from the Dutch resistance. Because

people going into hiding in that way were routinely accompanied by a member of the resistance to vouch for the fact that they were genuine, and not stool pigeons trying to find out who was hiding Jews. So, you know, three men cycling. A, a, a car or a lorry full of Nazis could have stopped and just asked them what they were doing and you know if- if there had been somebody on that lorry who could recognise that my father's accent was not a pure Dutch accent, that would have been the end of all three of them. So, I asked the son of that family, on his deathbed virtually, where my father had gone into hiding. And he said it was- he thought it was somewhere near the little town or village of Nieuw-Vennep, which is a village right near the outskirts of Amsterdam airport today. And there was in fact a family which has become, in a way, famous for hiding Jews. The Bogaard family. There's one book about them - only. The story is actually- although it's famous, the story is not sufficiently known, even in the Netherlands. This is the book. And the title of the book has the name of the farmer. And I don't know if that's in focus.

Yes, it's in focus. "De Zorg".

"De Zorg".

Yeah?

And on this farm, at any one time, according to this book, the farmer hid up to seventy Jews. Now, it was a tiny farm. I mean, it's a tiny patch of land.

Yeah.

[0:52:32]

You practically can't imagine a farm in Britain being as small as that. But this was high quality market gardening. And I guess they didn't need much land to make an income. But they were straightforward folk. Primary school education only. During the week you would have seen them in their clogs and blue overalls. And on Sunday it would have been different. They would have been wearing very fine clothes. And they would be using their front room. And they would look like very posh people. They were staunchly religious. And it was the practice to receive Jews and send them on to other hiding places. And my father seems to

have been sent on to another farm in that same area. Both farms were raided by the Nazis. The first one was raided three times. During the second raid, they interrogated the farmer's son who emerged from the interrogation with his teeth knocked out. But he had not told the Nazis where the Jews were. And the farmer was warned that if he did it again, he would be for it. And he said, "If I want to do it again, I will do it again." And he did.

And so, was your father- Martin was your father in the same place before he came to- out to help your mother? Did he go back to the same place?

I don't know which of those two farms he was on at the time. And I really don't know the detailed story. The story of both farms has been lost, to an extent. We only know of some of the incidents that occurred there. And the- I'm looking for a picture of this family, but what I've got is a very bad picture of their farm. Their- they're - black and white photographs. But no, I can't find the exact- yeah. No, I can't find the exact picture I was looking for.

So, you think it's quite likely that he was there?

Well, *that* farm was famous for doing it. And known in the area, even during the war.

Right.

[0:55:13]

So, it's quite likely to have been that farm. And it seems that he was then sent on to another farm. Because the story of my father's arrest does not match any of the stories about this particular farm. And also, I know it was the normal practice to- for the Bogaards, the family that ran *de Zorg*, to send Jews on to other places that would hide them. All over the Netherlands I believe but probably predominantly in that same area. But the story of my father's arrest I've got in two forms. One is from the woman who looked after us in Theresienstadt. And the other is from the Dutchman who accompanied my father to his first hiding place. The story from the Dutchman is that the farm was raided by the Nazis. Soldiers jumped off the back of a lorry that suddenly stopped outside the farm, and my father ran into the fields with a pistol. The farmer was hiding weapons as well as Jews, that particular farmer. And he shot two of his pursuers. Now, from the Theresienstadt story, it appears that

he shot his - two of his pursuers dead. From the Dutch story the story- the guy didn't tell me that he shot them dead, just that he shot them. Again, I asked him, but this was when he was terribly ill on his deathbed. And he thought for a while, and then sort of nodded 'yes', but I'm not sure whether he did that to please me, or humour me or whether that is something for which he had any evidence. Anyway. My father was- he seems to have shot two of his pursuers. And he was caught. He was sent to Auschwitz, but routine procedure for somebody caught suspected of a connection with the Dutch resistance, the routine was at that same place where I was interrogated, the- things would start with a beating up and then get worse. Torture was quite routine. And it was used to extract information. Jews who were arrested were not normally tortured before they were sent away. I mean, what happened afterwards was torture, of course. But again, my father got a different treatment. And I think all- he- he was sent to Auschwitz. He didn't die there. He reappeared in Buchenwald. So, I don't know whether he was on a death march, or in an open coal truck or a combination of the two. I just don't have information. Both of those were of course horrific in their own right. And both had a phenom- an unbelievable death rate. You know, one person who corresponded with me when I was trying to find out how my father died, said that if he had survived one of these methods of transport, they wouldn't have had to kill him. He would have died during the ensuing fortnight of what he'd suffered on the way.

[0:58:47]

But he is recorded as having died on the 25th of March '45 in Buchenwald. Surely not knowing that what he had done had played a vital part in saving the lives of his two children. Because we went on a cattle truck. Actually, we left Westerbork on a passenger train, very crowded. And in a compartment on padded seats, sitting opposite me, was a woman with a baby in her arms, in a beautiful white crocheted baby shawl with big holes in the pattern, I mean that was, you know, the kind of shawl it was. And she told me that was my sister. I wouldn't have known otherwise. Because I hadn't seen her for a long time. And I worried about whether my sister would get cold through the holes in the crocheted beautiful white baby shawl. And the woman reassured me about that. And, you know, said just because it- you know she made a story that this shawl would be particularly warm. But we were unloaded at I think probably a German railway station. Anyway, it was a big passenger railway station. And we were herded into a hall on one of the platforms separated from the other people by doors with great big glass panels. So, we could see the ordinary passengers

going to and from trains carrying suitcases and they could see us sitting on the floor of this hall- where we were told to hand in anything made of metal. I still had a little whistle like a referee's whistle. I guess I'd had it in my pocket when I was arrested. And the woman next to me told me not to hand it in. And I realised that would be too dangerous. So, I went up to a desk where there was a guy who looked a little bit like a railway official who took this little whistle and wrote down solemnly in a- in a ledger book that I had handed in- you know- Martin Stern had handed in this whistle. And that was the last possession I had apart from the clothes I was in. And then we were put into cattle trucks, and I say cattle truck, because it had the kind of door that hinges down and up rather than the typical sliding doors of a goods truck.

[1:01:21]

And which station- Martin, where was this? Where-?

I don't know. I don't know. It was so big that I just wonder whether it could be Cologne.

Yeah, I'm thinking of Cologne.

Or Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main or something like that.

A big station.

It- It was not some little provincial town; this was a- a major, big railway station at a busy time of day.

Might have been Cologne because it was closer to Holland in a way. I don't know.

Yeah, yeah – yeah. I mean, you know, it could have been still in the Netherlands. Arnhem or somewhere like that. But I think it was in Germany.

And then what happened?

Anyway, so- typical cattle truck journey. No room to sit. We were standing against each other. One bucket, for everybody, for a toilet. And you know a little rectangular opening out to the sky near me, but otherwise pretty dark.

And who were you with?

Well, with adults I didn't know. I mean, in the passenger train a woman had had my sister in her arms and I think in the cattle truck also an adult woman was holding my sister in her arms although at the beginning. But, I mean, I used to tell people that I thought the journey took three or four days and nights. But from NIOD, the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, it seems that that journey was probably about forty-eight hours from Westerbork to Theresienstadt. And towards the end, the conditions in that truck were very different from what they were at the beginning. Towards the end there was a man lying on the floor of the truck, so that's puzzle number one. You know, if there was no room to sit at the beginning, how could a man be lying on the floor later in the journey? And I was asking the adults around me why he was sleeping with his eyes open. And they didn't explain that he was dead. And towards the end of the journey, I wasn't thinking about my sister anymore.

Yeah.

And I can't remember what, you know, condition she was in whether she was on the floor or what, I- I just don't know.

[1:04:02]

And how does it relate- you said it relates to your father's story.

Yeah, so when we got to Theresienstadt, I was herded into a building where I found myself amongst a lot of little boys. And... I was pleading for food. I was given some water, I'm pretty sure. And eventually the- a prisoner, a young man who was looking after these little boys, got a boy a bit older than myself to take me into another room where there was a- a grey iron stove in the middle of the room that was lit-

[Asking Martin to adjust his camera angle] *Move in the middle a bit- you have to move a bit.*

On that- It's partly because- the way I've got my camera positioned, you're actually just behind the camera, which is also to one extreme of the- of the picture.

OK – OK, is it better if I sit like this?

Yes, then- then I won't be tempted to-

OK. Tell me where- at least tell me where I should move to.

Yes, this is fine. Yeah. Actually, it's better if you move more- yes, that's right because then you're close to the camera and I've got more sort of an eyeline to the camera.

OK.

I mean, that's why I have this great big round thing sitting in the middle obstructing the screen. It's to have better contact with people when I'm giving talks.

Yes, it's excellent. Just move it a little bit- little bit.

[1:05:28]

But it's a- it's a nuisance. It's a nuisance when you're trying to see the screen. [laughs] But- so, on that stove he made me a tiny bit of porridge. I mean, a really tiny bit of porridge out of rolled- you know, a teaspoon of rolled oats and a- a trickle of brown water that he managed to extract from a row of taps from a long white sink along the wall. But I wasn't there long. I was collected from there by a Dutch woman and taken to the place where she slept. It was the shell of a shop. Everything stripped out, but on the floor, sleeping places for women. And at her sleeping place was my baby sister. She had collected me from amongst - I don't know - maybe fifty little boys. And she had gone somewhere else and collected my sister from amongst a whole lot of little babies and tots. Why? And I had no idea. I- I was completely beyond asking questions. But I asked her after the war, and first of all, she wasn't Jewish. She was from a Catholic family in Amsterdam. She got married. She married a market trader in Amsterdam. He was a Jew, and that's why she was there. And they were childless and in a

place in Theresienstadt- I describe it to people as a place of filth and fear. You know, people were dying, especially older people, from a combination of malnutrition and infectious disease caused by the absolutely filthy, overcrowded conditions - and malnutrition, which lowered people's resistance.

Yeah.

[1:07:22]

The main mode of death was being taken away by train to a killing centre. But deaths were also very large in number. And, you know, fleas, lice, bedbugs, it smelled to high heaven and fighting over space I mean- and fear, above all that your name would appear on a list to be on the next train out. And under those conditions most people think of themselves. And this woman wanted to look after children. And she went to the *Judenrat*. The so-called Jewish council. The twisted sense of humour of the Nazis. These men had no power to counsel whatsoever.

Yeah.

They were slaves.

Yeah.

They were slaves carrying out orders of the SS. And if they didn't, and even if they did, they were taken to be killed.

So, she went to the Judenrat where?

In Terezin, Theresienstadt. And these- one of the men said to her, "There's a train coming tomorrow from the Netherlands. There are two children on that train whose father killed two German soldiers. Why don't you take them?" So, how on earth that guy had got that information, I have no idea. And neither did she- when I asked her after the war.

But she told you that story?

She told me that story in the 1980s when I found her again, yeah. Shortly before she died. I mean she was still fully- you know, if you were visiting her you wouldn't notice there was anything wrong with her. In fact, she already had breast cancer but it hadn't affected her brain or her ability to talk or think.

So, she was specifically looking for the two of you?

[1:09:18]

Well, she just wanted to look after two children. And was then-

Yeah – yeah.

Yes, yes- after she was told that that's why she picked me out from amongst a whole lot of boys, you know, every bit as good as me, and a whole lot of little tiny ones in another place. And- and looked after us for the rest of our time there. Yeah. Her name was Katarina, so it's a sim- similar name to the other lady, Katrien.

Yeah - Katarina.

It's just got an 'a' on the end. Yeah. It's another version of the name Katherine. And in Theresienstadt she used the surname, her maiden name, de Jong, which is like 'Mrs Young' in Dutch. Her husband's surname was Cassuto, which is a Hebrew word. It's an allusion to the almighty.

Sephardi name. Sephardi name.

It's - exactly. Exactly.

Yeah.

I was able to find her afterwards because it is a rare name in the Netherlands where there are- there is a whole population of Sephardi origin Jews. And I was very quickly able to find out

that there were exactly six people with that surname in the whole of the Netherlands. And I could then, you know, start looking at telephone directories and try and find them.

Which year was that? When did you try to find her?

Early 1980s. Probably 1984. Eventually I found her again with the help of the Netherlands Red Cross. But anyway, in Theresienstadt where I knew her as Mrs de Jong, the- she had been told that story, which tallies about as well as human fallibility normally allows with a story the version that I was told by somebody unconnected with her, in the Netherlands.

And do you think that relates also to the fact, you said, why you have been interviewed by this- that Sicherheitsdienst, this SD? Does it relate to it?

[1:11:25]

Yes, yes – yes. I think that is surely the explanation, that- that my father, apart from being a Jew was actually actively involved with the Dutch resistance. I know that even in Berlin he possessed a pistol. And my aunt told me that my grandparents' house was searched by the Berlin police whilst the family was still living in Berlin and they didn't find my father's pistol. And my aunt's explanation was the untidiness of my father's room. And the reason why I've got a fake background here, is I don't want you to see the state of my study. It's- there is a hereditary element in that. I mean, clearly, he was involved in a physical resistance to the Nazis even before he left Germany. I also know from Birgitte Wild, who died years ago in London, but who became a wonderful friend - later in her life, that he had asked her to look after a suitcase for him. And she did for a while, and then decided it was too dangerous and she asked him to take it back, which he did. So, you know, my father was clearly actively involved in anti-Nazi activities in Berlin before he left Germany. So, he was also involved with the Dutch resistance, evidently.

So, when it came to- to your arrest, they- they associated you with your father even though you were five years old.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, I can-

Maybe they thought you had some information.

Well, one can think of various reason, I mean, you know one potential reason obviously would be to use my sister and I to- as a way of torturing my father-

Yeah.

You know, indirect torture.

So, by the time you were arrested, can you establish where he was at that time?

No, no, no idea. No idea.

You don't-

[1:13:45]

I only found out after the war what had happened to him. And- and then, only in outline. I don't know exactly how I- how he died. I've got two totally contradictory stories, both of which have degrees of improbability about them. Well, I don't know. One is that he was stoned to death. And this was a remark dropped by one of the sons of the family that had taken in my sister. Shortly before he died. And he refused to tell me any more when I- when I asked him to tell me more detail, he just shut his mouth and wouldn't talk any more. But he was pretty well informed. He was the best -informed member of that family.

And the other theory?

The- the other story is the story that was given to my- written to my grandmother by a fellow prisoner in Buchenwald. And that story is that my father was marched out of Buchenwald by two soldiers and only the two soldiers came back. And Professor Aubrey Newman in Leicester who founded the first department of Holocaust studies in a British university tells me that is inherently highly improbable. Because at that stage of the war Jews were not being shot individually.

Yeah.

There it is, you know.

What about-

It may be a story that my grandmother was told by a kind-hearted fellow prisoner who wanted to spare her a truth that was worse.

What about- you were going to tell us a story about your sister's arrest.

Yes.

[1:15:33]

Yes. The Dutch family that was hiding my sister, was betrayed. Dutch police came to the house. There were three people in the house when they arrived. The woman of the household, who was a tough character, I mean, describing- I always say to children that describing her as a battle-axe is doing her an injustice. She was far worse than that. And the sixteen-year-old fiancée of her oldest son and my one-year-old sister. The woman started to scream and swear. Dutch is rich in very resonant swearwords, which she was very adept at using.

Yeah.

And she threw things at these policemen and in the conversation the family never omitted to mention corsets, which were amongst the things that she threw at the policemen. And in the confusion, the sixteen-year-old ran off with my baby sister in her arms into their large garden full of shrubbery and got away. I mean she was lucky the house wasn't guarded by somebody on the outside. And she got away. And I imagine that threats were made to the family. And the next day the family put my baby sister on their lap in the car and drove three quarters of an hour to Amsterdam and handed her in to the central police station in Amsterdam to be handed to the Nazis.

And how did you find out that?

It was a story told to me by the- the generation of that fiancée who ran off with my sister. The, the- two of the sons of the couple that had taken in my sister.

And what was their explanation, that they were scared that the family-

They didn't really explain it. They explained that the next day they had driven to Amsterdam with my sister. I mean, they, you know, saying that threats were made to the family is my construction. I mean, you know, even if nothing was said, the threat would be implicit. I mean that family lived repeatedly under real fear of arrest and death for various reasons. I mean, hiding my sister wasn't the only thing they had done. They hid another young Jewish woman by using her as a domestic help. For that, they could have been arrested and deported. And certainly, there were Nazis on the way to arrest the husband when the family was warned by their milkman, who had run ahead of the Nazis. And- and managed to get away. And they spent the last winter of the Second World War hiding in, you know, under terrible conditions. Because they were, you know, they would have been killed. So, don't underestimate the threat. And the threat would have been there even if it hadn't been spoken, I think.

[1:19:07]

Yeah, but the idea of giving a baby, you'd think, what would they do then with that baby?

Yeah

When you...?

Yeah – yeah.

But then she and you were then deported to Westerbork?

Yeah. I mean, I now know that she was kept in another part, another section of the same hut where I was living, but it was a complete partition. You could- I couldn't walk into the other

sections. Had a different outside entrance. And I only found that out a few years ago when I visited the Westerbork memorial where they've got the records.

And what are your- what are your memories Martin, of-?

Well- I remember you know, black creosoted wooden huts. Bare sandy soil. A high barbed wire fence and wooden watchtowers. And the first thing I remember being told is not to go near the barbed wire fence, because the soldiers in those watchtowers had guns and would shoot me - dead. And I sort of think but I'm not hundred percent sure, that I was told they'd seen it happen. Or heard of it happening. I'm not so clear about that in my memory. But I was put into part of a hut partitioned off for little boys. It was not as crowded as the other huts in Westerbork. You know, I mean I've read descriptions, many descriptions of Westerbork. By 1944 of course it was no longer as crowded as it had been. But I- inclined to think that the conditions for us little boys were somewhat better than conditions for most of the adults.

So how much time, once you were arrested-

Yeah.

How long before were you then taken to Westerbork?

Well, from some date I don't know in the spring of '44 until the 30th or, you know, the end of July '44.

So, you spent a good three to four months in- in Westerbork.

Yeah. Yeah.

And do you remember the journey into Westerbork?

[1:21:25]

Parts of it, yes. Yes. I mean, I remember sitting on my haunches with a group of women in the Central Station in Amsterdam on one of the platforms. You know, we'd been ordered to

wait there by Nazi officials or soldiers. We were loaded on to a passenger train. I remember the view from the train as we pulled out of Central Station. That's a view I'm still very familiar with, because I quite often have travelled in that direction from Amsterdam. And it still looks somewhat similar. I mean there are a lot of new buildings now but- but it's still very recognisable. And there's one incident, and I don't know whether it happened on the journey to Westerbork or whether it happened later on the journey to Theresienstadt when I was with a group of women outside a train, amongst the railway tracks, and the women started singing. And there was a- a soldier with a rifle some distance away and he ordered them to stop singing. And I don't know all the words of the song, but I know the first few words and I know the melody. And it was some kind of resistance song. And I've tried to look this up. When I've asked Dutch people, even people who know the history of the Second World War, I'm met with blank faces. But it clearly was a song which at the time was widely known.

Can you sing it, Martin?

And the versions- sorry?

Can you sing it?

[1:07:22]

Yes, but- but what I found out, you know, by googling it is that there were - and I use the Dutch Google so you get a better search - there are all sorts of versions of that song. So, the same melody and similar words have been turned to other purposes. So, it's-

*Wij zijn de toffe jongens, van de S-Company,
We werken als slaven, maar klagen doe we niet.*

So, you know, "We are the tough guys of the S Company," whatever S stands for. "We work as slaves but we don't complain." But it was a kind of you know, keeping their spirits up song.

And you remember that. You remember that? It's amazing.

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I learnt it-

Because it must- because to think that as a five-year-old you were put with complete strangers, just on a train. It's just-

Yeah, I mean, I didn't know any of these women. Yeah.

What were you feeling at the time? I mean, do you- it must have been absolutely terrifying.

Bewilderment and fear. Yeah – yeah. Total disorientation.

And was there anyone taking care of you on the- on the journey or were you-?

[1:07:22]

Well, the women sort of, you know, talked with me. And, you know, what can you do on a journey like that? I mean, you know they- they treated me as a child amongst them. And there, there was nothing else to do. I mean, they, they couldn't give me any food or they didn't have any themselves. And they, I- I mean, the journey from Amsterdam to Westerbork is not enormously long.

No

It's a few hours.

And could you stay with them once you arrived or then you? No-

No. I was put in to part of a hut partitioned off for little boys. And there were iron, you know, steel bedsteads like old fashioned hospital beds of the Second World War or even First World War period. You know, very simple metal beds-

Next to each other? Can you just describe the hut, Martin?

Not- not all that close together actually. Whereas in the typical story of Westerbork is multi-tiered trunk- bunks. And terrible overcrowding. And people fighting for space. It- it wasn't really like that. And a table, a long table at which we ate and maybe did other activities. The food consisted of vegetables you would unhesitatingly throw in the bin, and not a lot of those. And when I asked why there wasn't any meat or fish, they laughed at me. And one of the dishes was runner beans which had been sliced but they'd been harvested when there was a woody strip down the sides which had not been removed before they were sliced. So, we were eating this green mush with splinters in it. It was unpleasant to eat. And they called it 'prikkeldraad' - 'barbed wire'. You know, it was their joke about the food. And there wasn't a lot of it.

[1:26:36]

And do you remember any of these boys. Do you remember any particular...?

Not as individuals, sadly.

Do you remember any individuals at that- in this time?

Sadly no. I mean, you know, it's- they were absolutely terrific and they- they became my friends, you know. A number of them were older than me and, and they were a wonderful group of boys to be amongst. They made a great deal of difference to, you know, life there. For a time, a young man in Hassidic clothing ran a little class at which, you know, he got a blackboard on a stand and a little piece of chalk. And he taught us the *Alef-Bet*, the Hebrew alphabet. And later in life, I could remember the letter *Alef*, because he drew it so beautifully. And I could remember the next to last letter of the Hebrew alphabet the letter *Shin*, because he described it as three little birds sitting on the twigs of a tree. That's such a beautiful description. That's never left me. In Hebrew those two letters spell [??Ash] – fire. But I didn't-

Yeah.

I didn't understand that until very much later in life.

What other activities Martin, stand out from that time in Westerbork?

Well, that class didn't last very long. I guess that the guy was sent off. People were mainly sent to Auschwitz and Sobibor.

Yeah.

And of course, people didn't survive that. Or, or very few. There are a few survivors but chances of survival were extremely low. I don't remember much- well, yeah, and I mean one- one thing is bizarre and one of my friends who was in Westerbork and later in Theresienstadt – he's a couple of years older than me, you know, finds it unbelievable. He literally- he says it couldn't have happened, but it's in my memory that we were actually on one day allowed to go on a trip on the heathland surrounding the camp. Guarded by one or two soldiers. Yeah. But we played in the sand, you know, in- amongst the heather. And my friend Stephen Frank says he never heard of anything like that happening and it sounds completely impossible to him. And I can understand why he says that. I mean it is totally bizarre.

Yeah.

But it is in my memory, I mean, very definitely. Also, I remember that there were kind of classes for children. And one thing I remember is that the- the- Westerbork is on sandy soil. But the prisoners dug down and got a layer of clay. I mean, there are many areas in the Netherlands where you've got alternating layers of sand and clay. Amsterdam, for example. And they dug up some clay and they had a pottery class. You know. A long table and they had children sitting at the table. You've got a bit of clay and you had to make something out of the clay. And I remember a boy near me, and I guess he was probably about eight years old who had made a ginger jar. Now, it was normal and traditional in the Netherlands at that time to sell candied ginger in earthenware jars. Hexagonal or octagonal in cross section, with a blue glaze and a relief pattern on the surface. They're rather attractive-looking things and that was- you know, ginger was traditionally sold in such jars. And of course, he couldn't glaze it and he couldn't fire it, but he had made a jar like that. And it was beautiful. You know. And- and first of all I'm thinking about the adults who themselves were, you know, fighting for space. Living in filthy conditions. Their food wasn't wonderful, for sure. You know the toilet was a long plank with holes in it with, you know, barely any partition

between. And you know, if you wanted to wipe your bottom there were some bits of newspaper hanging on a string. And just a deep hole underneath. Those were the sanitary arrangements. And of course, people lived in fear of being on the next train. And you know, there was- people tried to influence the allocation to try and not be put on the train. There were terrible conditions amongst the adults. So, there were some adults who cared so much about what was happening to the children, that they arranged this kind of thing. And the other thing is the children themselves. I mean the things they were making. And that boy, you know, that made such an impression on me.

[1:32:16]

Do you remember things you made? Did you make with the clay or...?

No, I don't remember. I- I was no good with the clay. [Laughs] I don't think I had those pottery classes very long. And then the Hebrew classes didn't last very long. I know that he got through the entire *Alef-Bet* and got to the end, to the letter *Tav*.

And do you remember it? And you remembered it later?

Well, with- with hindsight, yes. But the ones that really stick in my mind are those two letters.

Alef, Shin.

And you know, I- that was the case before I knew, you know, about the Hebrew word for fire.

Amazing.

Yeah. So, yes, and also, shortly before I was deported from the - yeah, well I remember the loading of the trains, and you know there was a train leaving every Tuesday. And, I mean, I didn't remember which day of the week it was and I don't think I remembered it was a regular weekly schedule. I know that from reading. But I do know that I used to stand at the edge of the clearing into which the railway spur ran. The Nazis had used slaves to construct a

railway spur into the camp itself to save them marching prisoners outside to the nearest railway station. And I stood there I think probably every week, just watching these trains being loaded up. And I watched the people who were loading the adult prisoners in and there were some railway men and of course they were wearing railway mens' uniforms. And there were some soldiers. Not all that many. And they were wearing military uniforms. And the soldiers had brown leather holsters on their hips with pistols, presumably. But I could see their faces perfectly clearly. They were faces like you can see any day on the street.

Yeah.

Except nobody, certainly not the railway men, were obese. And, you know, I was wondering even then at the age of five how a set of such ordinary looking men could do that to another set of human beings who I knew were just normal people. I'd been living amongst them.

[1:35:00]

And did you understand the danger of what being sent away on this trains....?

No, I didn't- I didn't know what was happening- well, with an exception which I'll come to, but no, I didn't know what was going to happen to them. The trains in fact - and again I know this from visiting the Westerbork centre and from reading books - had boards hanging on the side saying where they were going. And the main destinations were Auschwitz and Sobibor, except that the prisoners didn't know what those names meant.

Yeah.

And then the doors would be closed and sealed with steel wire, so you know, I- I knew that wasn't normal for a railway journey. And then when eventually the train slowly started to pull out of the prison camp, with a few of the people trying to peer out through the little rectangular openings in the sides of the trucks, there was soldier with a rifle over his shoulder standing on a step on the end of each truck, holding on to a handle. And you know, I could figure out what one of those soldiers was likely to do with his rifle should one of those unfortunate people crammed inside manage to escape through the wooden sides during the journey. So, you know, that- that didn't look too good, did it? I was not that stupid.

And you could just see it? Why was it- how could you see it?

Well, the- there was a kind of clearing. You know, no huts for some distance from the railway line. So, I was standing with my back to one of the huts, you know, against the wall of one of the huts more or less.

And you could just see the...?

I could see the scene, yes. Yes. And I watched this, certainly repeatedly and perhaps regularly. I don't know. And then one day, I had to go somewhere and I had a medical examination. You know, I had to take my clothes off. I think I kept my underpants on but the- I had my height measured, and I was weighed and I was put on a couch and a young man and in my memory, I just wonder whether he was a medical student rather than a doctor. I mean, very young. And also, from the things I remember him doing, they are things every medical student is taught, but no doctor actually does, normally. I mean, there is something called the 'abdominal reflex'. Now, no doctor in his right mind examining you for any normal illness that you are likely to get will ever test your abdominal reflex, unless he's a neurologist and there are some very specific reasons for doing it. It is not part of a normal physical examination. That's what makes me think, you know, this was somebody who's learnt it- when I was a student and just newly qualified, I also did everything literally the way I'd been taught it like an inexperienced professional does.

Yes?

So, he- he tested my abdominal reflex by taking the- the- the stem of his patella hammer and stroking it across my tummy to see if the muscles contract in a reflex. You only do it if you want to know if there's a lesion in- a damage in the spinal cord at a particular level and you want to know what that level is, you know. It- it- so- but anyway. And he looked in my eyes. And I think I had my vision tested. And he looked in my throat. You know, quite a long examination. And he seemed very thoughtful as he was doing this. Which again, is odd. You know, in- in the processing of Jews nothing was thoughtful. You know, it's just- quick processing, getting the numbers through, you know. So, it seemed to me even then and certainly in retrospect that something big depended on this. And then I was told to get on a

train. And- and so I just wonder whether that examination was a link in what got me sent to Theresienstadt rather than Auschwitz or Sobibor. I don't know. Anyway-

[1:39:34]

Whether you were healthy enough or- healthy enough to-

Yeah, yeah. That if he'd found something wrong, I would have gone to Auschwitz, yeah.
Yeah.

Martin, what I think- can I just say it's now ten past four. And I think we have a break now because we can- we have covered Westerbork. I have a few more questions, but we know where we are. And I would say it's a good time to resume. Because I'm also worried about this recording, whether you know, I think, it's better to stop it now because I don't know how long it can. Yeah, and check that everything is all right. Is that OK?

OK Bea.

Listen I'm- I have to say, just to say I think it's amazing that - this works. You know, I mean from my point of view this is pretty amazing. Because, you know, you're not with me here but it certainly feels like one of my interviews. You know.

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean for the teaching, you know, everybody complains that it is not the same as being in the same room.

Yeah, but it's - it's-

But this is what we're stuck with.

No, but it's pretty amazing.

This is what we've got.

It is pretty-

Yeah.

It's pretty-

Yeah, so we've got to learn to use it. And also, you know, my biggest concern is with the survivors who are, especially the ones who are older.

Yeah.

The ones who are less mobile. They are going to be stuck in seclusion - not for three months.

No – no. But listen, this is really a fantastic example how this technology can be used.

Yeah, yeah - yeah.

And as I said, you're -

So, I'm not trying to get it to work. You know, maintaining contact with people in isolation.

Listen, Martin, we'll speak at the end tomorrow. I think we'll speak about the current situation as well.

Yeah – yeah.

Is that alright?

Yeah, sure.

Martin for tomorrow if you've got any photos we can see, you can show them to me.

Well, actually all the photos that I've got have been scanned by the National Holocaust Centre to a high standard professionally.

You can then send them as well.

It's best to get them from the National Holocaust Centre.

I know, but have you got anything to- have you got any of the original ones at all?

Yes, but with the chaos in here, I might have difficulties finding them.

OK. If you can find some original ones just to hold up while you were speaking that would be great. If not, don't worry about it.

[1:42:10]

I mean I've got a few. But it's limited what you can show in this medium. Yeah.

No. Normally what we would do- how I want to do it is I would like you to show us and talk and then send me the scan afterwards.

Yeah.

You see? The high-quality ones. That's the scan.

The scan it's best to get directly from-

From them?

[??Maxton] yeah. Yeah.

OK, I can do that. OK Martin, in the meantime, I have to say - listen, what a story you've got. Amazing.

Look. Loads of other people-

That you've got these memories. I mean, you know, that you can remember all these things is extraordinary. Really.

Yes, it- well, you know most of the people who would have had those memories are not around to tell the tale.

Well, I tell you, I've interviewed somebody who was in hiding in Italy, a man, you know, as a five-and-six-year-old and he can also- I mean, could remember details from the monastery and from things. But it's rare. It is rare, you know? To have a memory like that.

Well, when I started taking piano lessons at the age of sixty-six, my teacher told me I had an exceptional memory.

Yes.

So, it may be.

You are blessed. Yeah.

Yeah.

OK, Martin, well, I'll see you tomorrow- at two o'clock- is good for you?

Yeah, sure.

Two o'clock. Same time, same place.

Yeah, ok.

And same- please if you could wear the same jumper, if possible.

Yeah – yeah. I never change it.

Same background. [Laughter] OK, thank you so much.

They're all there to be chosen from. Ok, Bea, all the best. See you tomorrow.

Bye. Thank you so much.

Bye.

Bye.

[1:43:46]

Recording. Today is the 28th of April 2020 and we're conducting the second part of our interview with Mr Martin Stern. So, hello, and let's continue where we left off yesterday. And we were on the journey from Westerbork to Terezin.

Yes. I think I told you about how a man died next to me. And I didn't realise that he was dead.

Just to maybe just to start a little bit before-

I think- I think, I told about the beginning of our time in Westerbork-

Yes. So-

In- in, in Theresienstadt.

Yes, you did. But let's just- let's just wind back. When you left- just take us back to the place when you left Westerbork.

Yeah, I think I described all that, how we left Westerbork in a- a passenger train.

Yeah.

There was- in- in the crowded compartment where we were sitting on normal padded seats. The- there was a lady sitting opposite me with a baby in her arm, in a white crocheted baby shawl. And she told me that was my sister, which I wouldn't have known otherwise. Because I had not seen her for a long time.

And how do you think that happened, Martin, that- I mean was it pure coincidence that you were sitting-?

[1:45:17]

No, I'm sure it wasn't coincidence. It was a big train and there were- it was incredibly crowded. So, the fact that she was sitting directly opposite me was- you know- there's no likelihood at all that at- that was coincidence. I think there were other people in Westerbork who were well aware of the relationship. You know, they knew she was my sister. From time to time I got told about things that happened to my sister.

Right.

Although I don't remember seeing my sister.

And who was taking care of your sister in Westerbork?

She was in another part. I- I now know that it was another part of the same hut.

Yeah.

But completely separated by a complete partition. So, we couldn't move from one section to another, except by going outside. But as far as I was concerned then, she was somewhere else in Westerbork and I didn't know where. But, for example, my- I was told that my sister had developed a very dangerous illness. She got a middle ear infection. And somebody in Westerbork operated on her ear. This is- remember this is the days before antibiotics.

Yeah.

And he made a hole in the bone behind her ear to drain the pus. So, you know, somebody with surgical skills in Westerbork probably saved her life. Because if you don't do that the danger is the pus goes through into the brain, and that's the end of you.

How did you find out this, this- this story?

I was told it. I was told it by the- by the adults who were looking after me.

Right. Right.

[1:47:12]

Yeah. So- yes, we were transferred to a cattle truck as I explained yesterday. A long journey. And unloaded in Theresienstadt. When we arrived I, you know, we got out of this cattle truck and it was- looked like a town. You know. Not at all like people's image of Auschwitz or Bergen Belsen or anything like that. So, proper stone or brick buildings and pavements. Streets and grassy squares. Trees, even. And in the distance an embankment with a fence on it - a wooden fence. And I wanted to run to the wooden fence to see if I could see through the gaps in the fence and the adults called to me to tell me not to do that, or I would be shot. And I was herded into - or taken into - a building where I found myself amongst a lot of boys. Another boy made a little porridge for me as I explained yesterday.

Yeah.

And I was collected from there by Mrs de Jong, as I knew her then, who took me to what had been a shop. Everything had been stripped out, but it was a dormitory for women. A shop window to one street. A shop window to another street and two doors to those two different streets. But on the floor, sleeping places for women, shoulder to shoulder. And at her sleeping place was my little sister. And Mrs de Jong looked after us for the rest of our time there. Again, I- I- I said things about Theresienstadt yesterday, what- what it was like.

Can I ask you. Just- can I ask you- had she been there for a long time, Mrs de Jong?

I don't know when she arrived in Theresienstadt. I mean, obviously she was sort of there and settled in when she collected us. And she died in the 1980s, so I can't ask her anymore. She had no children of her own. She adopted a boy in the Netherlands afterwards, who was a problem to the- the couple. And they lost contact. But he had- he had two sons, who are very fond of her memory. They- they do remember her. And, you know, I've- I have met them. And had a long conversation about what I knew about their adoptive grandmother who they- whose memory they love.

[1:50:24]

But you said she had a different name as well.

Her married name was Cassuto.

Yes. You told us the story.

And so, after her husband died, certainly when I met her again in the 1980s, she used a double-barrelled name, Cassuto-de Jong. Katarina Cassuto de Jong. And in the card index of Theresienstadt of which there is a copy at the Bet Terezin kibbutz in Israel.

Yeah?

There are probably copies elsewhere. There might be one in the Wiener Library for example.

Yeah?

Her name is- I- I can't remember the details because it's a long time since I saw it, but it is slightly miss-spelled. But something has happened. Oh, yes, my screen went black. I was moving the mouse.

OK.

Yes. I- I mean, I remember talking about all this yesterday but I'm not quite sure –

Yes.

What I included and what I-

It doesn't matter if we have slight repetition. You know?

Yeah.

So, don't worry about yesterday; that's the problem when you do it in two days. But my question is to you, did she- and you said she- she wanted to help children. And she was given your name and your sister's name.

[1:52:00]

Yes. I mean, again, I mentioned this yesterday, but when I asked her about this after I found her again in the 1980s, you know, "Why did you do this? And why did you pick me from one building and exactly my sister from another building when there were so many other children in those places?" She explained how somebody in the *Judenrat*, the so-called Jewish council, I mean I regard that as a macabre joke by the Nazis, because it wasn't a council. They were slaves. Obeying SS orders under threat of death. Actually, even if they obeyed the orders, but certainly quicker if they disobeyed them in the slightest detail. They had no power to counsel whatsoever. But one of the men told her that there was a train coming from the Netherlands and told them the story about my father having shot two- she said, killed two German soldiers. Shot them dead. And, yes, she worked in the kitchens. She stole food for us and brought it to us in the dormitory. If somebody had told the SS about that, that would have been the end of her. And the person betraying her might have thought they were doing a good deed because other people were dying of a combination of malnutrition and infectious disease.

So, during- during the day, did you stay with her or did you put- did you take care of your sister? Can you just sort of describe your sort of daily routine?

During the day the women did slave labour.

Yeah.

Mrs Cassuto de Jong worked in the kitchens. The other women, in the- one dormitory I was in, all were splitting mica. Now most people these days don't know what mica is. But it's a mineral. It's related to asbestos. It's a kind of rock but you can split it into very thin sheets which are like glass, with the difference that it is, like asbestos, highly resistant to heat. So, it was used for the windows of stoves. And it was used for electrical insulation. So, it was an important war material for the Nazis. And they used slaves to prepare sheets of mica from the lumps of mica that came out of the rock. My sister was looked after somewhere else and I- I really have no idea at all where. So, during the day I didn't see her at all. And I just walked around the town. The streets of which were for most of the time I was there more or less deserted or deserted. Because the adults were doing slave labour. The other children were mostly either in a building for children and they were getting lessons, so they would have been indoors. And there were a few children allowed to stay with their parents. So-called privileged families, who had relatives in Britain or the United States or something like that. And no doubt the Nazis were thinking of using them as hostage exchange for captured German or Nazi military personnel.

[1:55:57]

But you were not together with the other children?

I was not together with the other children. After the first- the day of my arrival, I only met children occasionally in the street, and usually fairly briefly. So, I don't know why they were on the streets and you know it- it's- it maybe they were members of the privileged families. Not in the schooling.

Yeah. And Martin at that point you were five and your sister was how old?

My sister had her second birthday in Theresienstadt. I had my sixth birthday in Theresienstadt. Both of those of course passed like any other day, and I was not conscious of either birthday. Yeah.

But that's incredible that you somehow managed with your sister during the day to be just left on your own. Or-

What could- what could Mrs de Jong do? I mean she-

No, I know. I know.

Yes, yes – yes. She had no choice.

So, you were in fact taking care of your sister?

No – no. My sister was somewhere else and I didn't know where that was, I didn't see her during the day. I only saw her-

Oh, I see, OK, sorry.

In- in the mornings and evening, in the dormitory.

OK. So, she was given to somebody else, or-

She was being cared for somewhere else, yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Were you aware, because I know they had, in Terezin they had- for example they put on this Brundibar opera?

Yes – yeah.

Were you aware of something? Of those sort of experiences-?

[1:57:39]

Not then. I mean I know it very well now, and a few years ago it was performed repeatedly, a few nights running, in Jersey-

Yes.

In the Channel Islands. And I was invited there to give introductory talks. And to do some school education in connection with this. So, you know I heard it performed very well by the children of the schools there. And at Cheetham's School of Music in Manchester, members of which went over and, you know, ensured the musical standards were very high.

But at the time you- you were not aware?

I- I have no recollection of seeing *Brundibar* in Theresienstadt. I remember Mrs de Jong taking me one evening to a show that was put on inside one of the buildings. A sort of improvised stage. And I know the show included rather trivial popular- Dutch popular folksongs. So, it- it was a rather low-level you know evening of entertainment by very ordinary people. But of all the art that went on, you know, the Verdi *Requiem* and the string quartets, I mean, I had no idea about any of that.

And while-

Nor any- and nor any religious activity at all. Although there was some.

Yes, because I was going to ask you, because in Westerbork you had this little class. Was there any instructions or anything you received in Theresienstadt?

No. Well, for a short time, Mrs de Jong befriended a man who- she persuaded him to try to teach me to read and write And, he was trying to teach me the letters of the Roman alphabet and it was not very successful and it didn't last very long. Whether he disappeared on a train or whether she and Mrs- he and Mrs de Jong fell out, I don't know. But there was a brief attempt by one of the prisoner men to teach me the alphabet.

And what were the most sort of scary moments for you in- and how different was it from Westerbork, for you, as a six-year-old boy?

[2:00:21]

I mean, in appearance it was utterly different from Westerbork. Westerbork was creosoted wooden buildings, single story huts on sandy soil. In Theresienstadt it was, you know, rather fine buildings with normal streets and pavements, and squares with grass and trees. So- you know, Westerbork looked much more pleasant. On the other hand, in- in Westerbork I was staying amongst women. In- in Theresienstadt I was amongst women. In Westerbork I was with- amongst children, with a few adults looking after us. And in Theresienstadt I suffered more hunger. Although Mrs de Jong stole food for us, I was for large parts of the time, very hungry indeed. For a time, children were allowed to go to the- a window in one of the buildings, and collect a white bread roll with a piece of margarine that was very, very carefully measured out. I mean, it was a rectangular lump, very carefully cut and these lumps were floating in water so that God forbid one wouldn't stick to another and one person would get a bit more than- than another. But I and other people had to queue up at this window and one by one we got our one bread roll and one lump of margarine. And that actually made a huge difference. But that only- that was only true for a small part of the time. There was all- there were also occasions when parcels arrived from the outside world - I think via the Red Cross or from the Red Cross. They no doubt had a brown paper wrapping and then inside that a grey- a box of rather thick grey cardboard. And inside were all sorts of nice foods. And they included chocolate-

[2:02:47]

Right-

Which was certainly otherwise completely unknown to us in Theresienstadt. And the other foods I can't remember. But I mean that obviously helped our nutrition.

Right. And during the day, what other- what other things do you remember? I mean, what stands out in, in- in this time? I mean, how long did you spend in total in Theresienstadt?

Well, from I think the 2nd of August '44 - and beyond liberation on the 8th or 9th of May [1945]- because we had to stay there after the Nazis capitulated and after Theresienstadt was liberated, as it were, by the Soviet Army. And for some weeks. We arrived back in the Netherlands on the 17th of June.

So, quite a long time.

It was more than a month, you know, about five weeks between liberation and arrival in the Netherlands. Now the journey to the Netherlands- I don't know how long it took. It certainly wasn't several weeks. It was several days. So, we spent some more weeks in Theresienstadt. And I don't have too much of a memory of that time, or else I can't distinguish it from the last time before the capitulation.

Did you- did you encounter- who were the other adults you encountered? I mean, did you encounter SS, the Germans?

At the end of the time of Theresienstadt prisoners were brought from other concentration camps and from extermination camps. And I could see them in the distance wearing the typical Auschwitz type uniform. The striped pyjama type of clothing. Looking absolutely miserable and shuffling along. And queuing outside a building. And I was told they were queuing to have a shower. They- I was told not to go near them, because of the danger of typhus. There was an epidemic of typhus in Theresienstadt at that time. Typhus, not typhoid, they are different diseases. No doubt there was typhoid as well but typhus was certainly killing people and it is spread by lice.

Yeah.

[2:05:27]

And so, there were, you know, attempts to deal with the lice. I don't, again, remember that so much from my time in the- the last days in Theresienstadt. More from the journey home. When at one stage the lorry on which we were travelling stopped, we were unloaded and we were told to have showers. By this stage the women had heard about gas chambers and they refused to have showers or let me have one. Even though they were in the hands, I think probably, of the American armed forces.

What about liberation as such? Do you remember?

Well, like I explained yesterday-

Yeah.

I was- one morning Mrs de Jong explained that we'd been liberated, and that there had been Soviet or she said 'Russian' soldiers in Theresienstadt. And she had been out greeting them, and brought back a magnetic compass which was broken, but a Soviet soldier had given that to her because she had mentioned she was looking after a little boy. And she said that he had given it to her, for me. And I took that compass back to the Netherlands and eventually it was lost when I moved to England. Not all my belongings reached me in England. Sadly. But I was confined to the dormitory at the time when the Soviet soldiers were in Theresienstadt. And when I got out in the morning there were no more Soviet soldiers. And I don't blame them because you don't want to keep an army in a place where there is typhus. Typhus can wreak havoc with armies. And also, the Soviets of course were not really interested in spending their time with lousy, stinking Jews. And I mean literally lousy, we had lice. And literally we were stinking because we couldn't wash and we couldn't change our clothes. They were trying to capture as much of Europe as they could. So, the Soviet government certainly had, to its mind, better uses for the soldiers than staying around in Theresienstadt.

[2:08:12]

So then in that period, once the Germans had left the Russians passed through then who- who- what was going on? And-

Well, this is not from my memory so much.

No.

This is from what I've read.

Yeah.

The Nazis handed over control of Theresienstadt to the Red Cross. The International Red Cross. I think about a fortnight before capitulation. And, you know, I assume conditions then improved although I can't tell you about that in any detail. My memory is too vague.

Yes.

So, I guess that the Red Cross remained in charge after the capitulation.

And in terms of your feeling, I mean, you were with this one woman. Did, did that give you a sense of security or did...?

Oh, yes. I mean, you know, I- I was very fond of her and, you know, of course she wasn't my mother, but I loved her and had a very good relationship with her. You know, the women had to work, you know, go to work early, and came home late and they were tired. You know, conversation was limited; they had to get some rest. But you know, she, she was like a mother I mean, you know, when I became- during about the middle of my stay in Theresienstadt, as yellow as a lemon and feeling terrible. And my urine was the colour of black coffee. And I knew that there were doctors and nurses amongst the prisoners who tried to run clinics. And I wanted to go and see a doctor or a nurse. And she told me very sharply not to do that, because if I was seen outside, I would be killed. You know. It would have been obvious at a first glance if anybody had seen my skin, that I was terribly jaundiced. And the Nazis had one answer for everything. You know, it would have been the end of me.

And how did you manage to overcome...?

[2:10:36]

She- she certainly had, you know, the same protective instinct towards me as- as my mother would have had. Including at the end of our time in Theresienstadt, it was announced children had to board the next train. And she, believing that we were going to our deaths, decided she couldn't let us go unaccompanied. She would come with us, even though she was not a child. She didn't have to get on that train. But I- I told that story yesterday so I won't tell it again. Yeah. But I mean, that- it, it tells you how she felt about us. She was-

So-

...willing to die, rather than let us go to our deaths unaccompanied.

So, your- your life in Terezin would have been very different without her.

Without her, I would have stayed with the other children. I would have been in the children's building and I would have disappeared to Auschwitz-

Yeah.

- I believe.

And do you remember any of the conversations when she came back from her, from slave labour at night-time? What? Do- do you remember any details?

[2:11:59]

Well, they were unremarkable normal conversations. I mean, the- the- you know, the- the Red Cross visited Theresienstadt twice before it took over control after the- from the SS. And the town was prettied up. It was a kind of Potemkin village was created to deceive the Red Cross officers who were led around a very carefully controlled route by Nazi personnel- by no doubt SS and perhaps military and- and other Nazi officials. And shops were created that looked from the outside as though they were in business. And Mrs de Jong saw one of these shops shortly before one of these Red - well, the Red Cross visit which occurred whilst I was there - and went in, you know. There were- people working were paid in special money that was printed for Theresienstadt so that it couldn't- God forbid- be used for bribing guards or for people who might against all probability escape. It was like Monopoly money, really. And but she went in to see if, you know, and there was anything she could buy. And the lady who was there to act as if she was the shop assistant, more or less laughed at her and told her that no, there was nothing. It was just a, a display. But she had a doll back behind the shop. And she, you know, Mrs de Jong, I think, talked to- I was with her, but she mentioned my sister, so she gave Mrs de Jong this doll, quite a nice doll – for my sister. And when we got to the dormitory an arm came off the doll and inside the arm were some bank notes. There was some money. So, we talked about that and the implications of that. And there were other things. I mean, the women, can you imagine, were trying to make corsets for themselves. They must have had some material and, you know, their dress sense required corsets and I

mean it sounds crazy, but it's- but it's true. Also- and this is also bizarre, because I was five or six years old at the time and the- the women were- you know, women, when they're starving don't menstruate-

Yeah.

- if the starvation is bad. But they were menstruating a little bit. I mean, I guess, you know, Mrs de Jong was working in the kitchen. She was not as malnourished as- and, and- and a lot of women would have not- none of us were as malnourished as people in, in- in Auschwitz.

[2:15:12]

Yeah.

So, they- they sort of had scanty periods. And she showed me a little piece of cotton wool with a little bit of brown, by now, blood on it. I mean, you know, what the hell do you talk about in a small dormitory, you know, you've got limited time. And it's a sort of oddity. But, you know, what could you talk about? It's- we- we did talk, but the conversation was very ordinary.

Well, it's amazing that you can still remember those conversations and that you remember that- that shop from the Red Cross. So, it was a special display shop?

Oh yes, I mean, that was- that's a sort of standout incident which I remember clearly.

Did you come across the Red Cross? Did you see them when they came?

Yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yes. The day before the Red Cross came, we were all given strict orders about what we were allowed to do and not allowed to do. And the- I was in a small dormitory off the back of a big dormitory in the Hamburg barracks, and I think it was on the first floor as you come in through the main entrance turn left and you go up some stairs, and it was on the left side, near the front- the main entrance side of the Hamburg barracks. And there was a big dormitory and the rear right-hand corner there was a door, and that led to a dormitory which had probably four bunk beds in it. Wooden bunk beds. And I was there with

Mrs de Jong and my sister and some other women who occupied the other bunks. Also, Mrs de Jong brought back some milk from the kitchen where she worked and some kitchen towels. And they made a kind of cottage cheese by, you know, they probably let the milk ferment a bit and then poured it into these kitchen towels over a container, so that you get a thin liquid dripping out and something like cottage cheese - called 'kwark' in, in Dutch, which is the word she used, which they made for themselves.

And that's when the Red Cross came, or?

Oh, sorry the Red Cross. Yes-

Yeah.

[2:17:55]

So- I was told- you know- when they told me the Red Cross would be coming to our little dormitory off the back of the big dormitory, I said, "Oh, then I will be able to tell them about what life is like." And the women were very, you know, told me very fiercely to keep- to say absolutely nothing. Not to go near them. Not to touch them. Just to keep still. And they came into this small side dormitory. And, you know, if I'd reached out my hand, I could have touched their coats.

Do you remember them? A man? A woman? Who were they?

They were all men. No women. There were some Nazis. Nazi officers. And there were a few of these Red Cross men. And they were wearing olive green coarse woollen overcoats. They talked amongst themselves, you know. I did as I was told by the women. I didn't- I did nothing. Yeah. They actually came into that little side dormitory. And I could have touched them.

Extraordinary. But you didn't speak to them. You didn't say anything.

I didn't say anything.

You followed the instructions.

Yes. I didn't touch them. Yeah. Yeah. But, you know, I mean even those bunks, they were full of bedbugs. You know, at night the bedbugs came out of the cracks and had a drink of blood and then they crawled back full of blood and I squashed them on the bedclothes. And so, there were red blood spots all over my bedclothes, but there were always plenty more bedbugs.

Yeah.

Actually, before the Red Cross came, the dormitories were fumigated. And so, we were moved from dormitory to dormitory at that stage so that one dormitory could be fumigated at a time. And I was told not to go near the doors of those dormitories but I did, and the cracks- the space between the moving part of the door and the door frame was sealed with brown old-fashioned sticky paper. The kind that you have to moisten before it sticks. So, obviously what was inside was considered very poisonous. And I now know that it was in fact Zyklon B, you know, the same gas that they used for killing people in Auschwitz.

They used it to fumigate the barracks?

They used it to fumigate. To kill off the bedbugs, and the lice and the fleas.

Just for the inspection.

[2:20:46]

Yeah.

Yeah. And you mentioned a blanket. What sort of- how cold was it? And what- you said there were blankets or bed coverings. What-?

Yes. I- I can't remember. I can't remember. I mean, clearly it was not luxurious but I can't tell you in detail.

And another question-

All- all I know is I squashed the bedbugs- I squashed the bedbugs on them.

So that's why you remember that. So, it must have been white, otherwise you wouldn't have seen it.

Yes. Yes, that's right.

What nationality were the women, Martin?

Well, again, I can't be sure, but I have a feeling they were Dutch. Because they were talking freely all the time. I'm not really conscious that Mrs de Jong knew German. Or any of the other languages. You know - Czech would have been used in Theresienstadt. Also, French, and possibly some of the other Slavic languages. And I- I certainly don't think she knew any of those languages. I mean, everybody learned a few words of German, inevitably, but they were having perfectly normal conversations. So, it must have been Dutch, I think. And- and you know, nobody in their right minds knows Dutch unless they're Dutch. [Laughs]

Yeah, and what about SS? You said- so did you stay under the radar basically, or were you-?

Well, I wandered around in the town.

Yeah.

Doing nothing in particular. You know, I just looked at the buildings, and-

But you knew- you knew in the evenings some- the women would be coming back, so you knew at what time-?

[2:22:35]

Yeah. Because that was the normal routine, yes. Yeah.

Extraordinary. Extraordinary.

Yes.

OK, is there anything else on Terezin itself which you haven't mentioned?

Well, I mean one of my very good friends Stephen Frank was there at the same time. And he also originated in Amsterdam, and knows the same parts of Amsterdam that I know. But neither of us can remember encountering the other. Although we may have done. It's- we just don't have any way of really knowing whether we did or not.

And did you, in that- Martin, in that time, did you think about your parents, did you-? I mean-

Yes, certainly. Yeah. Well, I knew my mother was dead. I didn't know what was, you know, going on with my father. Of course, I thought about them. Yes. I was very conscious of not having my parents.

Yes.

Yeah.

It's amazing that you can- that you can remember all these things. OK. Now getting back, you said, so you were- came on the train from Terezin-

Yes.

So, let's pick up there, maybe.

Yeah. Sorry, you want me to- you surely don't want me to go back to the arrival?

No, no. To departure. To departure.

[2:24:14]

Eventually we were loaded on to the back of an army lorry in Theresienstadt and started our journey back to the Netherlands. The journey took several days and nights. We spent nights in all sorts of different places. One I think was a railway station. In fact, it must have been a railway station, from visual memories I have. Another one was a prison camp. At least it looked like that. And one night we stayed in an empty chateau, you know, a big building a bit like a, you know, almost a palace. But empty, apart from us but with large beautiful grounds and I think some mountains in the background. And- but one morning Mrs de Jong told- told me that my sister had fallen out of an army lorry whilst we were travelling. I had been in the back of the lorry with some adult men. She, because she had my two-year-old sister with her, was allowed to sit in the driver's cab. And with my sister on her lap. And she had fallen asleep during the night as the convoy of lorries was travelling. And she fell asleep against the door. The door opened and my sister rolled off her lap – and - survived! I mean, I wouldn't have known about it if Mrs de Jong had not told me. She was very upset, of course. And I looked very carefully over my sister and all she had was a few superficial skin abrasions. Otherwise- she seemed perfectly fine. But she could have easily died on the way back. And on another occasion, I think again I told both these stories yesterday. In the thing that I- I- the place that I think was a prison- had been a prison camp I wandered outside because the gate was open and we were allowed. And outside the gate I found a black disc lying on the ground near the barbed wire fence. And I wanted to pick it up and I heard screaming. And I looked around and there were some boys about my age running towards me like I've never seen anybody run before or since. And when they got to me- they explained what a landmine was. So, you know, I- I came within an ace of picking up a landmine. The last part of the journey was on the bottom of a Rhine barge. The kind of barge that's used for transporting vegetables and coal and sand. In June, it was hot weather. It- the way we were on the bottom of this cargo barge was a bit like slave ships, you know, during the Atlantic slave trade. Except we weren't chained of course, but we were lying very close together on the bottom of this- the hold of this ship. It stank like you- you know, horribly. A small hatch was opened to the outside and from time to time I could go close to the hatch to get a little bit of fresh air because it really was terrible in- in there. And at the end of that journey, we arrived at a quayside in the Netherlands. And there, on the quayside waiting for us were members of the family that had adopted my baby sister during the war, before she was arrested. But we went with Mrs de Jong to her home in Amsterdam. And the – yeah – incidentally the reason why that family was there was, I'm told by the- one of the sons of that family, that his mother, the- the woman who had adopted my sister during the war, had a boyfriend in the Red Cross who

was able to look out at the lists of people who were due to arrive. And warned her that we would be arriving on this particular Rhine barge. So that's why they were there waiting for us.

[2:29:31]

How many other children were with you in that Rhine barge or how many people were there?

I don't remember any. I mean, if there were any, there weren't many. I mean, the children- the vast majority of children in Theresienstadt were killed. Were murdered.

Yeah.

So, we went to Amsterdam to Mrs de Jong's flat. We stayed there overnight, I believe. And in the morning the other family, the Bangma family that had had my sister in their house, arrived to take us away from Mrs de Jong, whose husband had been arrested and sent to a concentration camp. He had not returned. Mrs de Jong assumed he was dead. As it happens, he wasn't. He returned later. But she was never able to show us to him. And it upset her terribly. But, you know, this well-off middle-class family with a lawyer metaphorically at their back, I mean he wasn't physically with them but he was certainly involved, you know approached this working-class woman who had lost her husband and, you know, just emerged from terrible conditions in Theresienstadt. And she robbed her of us.

It must have been very difficult.

Yeah. And- and they, they said, "Of course you can come and see them any time." She tried it once, and she was treated in such an unpleasant way that she couldn't bear to repeat the experience. And I remember that. I remember that visit and I- I - you know, I- I, I can understand why she didn't want to repeat the experience. The way she was treated was quite horrible. Yeah. Not like a human being at all.

This must have been very difficult for you, to have another separation. And I mean-

[2:31:46]

Yes, it was. It was a disaster. I loved her. I still love her memory. She was a wonderful woman. I would have loved to have grown up with her. And would have been, you know, totally happy with that. I was first sent to live with the woman who'd looked after me during the war, whose husband had been murdered in Neuengamme. So that would have been from maybe the 18th of June '45 until I think sometime in September. Because shortly after my seventh birthday, on the 6th of September, I first went to school in Amsterdam whilst I was still living with Katrien Rademakers on the Rozengracht. And I used to walk from her flat to the school, which was within sight of the Royal Palace. I mean, it's on a street called the Nieuwezijds Voorburgwaal which runs past the Royal Palace. And that route took me past the Anne Frank house. Of course, I didn't know that. The thing I noticed was the very beautiful church that stands next to the Anne Frank house. And its' beautiful carillon - you know the, the melodies that it played. And I know one day I was walking to school and, you know, with all the destruction and confiscation of the war there were- there were very few cars and there weren't that many trams. And most people walked to work. There were great masses of people walking to work in the morning, as I was going to school. And a man sort of, you know, walked beside me and we got into a conversation and within a 100 yards or 200 yards he knew the outline of my story you know that I'd been to Westerbork and Theresienstadt and so on. And he reacted with great pity. And that revolted me. I didn't- I didn't like that reaction. So, I always used that as an explanation about why I didn't talk about the wartime events afterwards. But, you know, all my friends have done the same. And they didn't have such an incident. So, I think this is what in psychology is called "the just so story". It's the story which sounds plausible but is not actually a true explanation. But I remember that incident. And another incident. I was just crossing the- the road from a bridge across a canal to the pavement on the other side, and suddenly found myself yanked back by my collar - violently. And, you know, in Theresienstadt there was no traffic. I had just stepped across the road without looking. And I had the white face of the driver of a little van who would have surely hit me if the- somebody you know, a man behind me hadn't grabbed me back. Yeah.

[2:35:20]

But Martin, who was in charge? I mean you said you came back and the family was there. Was there any Jewish community involvement or anyone? I mean- and you said you went back to your original- the original family. So, who- who was- was there anyone in charge or?

Well first Katrien Rademakers of course was not Jewish. Neither was the family that had housed my sister. And I'm not aware of any Jewish organisation being involved. That doesn't mean they weren't. I think if they had been, there's no way I would have found out about it. I'll tell you in a moment a story that illustrates that. But I was then- one day Katrien told me that when I came to school, I shouldn't come back to her. I should wait in the little square opposite the school - you know, the- a triangular pedestrian area - and somebody would collect me. And the somebody was one of the sons of the Bangma family - who I had met, but I'd totally forgotten him. I'd met him on visits to his parents' house during the war. And he took me on a tram to where he lived which was the Merwedeplein, a square in Amsterdam South where Anne Frank had lived, before she went into hiding. Again, I didn't find that out until decades, decades later. But- so, I was shown to their second-floor flat. You know, and met his wife. And then the doorbell rang, and they had to go down some steep stairs to get to their front door, which was at the bottom of the stairs. I was in their living room. And whilst they were talking to somebody at the door, I bumped into a tea trolley and broke a cup. So, the first thing, that I was with people I didn't know. And the first thing I did was to break some of their crockery. And you can imagine how I felt. But I lived with them, for a time. I went- I was taken to a nearby school, the Vondelschool. [Joost van den] Vondel, is, you know, one of the great golden age poets in the Netherlands. He's not the level of Shakespeare, but he might be the level of Marlowe. And Bep Bangma, that was her name, the woman took me to visit the school, to have a look at it.

[2:38:20]

And the headmaster showed us around. And as he was showing us towards the exit of the school, as we were going down some stairs, he, the headmaster said, "He looks a bright boy." And he used a word *pinter* in Dutch which is not the ordinary word for bright. And I didn't know that word so I had to ask her to explain it to me. And it made a very big impression on me. It- it sort of gave me the idea that maybe I could do something with my head. And I went to that school. And, I mean, I had already at first when I went to the school in - near the Royal Palace which was called the Spinozaschool so it was named after Spinoza, Baruch

Spinoza, at first, I was very withdrawn. I mean I sort of felt as if I was separate from all this cloud of other children. And the other children behaved quite normally towards me. So gradually I started to function a bit more normally. And that process continued at this school near the Merwedeplein until, you know, after a month or so I- I- I sort of felt as if I was interacting pretty normally with the other children. But it took time.

It must have been very difficult to adapt from a completely different reality.

The only time at the age three I had been stopped playing with children in the street. I had for some few months had contact with some boys in Westerbork. But even that was a bit limited.

Yeah.

And then almost no contact with children in Theresienstadt - just the odd child. A small-small group of boys I met in the street. [Coughs] So, yeah, I was completely- I mean if you did that deliberately to a child now, you know, you would be punished severely by the law and rightly so, because social contact in those years is known to be crucial for brain development.

Yeah, but also thinking of you know they brought these young survivors from Terezin here to England-

Yeah.

You know- and they came to Bulldogs Bank, and they had a year of rehabilitation.

Yeah. No, I had nothing like that.

No.

Yeah. Nothing like that.

It must have been- it must have been very difficult. But Martin what I-

[2:40:52]

It was.

What I don't understand- why- why did she- couldn't she keep you, the lady? Why did she tell you to go?

I asked her about that. You know, "Why did you agree to this?" And she said that the Bangma family had told her that they wanted me to live with my sister. And Katrien Rademakers said she thought, yeah, that made sense and so she gave me up. I mean she clearly loved me. And I loved her. But she thought she- she was convinced by these people that it was the right thing to do.

It's extraordinary that they went through all this effort.

Yeah.

I mean more than one separation. I mean, it's-

Yeah, yeah! Absolutely. Absolutely, you know, from- from school to school to school, from family to family to family. It- it's not good.

What about your sister, Martin? How did she-?

My sister went straight to the older couple who were living temporarily in a quite- a very nice semi-detached house. Very nice semi-detached house in a village near Haarlem in the Netherlands. And the village is called Santpoort. They owned a large villa and a huge garden but it had been requisitioned during the war by the Nazis and then handed over to a maternity hospital, and it took them a long time to get it back. Some years, in fact. And then when they got it back it- they decided to divide it into two so that one of their sons could live in half of it. So, there was a lot of rebuilding; it wasn't just dividing. They really rebuilt a lot of the interior and it was quite major work. So, they were living temporarily in that house and looked after my sister there. I visited her there on some occasions. Mrs de Jong made one visit. And that's the visit I remember. And she was treated in a very off-hand, distant way. I

very much doubt she was even offered a cup of tea. And she was allowed to take me for a walk outside. Not my sister, not Erica. Just me. There was some wasteland across the road and some, you know, with a view to some fields. I say, wasteland, it wasn't that unpleasant but it wasn't you know, not in their house or in their garden, for example. And Mrs de Jong and I had a- you know, talked. And then she went away heartbroken at the way she'd been treated. And I can understand it.

And did she explain to you the situation, or what? I mean that- did she feel, she couldn't do anything? Was powerless, or-?

[2:43:31]

I think- I don't know. I mean, I- I- I- I guess that she probably didn't understand how and why you know, how unpleasantly she was being treated. That was probably on- you know when she- on the journey back and afterwards that she really decided she couldn't face it anymore. But the- the- you know, I'm virtually certain that the explanation for all this is that the older Mrs Bangma, who was responsible for all this - especially the way it was done - was in fear of losing us. Not in fear of losing us, in fear of losing my sister. And would do anything to prevent that including being very nasty to Mrs Jong – Mrs de Jong. The- so, I lived with the- with her son in Amsterdam. And then when their- a bit later, when their house, their villa was nearly finished, I was moved from there to where the older family where my sister was living. I was also treated in a very off-hand way. I mean, when the family went on holiday, they would discuss for weeks beforehand how they were going to make my three-year-old sister - my sister had her third birthday there- my three-year-old sister - safe on a sailing boat. A sailing yacht. Three years old. And when I asked "What about me?" "Oh, you're staying behind." They went on holiday, they took my three-year-old sister on a sailing boat, they left me with the housekeeper. You know. And, and- and I was treated harshly by- by this woman, the- the- the men of the family behaved perfectly normally. But they were away during the day.

And was your sister happy with them? I mean, your sister-

Yes. Yes, very happy.

Does she have memories from Terezin at all? Can she-?

[2:46:40]

She died in 2007 in Amsterdam. She- during most of her life, there was no evidence that she remembered anything of Theresienstadt. Late in her life, she claimed she did. But she was a psychologist, a self-taught psychologist.

Yeah?

No university qualification in that. And a strong believer in recovered memory. I mean, she told me dramatic stories about a patient who she had had dealings with, with elaborate recovered memories at the time when that concept was fashionable amongst some people. So, I'm very sceptical about that. I can't be sure it's not true, but I have strong reasons to doubt whether my sister really remembered anything. And certainly, she was quite- quite unable to tell me anything that she couldn't have known from being told. You know, I can tell you things about Theresienstadt which you will not find in any book. You know, the colour and material of the Red Cross officer's coats. That's not in any book as far as I'm aware.

No.

Right? So that's potentially checkable. I've never checked it actually but- but I have quite often included details like that because they are potentially checkable and for somebody in fifty, a hundred years' time-

Absolutely.

-trying to figure out whether I'm, you know, another [Benjamin] Wilkomirski - that is evidence that I was there.

Yeah. But your sister said- so she- did she like the people? I mean when you were there?

Yes, oh, yes, I mean she was very happy. She was spoilt rotten.

Right.

[2:48:39]

You know. If she cried at eating tomatoes, they put a lot of sugar on them. If I had something which I didn't like, "It's on the table. You eat it." You know, which was- had been the rule with their own sons as well but she was really spoilt rotten. I mean, she was given beautiful dresses. She was later on given piano lessons. When I asked whether I could have piano lessons. "No." You know, this woman wanted my sister to be able to do something I couldn't do. She was a sort of, amongst- apart from being a bitch, she was also a feminist before the term was current, as far as I know. And- and so, I mean, I lay crying in bed at night in that family, because of the way I was treated. I had good reason to cry.

And there was no other support system? There was no way to ask for help or-? No.

No – no.

And at that point did you know that- what had happened to your father? Did anyone tell you?

They- they did more or less tell me whilst I was living with them - in rough outline. I mean, later on when I moved away from that family, I asked them in more detail and got more detail. Not much, but some. But also, whilst I was living with that family, by the time they had moved to their very fine villa, a parcel arrived from the Jewish community in the nearby town of IJmuiden. And it contained a propelling pencil and a Monopoly game and some other things that might appeal to a child. Toys and things like that. And it really touched me, because, you know, here were some people outside this family thinking of me. And it meant a huge amount to me. And I wanted to write to them to thank them. And they wouldn't let me.

[2:50:48]

Unbelievable.

They wouldn't let me lest I develop a connection with the Jewish community in IJmuiden.

But how did the Jewish community know that there is a- that you were there? It's interesting, isn't it? So, you couldn't- you couldn't establish that connection?

No. For- for, for that reason but there may have been other people who tried to get in touch. There obviously were records. There were things going on that I was, and am, unaware of. But they did. Yeah.

And again, were you- you were aware that you were Jewish? And that, I mean that you were different?

Well, my- my father was Jewish and that his family was Jewish. I knew my mother's family- my mother and her family were not Jewish. I knew that.

Yes, you knew that. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah.

*And what did they- when they- were they religious this family you stayed with?
Did they go to church on Sunday?*

Yes, they- they were. They were, they were Christians. They were Mennonites.

Mennonites?

[2:51:58]

The- now, there are different varieties of Mennonites. They absolutely staunchly refused to have anything to do with a little Mennonite church which stood practically next-door to their- the garden of their beautiful villa. They went to one that looked like an ordinary protestant church. The nearby one was a wooden- small wooden building. And they did sometimes take me there. And they certainly taught my sister and I to pray before we went to sleep at night, and to pray after a meal, the Lord's Prayer, the Christian prayer. They sent me to a Sunday school in the village, Santpoort. It was actually a very good Sunday school and I learnt a lot about the Bible including the *Tanakh* but in Dutch of course. And it was presented to me as

the Old Testament. But the teaching was of, you know, it was really well done. And so, you know, I grew up as a good little Christian. And in fact, read the Bible from cover to cover and read *A Pilgrim's Progress* which was one of the books they gave me. So eventually when in 1950 I arrived in Manchester in England, I regarded myself as a Christian. And I guess if my sister thought about it, she would have done too.

You were twelve, twelve - when you-?

I was twelve, yeah.

So how long did you stay with this family?

Well, I am not sure when I moved from Amsterdam to the village of Santpoort. My guess is it would have been 1948. Because I reckon, I must have been there at least two years. And that roughly tallies with the fact that- no, I can remember being in three different classrooms.

Well, that's still possible with a two-year-stay, depending on the time of year when it begins and ends. But I remember three different classrooms in the- in the primary school. So, you know, each classroom was always one year. They sent me to an- a really superb primary school. And I'm sure they paid fees. I mean, I'm sure it's a private fee-paying school in a beautiful area. And, you know, I made friends there and was certainly very happy with the school

[2:54:48]

So, you adapted yourself, despite the difficult home life?

Yeah, and I mean- and- and it was better school than they had sent their own children to, their own sons to. Their own sons had gone to the local village school. Now probably when that happened, they didn't have as much money as when they were looking after us

Yeah.

And they had four sons to look after. Now they just had two children, and they were much better established. So-

And how old were they, Martin? How old were they?

Well, the husband was I think fifty-eight when he died. I'm not necessarily quite right about that, but I believe he was in his late fifties. So, by the standards of, you know, my conceptions in those days, getting on in life, but by today's standards, still quite a young man.

And the woman? The- his wife?

Well, she would have been- I- I don't know her age. I mean, I guess she would have been as was convention, a few years younger than he.

And she died? Or, what happened to her?

What happened was that one morning - I woke up and somebody told me that she had died during the night. There had been nothing wrong with her the previous evening as far as anybody could tell in any way. And so, there was a funeral. And the husband tried to look after us. And he hired two housekeepers in succession. And both of them were disasters. You know. The conclusion he came to, and I suspect he was right, is that he was quite wealthy. And they thought, you know, they could become the housekeeper for an old man and he would die and, you know, they would inherit the wealth. But he got rid of them, quite rightly. At the same time, my family in Manchester was clamouring to have us, and so was our family in Israel. And we'd met both families. And I certainly was very fond of my Israeli aunt and uncle. And I'd even met my Israeli cousins. Certainly at least one of them. And I had probably two of them. More superficially, but- but, you know, perfectly pleasant impression.

[2:57:32]

This was your father's - father's relatives?

Yeah.

Yes.

It's my father's old- half-brother. Older half-brother and his- yeah.

In Israel?

In Israel, that's right. And I'd also met my aunt and my grandmother from Manchester. And my grandmother had lived in Amsterdam for a little while before she moved to England, so I'd met her a few times that way. And I mean there was nothing wrong with the relationship with my grandmother. But the aunt, I didn't take to her so well as to my family in Israel. And I think that was really the reason why I wanted to be in Israel. It may, you know, it's- human beings are not good at explaining why they make decisions, so it may not be quite so simple. But I was asked four times whether I wanted to join my family in Manchester or my family in Israel and each time I said, Israel. And I was sent Manchester. Now, again, what was in their mind, I'm not a mind-reader, I don't know and they didn't say. It may be that they thought my sister at the age of eight was too young to decide, that we shouldn't be separated and that England was safer than Israel. There may have been all sorts of reasons. I know the pressure from my aunt and grandmother was strong. I have some ideas about my aunt's motivation. But I have no, you know, nothing to back it up. The fact is that my grandmother had somehow got a big Van Gogh picture into- into Britain. Just put it amongst some other oil paintings of no value and taken in through customs.

Yeah?

And it was hanging in the dining room of my aunt and uncle's family in Manchester.

Yeah?

A very fine Van Gogh. And I mean there are images of it on the internet. If you look up 'Stern' and 'Van Gogh' you will find it. It's *Orchard in Blossom*.

Yeah?

A bit like *Souvenir de Mauve* - the same family of paintings. With a, a- you know, hay store with a red roof in- in the background. And my grandmother gave that to my aunt and uncle. So, it was their property. Afterwards, it- there was a will in which it was bequeathed to my cousin and- my two cousins. We were equally grandchildren of my grandmother and grandfather, but we didn't come into it. And then after my uncle's death, my aunt changed that will and made some of it over to my sister and I, quite a small amount actually. Now, I- you know- was the promise of the picture made to my aunt as a kind of bribery to enforce me and my- my grandmother was a very forceful woman by all accounts. And didn't- had an intense dis- dislike of my uncle in Israel who was not her son.

[3:01:30]

Right.

He was the son of the first- my, my grandfather's first wife.

Right.

So, you know, all sorts of possibilities arise about these... women's motivations. But I find it very strange and- and, and also the fact that even before I moved to Britain, my aunt had decided to send me to a boarding school. Now in the Netherlands it's not usual to send children to boarding school. And the Dutch word for a boarding school is also the word for a school for, you know, a correctional school for children who are criminals. And the threat you know, of sending somebody to a boarding school in Holland is certainly- I don't know now, but then it, you know, if, if a boy was not behaving himself, you know, "Behave yourself or we'll send you to a boarding school!" So, the whole idea of being sent to a boarding school seemed very strange to me. I mean if they wanted to have me in Manchester so much why did they immediately send me away? As soon as they could. I had to go to a prep school first, so I could pass the entrance exam to the boarding school. But they didn't send their own children to boarding schools.

And do you remember- do you remember arriving in Britain, Martin?

It's a bit mixed up with- I used- before I came to live in Britain, I had travelled to Britain quite a number of times on a DC3 plane leaving from Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, near Amsterdam to Ringway Airport near Manchester. So, there were quite a number of those journeys and I can't tell them apart particularly in my memory. But I mean settling in to the family in Manchester was difficult. It was not an altogether nice experience.

And it was against- again another decision against your will, so-

[3:03:40]

Yes, it was. Yes. Yeah. My repeatedly and very clearly expressed will. Yeah. And, and my Israeli family, you know my aunt in Israel was very upset and couldn't understand why I didn't join them. And was told that I had decided I wanted to live with the family in Manchester. They lied to her. And when I- when this came out- it came out one time when I was visiting my family in Israel and she was driving me to the airport on the way back and during the conversation she asked me, "Why did you decide to go to England?" And I said, "I didn't." And that I- you know, it came out and she was very, very upset. They had lied to her. And they were, you know, she and my uncle there they were really wonderful people and so are their children. I'm desperately fond of them, still.

Was not in your control - at all.

It was not in my control.

What about your sister? How did your sister manage that transition?

Well, not well. Because she was treat- she had been spoiled rotten by the fam- the woman of the family in Manchester. But the other members of the family, I mean, the housekeeper did as, you know, what she was told by this woman. And the men were under the thumb of this woman when they were in the house.

In Holland you mean?

Yes, the woman really determined what happened. So, my sister, who'd been used to being you know, little princess and always getting her way, was suddenly treated in a cold and distant and unpleasant way and, and a harsh way, sometimes. Her beautiful clothes disappeared, never to be seen again. And she had a terrible transition. She was only eight, she was four years younger, so, it, it- it was a further damage to her, which she didn't need. I think it helped to damage the rest of her life.

And she- was she also sent to boarding school?

No. No, she was not con- she was sent to Whalley Range School in Manchester, which I suppose is quite good. But it- but- I don't know what it was. I mean, despite the fact that, you know, life with the family in Manchester was really quite unpleasant in some ways, my aunt had a kind of affection or love for me, I mean, which was supposed to be explanation for why I was, why- why she wanted me in Manchester. But it was not a normal affection. And she definitely didn't have that towards my sister. The opposite, in fact. A kind of antagonism. So yeah, I mean life was difficult for both of us. But my sister was younger and I suppose less able to take it.

What about language? How did you manage to learn English?

[3:07:30]

Hah. Well, I was given some English lessons by a lady in her house near where the family- the family lived. And then I was sent to school. But I couldn't really understand English well enough to follow the lessons properly. And- but when we did arithmetic- yeah, I'd done long division in Holland so I knew how to do that. The only- I used the Dutch way of setting out the figures on the paper, instead of the English way. And for that, I was caned. And- bizarre. [ironic half-laugh] I did all the arithmetic right. But you know, getting the lines and the positions of the numbers in a different- would have been correct in Holland. Then during a French lesson, I couldn't tell when they were speaking French and when they were speaking English. The reason I couldn't tell the French was they spoke it with a terrible English accent. You know, the- the teacher would point to the door and say "*Qu'est-ce que c'est* [pron 'say']?" And I knew the word 'say' was an English word. But I didn't know the meaning of the rest of the sentence, and the children all answered, [pron] "Say la port." And I knew the

word 'port' was an English word because I'd come by boat via Harwich. I was talking about planes earlier on, but the- actually in the end, the- the- when I emigrated it had been via Hoek van Holland to Harwich by boat. So, I had a problem. You know, if they'd pronounced the French properly, I would have stood a better chance. The- and then I had history lessons. And I was in luck, because the year- the century we were going to study the 17th century when England and Holland were at war. It's a big subject in Dutch schools. I had just studied it the year before and I had read books about it. And you can go to the State Museum in Amsterdam and see the stern of a, a Dutch, the- the British war ship, the flagship of the British fleet hanging on the wall because the Dutch captured the ship and kept this as a trophy. And Dutch people still go and gloat at their victory over the English in this war. So, I- I knew a lot about it and I could even tell you the colour and pattern of the main admiral's coat because every Dutch boy learns a song about that. The only thing is that in the English history lessons none of these battles that I knew about had ever occurred. And there was no mention of all these very famous admirals that I knew all about. Instead of that, there were different sea battles which had all been won by the English. And different admirals I had never heard of who had won those battles. So, I had a very valuable history lesson. So, it was a difficult transition. But after two terms- so two thirds of a year at a preparatory school in Stockport near Manchester, I was sent to the boarding school having passed the entrance exam. And it took my classmates and I three months before they and I realised- they realised I wasn't born in Britain. And I realised they didn't know. In- in- in that time you know there would have been some holiday time as well and I would have been speaking with my cousins and the other members of the family so I would have been using English. But you know, two-thirds of a year my English had become so good that my classmates didn't seem to suspect that I- I wasn't born in Britain.

[3:11:38]

And I assume at that point-

But it was hard- it was hard, but it worked.

And I assume at that point also you didn't tell anyone about your experiences, your wartime experiences?

No. Absolutely not. No, no. No, no. No. Not until late in my medical career and then only a few people. Yeah.

OK. We'll speak about it a bit later. What about the religious aspect? Were they Jewish the family?

Well, the- yes- the family in Manchester-

I mean, practicing anything?

Well, they were Jewish. They observed Pesach and Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Although they called it Rosh Hashonah. Really no awareness of any of the other festivals, not even Purim. You know, I only learnt about those much later. *But*, you know, Pesach they- the, the Seder was done very nicely and my uncle read the Haggadah and he did it very well. So, I learnt parts of it. And I, you know, I was sent to a boarding school run by a Christian denomination, the Quakers. So, I continued to go to the Quaker meeting house in Manchester. And I wasn't formally a Quaker but I sort of associated with them. And then later on, on Yom Kippur they were fasting, so I would fast with them. Because I didn't want to eat in front of them when they were not eating. And then break the fast with them. And my uncle, who had been very antagonistic at the beginning, actually, you know, later- in later years, you know, reacted very positively to that. And we became friends in the end. And then, yeah, I mean I went to university and at university I started conversations with my Christian friends, no two of whom could agree that any of the others were proper Christians. Or Christians at all. And I couldn't figure out why a beneficent almighty could allow something like the Holocaust to happen. And so, I abandoned any manifestations of religion and told people I was an atheist in order to avoid arguments which I thought were going around in circles and not getting anywhere. And ultimately in my fifties I sheepishly walked up the steps of the synagogue in Leicester. And I didn't have a kippah and I didn't know what to do, where to sit. I- I just slunk away in the furthest corner that I could find, where I still sit. And, you know, somebody gave me a kippah and as I turned up regularly the guy sitting next to me would help me a bit find- you know with a prayer book, and gradually I learnt a bit. And so now my situation is that my religion is the Jewish religion. I'm not a Jew because my mother was not Jewish. I am married to somebody, to a wife who is not a Jew. This prevents me from having an orthodox conversion. The option of a reform conversion does not appeal to

me at all. You know, and the countless numbers of people who've said to me, "Why don't you go to the other shul, the other synagogue?"

[3:15:33]

The Reform one?

Yes, exactly.

Yeah?

But I- I function in, you know, every possible way as a member of the orthodox community. Although of course I'm not part of the minyan. There are all sorts of things I can't do.

But you go to that synagogue?

I go to the synagogue. I take part in the prayers. I take it very seriously. And, and I- I function in many ways as a member of the community. I'm just not a Jew according to *Halacha*.

And what do you think made you do that in- in-?

Yes, I mean I found myself in my professional life and in my adult life surrounded by people who knew what was right and wrong. So, they told me. They were mostly either not religious, or nominally or very superficially religious. It wasn't those- my experience that those who went to church more were necessarily nicer people. There seemed to be no particular relationship. But whenever they got on a high horse about some big moral principle, it always turned out that the outcome of adopting their view, was that they were better off. Now in scientific medicine you're supposed to learn some- something about statistics. And, you know, you know about human variability and it is not likely that anything is the case in 100 percent of human beings, least of them- least of all them being right in their opinions every time. And it seemed to me that if one was to make moral decisions, just being intelligent and well educated and making up your own mind - which is the common view now - that it wasn't enough. And that a human being needs an external set of rules that they

don't make up themselves that is the same for everybody. I think that's a kind of foundation of morality. And I decided to choose for that, the Jewish religion. And-

[3:18:14]

What about your- what about your sister? What did she choose or-?

Well, my sister remained really a floating voter religiously till the end. She of course had had a Christian upbringing up to her eighth year. Never did anything about Christianity after she arrived in Britain as far as I'm aware. Was exposed to Judaism in the way I've described. On her deathbed she asked to see a Liberal or Reform Dutch rabbi. And she wanted a *mezuzah* on her door. And there was a great fuss because you know, we got her one and she wanted it- it couldn't be nailed because actually she was in a hospice. And it had been beautifully painted inside, including the door posts. We were not going to make holes in it. I mean she was not going to be there for terribly long. So, I found a- you can get some sticky strips which have a thing that you can pull and they will remove cleanly from any surface. You can get them in any supermarket or hardware shop. So, I got these things. Nope. This wasn't right because she could see a bit of white. So, I picked up one of her women's magazines. And I went through the photographs. And there somewhere was part of an advertisement which had some purple the same colour as her door post. And I cut that out and covered up the white. And so, she was reconciled to having it stuck on. But it really would have upset the painters and the workmen in that place. And the staff. You know because they, they had gone to terrible- tremendous trouble, you know. And I've painted door posts; I know how hard it is to get it to look really beautiful.

But she wanted a mezuzah on the door?

She wanted a *mezuzah* on the door. But again, it was pick and mix. It was- you know what she- she made her own rules.

And when did she go back to Holland? She- she returned to Holland?

[3:20:37]

She went in her thirties. She studied German at Birmingham University. Spent a lot of her time as a student doing music. She- at that time she was playing the cello. She then took up the piano. And she became for a while a teacher – a supply teacher. So, you know, substitute when teachers are off sick or something like that. And she then became an educational psychologist helping school children with emotional problems. How she got trained for that- I've got a sort of rough idea. Again, it was a bit pick and mix. It wasn't formal course. But she did study a little bit, I think. She was then offered a job in a Dutch university. A kind of department of psychology. And- in- in Utrecht. It's one of the big Dutch cities. And at the University of Utrecht, she worked in this department. Eventually, when the man who had invited her across, the head of department retired or died she became the head of that department. And it became, I don't know whether it was initially, but it became the department of group psychology. And she was the head of that department on the day she died in 2007, March 2007. And she'd developed quite a reputation around the world. I mean, I, you know, I know some of her ideas about psychology and don't agree with them. I mean I have since she died studied psychology as much as I can, without doing a formal psychology course, and I think her ideas about psychology were now old fashioned, Freudian, gestalt psychology and that sort of- these schools of psychology which were fashionable in the early part of the century and up to certainly the 1950s, 60s.

And her name was Erika Stern?

Erika Stern. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah- and I mean her department was quite a flourishing department when she died. And they had a sort of academic event in- in memory of her kind of *Festschrift* [commemorative publication].

[3:23:30]

And- and Martin, do you think the fact that she became a psychologist was related to her early experiences?

I would think so. There might be other explanations. My uncle who was a general- a private general practitioner in Manchester, was very fond of Freudian psychology and often talked about it. So that may have influenced her. She was a troubled person throughout her life. That may have been a motive. You know, some people go into psychology to solve their own

problems. If there's one thing I've learned about psychology is that we are all very good at inventing reasons why we do things, which are not necessarily the correct reasons. So, when I believe I can't do it reliably for myself, I should be even more cautious when I'm talking about my sister.

Yeah. So, it affected you differently, your experiences. Obviously, your experiences were different, but you-

Well, you know, the difference between- of four years at those young ages makes a huge difference.

Yeah.

So- and- and you know people who were older than me when they were in camps in- in the Nazi system, survived it better than I did psychologically, usually. It- it's tremendously age related. Yeah. But I mean I, you know, had the good fortune to go- the school I went to in York, which I left at my own insistence, because of anti-Semitism amongst pupils - which I must say was not particularly combatted by the teachers - I- I they may have been more or less ignorant of it, but-

Is it the Quaker school? The Quaker school?

[3:25:40]

Yes. But in other respects, it was an excellent school. And in other respects, I enjoyed my time there, but I certainly learnt and worked hard. And then I had the enormous good fortune to go to Manchester Grammar School, which is one of the best schools in the- in Britain. And from there I got a kind of scholarship called an exhibition at- to a college at Oxford University. And had a wonderful education. And the thing that drove me into medicine most of all as far as I'm concerned, I've just said we're all bad at explaining why we do things, but the intellectual challenge of it. I mean I liked the science of biology, and you know, I liked chemistry and physics as well. When I was in sixth form at school, I gave a lecture. I was in the biology sixth form. But I gave a lecture to the physics sixth form on how transistors work. In, you know, the late 1950s when that knowledge was a bit newer than it is now. So, you know, I really enjoyed science. The whole way of thinking and so on. And in- in Oxford I got

a fantastic training both in science and in medicine which isn't exactly the same thing because medicine it- it has an incredibly important vitally important basis in science but you can't practice the whole of medicine on the basis of science because much of the time you don't know everything. You have to make your best guess, and it's a human judgment. So, medicine is a kind of curious mixture of really fantastic science and human skills - which are not in themselves scientific. And I- I enjoyed that very much. So, yeah, my formation was different. My sister did, went to different- different schools and went and- and did a modern language. And moreover, one which was relatively easy for her because knowing Dutch, I mean, learning German is a bit easier.

[3:28:13]

Did you keep up your Dutch? Did you speak Dutch to your sister?

Als ik kan heel makkelijk Nederlands spreke. En met een [inaud – gaangbar?] goed accent geloof ik? [both laugh]

I can reply to you in German, but...

OK. [both laugh]

But so, they allowed you to keep the Dutch? That's what I meant. The family they didn't mind you speaking Dutch to each other?

Well, I mean to be honest, my aunt and my grandmother had learnt a little bit of Dutch. And I actually could have, my aunt was able to have a simple Dutch conversation with me. They tried. And, you know, my- my grandmother had lived in- in the Netherlands for a while, so that might have been a reason. And also, they had lived in the Netherlands during the war. They'd fled from Germany to the Netherlands. And, and so my aunt- my grandmother may have had an opportunity to learn some Dutch through that. My- my aunt never really lived in the Netherlands. So, I, you know she, she may have done that and probably the most likely explanation: to be nice to us. You know. People are not all bad or all good. People are a mixture all the time.

And I think, you didn't tell us, how did your grandmother manage to come to England?

She and her- my grandfather purchased, during the Nazi period, citizenship of Haiti. And because of that, they were not sent to Auschwitz or something like that. Or, you know, Sobibor or... Chelmno or any of those places. But because of that the Nazis interned them in a prison camp which was not a death camp, and not a forced labour camp. And my grandfather died there, during the war, apparently of an infection. You know, who knows whether his medical care was what it would have been if he'd not been incarcerated. My grandmother survived it. And one day in the Netherlands I was taken by the husband of the family that had taken my sister to- from Amsterdam to Maastricht in the south- southern tip of the Netherlands, in the little van of his business. It was a ladies' coats and dresses business. So, there was a van with a high roof to the van at the back, so that it could hang these clothes from the ceiling without them touching the floor. And in that van, we collected my grandmother who arrived at the railway station in Maastricht. And I, you know, I greeted her at the station and went to the van and we drove back to Amsterdam. And she then lived for a while behind the Concertgebouw, you know the big concert hall in- in Amster- in the middle of Amsterdam.

[3:31:40]

And it was during the war?

No, no, this was after the war.

After the war?

Yeah.

So, she came to England when? Sorry, I didn't quite understand.

Well, she came to England before I did.

Ok.

So, I mean my guess would be 40- 1947, '48 something like that. But it's a bit of a guess. I mean, sometime between when she was- arrived and, and certainly quite long before I went to England in 1950.

So, her daughter had come before the war? Her daughter, your aunt?

Her daughter, my aunt, had- fled to Britain before the war. She was a Jewish refugee. She married another Jewish refugee, my uncle. And so, they had been living in Manchester since before the Second World War.

Got it. And then the grandmother joined them.

And the grandmother joined them in their house in Didsbury and Manchester yeah. Yeah. And corner of Wilmslow Road and Ballbrook Avenue. Everybody who knows south Manchester will know where that is.

Right, right. And he was a doctor you said? He?

He was a family doctor. He- one of Manchester's only two private family doctors. The others were all working for the National Health Service.

[3:33:02]

Martin I would like to- it's again four o'clock. I would like to talk about a bit more about your career and then I have some questions about, you know, Holocaust education and things you're doing these days.

Yeah. Let me just check my diary to make sure that I'm not overlooking something. Because I hadn't sort of-

So, shall we stop? I think it's best to stop now, because I think it's not good to not move for more than two hours. And-

Yes. Indeed. I've got something else on this evening. And I need to prepare a bit for that. So.

No, we can- we can let me just stop the recording for now. I will stop the recording.

[3:33:46]

Here we go. So, today is the 29th of April 2020, and this is our third session of interview with Mr Martin Stern. Martin, so we managed to get to your schooling in the UK and today we'll talk a little bit about your career and some - just general reflections.

OK. Right.

Maybe let's start- I wanted to ask you to go back to your schooling. You said you left the Quaker school because there- you encountered some anti-Semitism.

Yeah.

And I was going to ask you, what was the problem and what did you encounter there?

Well, the problem was that in conversation casual remarks would be made about Jews 'stroking their noses' and 'croaking on about earning shekels, shekels', you know the medieval image of the avaricious, hoarding, greedy, inhumane Jew. And in the dormitories- in the dormitory at night boys would sing a song you know "In the Streets..." of- to a- to a tune of the *Lambeth Walk* song. "*In the streets of Tel Aviv, Jewish child with Jewish mother...*" and then you know going on to really horrifically slanderous things. I mean, they would have done credit to *Der Stürmer*. You know. And I had to endure that.

And did they- did-?

And also, the boys who were Jewish, were bullied for that from time to time. Because they were Jewish, not because of anything they had done.

And what about you? Were you considered Jewish in that context or not?

No. I didn't consider myself Jewish. Nobody else had any reason to think I was a Jew. But because I did not take part in the bullying of the other Jewish boys, after a time, one of my classmates asked me, "Are you a Jew?" And although I had been brought up as a Christian in Holland and didn't regard myself as a Jew, it stuck in my throat -

And what did you answer?

[3:36:18]

- to say that I was not a Jew. So, I kept my mouth shut. And from then on, the other pupils assumed I was Jewish and treated me accordingly, which was of course unpleasant. I mean you could describe it as being sporadic and relatively low level. One of my Jewish friends from that school who remains a friend, tells me he does not remember Jewish bullying - anti-Jewish bullying. Now, that could have various possible explanations. First of all, I think his identification as a Jew was probably not terribly strong at that time. It is now. And, you know, some people have a sort of easy-going personality and everything flows off their back and they remain good humoured in spite of being stressed. And I think he had that kind of character which doesn't lend itself to bullying very much. But for others it- it bit. And it got into them.

But also, I mean it wasn't that many years still after the wartime - for you.

Exactly. It was five years, you know, five, five and a half years after the war. And significantly, only a couple of years after Israeli independence, up to which there had been British troops in the Palestine Mandate. With Jewish terrorism against British troops. There was of course also Arab terrorism but somehow that- that was not an issue. Actually, there weren't any Muslim or Arab pupils in the school. Certainly not that I was aware.

So, did you-

But I somehow think that if there had been, they would probably not have suffered bullying, even though the British troops had also suffered at their hands.

[3:38:26]

So, did you instigate to leave the school, or?

Absolutely, yes. Yes. Absolutely. Yeah.

And then in the next- then you went to Manchester Grammar School you said?

My aunt went to the headmaster called the High Master of Manchester Grammar School. Eric James, who had some discussions with her and let me enter Manchester Grammar School without an exam. You know. Normally you did not get into Manchester Grammar School without passing an exam. And it was an elite school, demanding high standards. So, you know, I- I'm eternally grateful for that. I- I don't think I discredited his decision. [Laughs]

And how old were you when you came to Manchester Grammar School?

I guess it would have been fourteen, or something like that. Probably. Fourteen, fifteen.

And from there-

And at Manchester Grammar School was an utterly different. You know, every- there were quite a lot of Jewish boys in the school including in my form everybody was judged as an individual. And I- I don't remember any group bullying based on somebody's background origin of any sort. There were people from well-off families, people from less well-off families. It made no difference. I loved it.

[3:40:16]

So that made your time easier in England in a way, I mean, through the school.

I think it rescued me in a- in a way. It rescued me from a particular problem and I'm deeply grateful for it.

And then you set off, you said you went to Oxford and studied medicine. Yes?

Yes - yes, yeah.

And what made you decide to study medicine? You mentioned a little bit yesterday.

Well, I- my interest really was in science and I was in the biology sixth form studying zoology and botany as well as chemistry and physics. And I intended to be a biological scientist. And then the form master who was also a careers master sat each of us down individually at a little table, and showed us two sheets of paper with some figures on them. And on one sheet was what you could earn as a biological scientist and on the other sheet was what you could earn as a doctor. And he said, "You could raise a family on that, you can't on that." And he persuaded all but one of us who had not already decided to be doctors to switch to applying for medicine at university level. And he persuaded me to change my mind. Now, I'm sure I had been influenced by my uncle, whose conversations over the dinner table about his medical work were fascinating and gave me a lot of insights. So, I think there was more than one influence. And I discussed it with friends as well. But that was a critical moment in my career. Yeah.

And were they- was your uncle- were they pleased about your studying medicine? Your family?

Yeah, I mean they didn't say one thing or the other. They certainly accepted it. And I think ultimately my uncle became quite pleased that I was doing medicine. I mean, ultimately at some stage I looked after his patients whilst he was on holiday for short periods- once I had qualified.

And maybe just tell us in summary about your medical career. What did you go on to?

[3:42:36]

Well, after qualifying I did some work as a doctor in Oxford. And then I- because I was training to be a physician, and I felt a bit sort of bewildered and frightened by kidney disease which crops up from time to time if you're a physician, I felt I shouldn't have gaps in my knowledge like that so I applied for jobs in kidney medicine and I got one in Dundee. And I-

I sent off an application and by return of post I got a letter giving me the job. No job interview.

Yeah?

It was only after I had been there some time and realised that I was working for a boss who was intensely unpleasant to work for. It was not that he was not a clever guy, but he had a terrible personality. So that the local doc- junior doctors would not work for him. That's why I got the job without an interview. And they said to me, "Why didn't you come to have a look? We would have told you not to apply for this job!" And of six successive people in that post, I was the only one who lasted more than six months without spending time in a mental hospital.

Right?

You know most of them left before six months were up. And the one who had lasted longest spent eight weeks being treated for depression in the- in the mental hospital locally. I did in the middle have a knee operation, which meant I had to convalesce and I had a respite from this guy - which probably helped to save my sanity. And actually, I don't think my perseverance was a good sign. I think the guys who left after six months or less, made the right decision. And I think this reflects my traumatised background. That, you know, I was less skilled at dealing with stressful situations than people who had not been stressed.

[3:45:04]

Or, to confront, to for- maybe something to do with confrontation or how to deal it?

The answer- there was no chance of succeeding by confrontation with that guy. The correct answer was to leave. But you know although I didn't spend time in the mental hospital, boy, could I see what the problem was. I mean, I became severely depressed whilst I was in that job. Dangerously depressed. So, you know, it is one of the examples in my life of how the background made me vulnerable to onslaughts by other human beings.

In which way? In which way Martin?

Well, you know, you can, in life you can make your way by doing something that's useful to other people. You know you can become a butcher or a baker or a candlestick maker. And people want meat, bread, and candle sticks. You work for a living. But if you look at how people behave whilst some of the time and more so with some people than others, they make, they do something that is useful for others. They become lawyers or plumbers or whatever. Also, you will repeatedly see in people's behaviour that they try and gain an advantage at somebody else's expense. And, you know the- the image that always comes to mind of the bear catching salmon as they're leaping up rapids in a river, and when they've caught the salmon a bigger and stronger bear comes and takes the salmon from them. He's found an easier way of catching salmon. And humans are like that. You know, in my medical career there was constant conflict between doctors for the limited number of salmons that were coming, flying up the rapids and snatching the more forceful and stronger people snatching them from the less skilful and less forceful and less strong individuals. Human behaviour is like that and it- it happens not only among doctors. It happens in all human groups.

[3:47:30]

Yeah. And you feel you were emotionally less equipped to-

Absolutely.

To, to catch the salmon let's say or-

And not only- not only, you know, the traumas of previous life, but remember that from the age of three when I was stopped playing with kids in the street, up to after my seventh birthday, I had no regular contact with other children. The only continuous and you know substantial contact was during the few months I spent in Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands where I was with some other boys with whom I became friends. And if you did that deliberately to any child now, you know, deprived the child of social contact with other children and other adults for that matter- you know. My- after my mother- well after I was arrested the contact with adults was, you know, pretty minimal. Certainly, you know even in Theresienstadt where I was being looked after by one individual woman who took care of me and, and, and loved me. The- the hours that she could do that were very limited.

Yeah.

And- and she would come back tired and- and it you know, so even that was limited. I mean, it is established that brain development is influenced by social contact in those years. It's, you know, never mind behaviour you can see it in the structure of the brain. So, I think throughout my adult life I've been handicapped by being less skilful than the people around me at handling human relationships.

So that's my- you know-

[3:49:18]

It's terribly important in, in one's work career. It wasn't so bad in my higher education, where things are organised for you and you- you, you follow standard things. And you know I mean you have to do something objectively bad to get punished. And you know there was never any danger of that. But then when you're out in the wider wicked world, you know, there are those stronger bears around, you know, with all kinds of personalities that are problematic. And a normal adult has to fend for themselves. And- and defend themselves. Defend their territory and make their way, and maybe do their little bit of piracy themselves. To be successful.

But it seems as though- a confidence question as well. A confidence. Or?

I don't think the primary issue is confidence. I think the primary issue is...

Or security, or-

You know, people think of child's play as trivial. You know, I mean, not- not child psychologists. For goodness sake I mean, anybody who's well informed about it wouldn't fall into that trap for a second, but the sort of normal ordinary person's concept of childhood. This is, you know- the word 'child's play' is used for something that is you know not important. Trivial. It is unbelievably important! It is what-

[inaudible]

Yeah, it's like play fighting between baby tigers or, or - or lions. They're learning how to catch prey.

Yes.

And- and play between individuals in childhood is where you develop the social skills that you then need in adult life. I mean don't forget for a second. I mean bullying is something we think of as something that happens in schools, but it happens throughout life including adult life.

[3:51:24]

But you mean, so it's a combination of neurological, plus social, or-

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Yes.

So that's a big question for- you know, for me in all the interviews about how, you know- what impact do you think your experiences had on your later life?

Yes, you are interviewing traumatised people. And they're not only traumatised in the obvious way by for example seeing their mother shot in front of them. Everybody recognises that as trauma. But they forget that there is the, you know, the completely abnormal childhood. It may be that you were not facing any atrocity. In my case you know I- I did not see my parents murdered in front of me like, you know, some of my friends did.

Yeah.

But there is another category of damaging influences. And they're incredibly important and help to explain why the after-effects of being a Holocaust survivor are so different according to the age at which the Holocaust events occurred.

Right. So, you have different trauma at different ages.

Yeah.

But then you also have - you know, and I've done so many interviews - you also have the individual and I mean, you know, it's a- it's a- such a complex...

Yes. I mean, I gave the example of my Jewish friend at the boarding school who just happened to have this rather easy-going, relaxed, good humoured persona which made him - according to his memory, which may not be perfect - not a target for anti-Semitic bullying.

[3:53:14]

Yeah, but-

It's personality.

Yes, but it's also of course experiences you know, when you came as a refugee you didn't have the language, you didn't have the family support, you know, so those are big themes as well. But so, what-

Oh, yes, yes, yes. I mean, when I went home, I did not feel I was going into an environment where I could talk to my parents or, or anybody who was emotionally or educationally really replacing them. You know it's- I mean in some ways I didn't feel that much closer to my aunt than I did to the other women in the dormitory in Theresienstadt who I called 'Aunty'. You know there was a kind of friendly kind of aunty-like relationship. My aunt was not an emotionally engaging person. Not to other people either.

Yeah.

Except superficially. To strangers for, you know, meetings outside the home she appeared very friendly but in family life it was not quite like that.

So, Martin, what other impact- if I were to ask you what is the impact of your experience on your later life, apart from, you said your professional life-?

Well, I think it- I think it wrecked my professional career. You know, my- my lack of skill at handling interpersonal situations throughout my adult life prevented me - absolutely - from having the career I should have had.

What, what- what should have happened? What do you think should have happened to you and what did happen?

[Inaud] in medical science. I was an enthusiastic doctor. I think I managed the human side of being a doctor certainly better than some. And I think better than many. And- and you know that was important to me and I- I ranked it highly in my order of priorities. And I should have been doing research, publishing papers, and making a reputation for myself - and moved up the academic ladder. You know, people I think to start with less able than myself became professors. I didn't even, you know, I published almost nothing.

[3:55:50]

But also, in competition for resources, I was continually defeated, so that I didn't have the resources to do the job I needed to do. And that of course damaged my reputation. You very quickly get into a vicious circle. And then other people spot even slight abnormalities in behaviours which every Holocaust survivor has. That's why we have Holocaust survivor groups. We are more comfortable with each other than we are with people who are not- who have not had such experiences. That's why we get together in groups. And you know, even slight abnormalities in behaviour are spotted and are regarded as a mark against one.

Such as? Such as?

Well, it- I- I would find it difficult to be exact about that, but it's just a general lack of skill in interpersonal relationships.

Yes. OK. So, did you work in a hospital or what did you- what did you do?

Oh, yes, I- I trained in fantastic hospitals. I mean in Oxford, even in Dundee although the guy I was working for had a, you know, a severe - really severe - personality problem. There were some other doctors who were very good and from whom I learnt. Even from the bad guy I learnt very valuable things. I mean, he was a bastard, but he did know something about kidney medicine and endocrinology which were very useful to me afterwards. I also learnt by swallowing a couple of textbooks. You know, I, I did the work by reading and studying whilst I was working. More so probably than- than many others. But I- you know afterwards, I got somehow back on my feet and worked for some superb people who taught me - wonderfully. And, and I became a consultant physician in the hospitals in Leicester, and an immunologist, specialising in asthma and allergic diseases which were- I found fascinating subjects and you know they fascin- I mean they would still fascinate me now if- if I hadn't cut myself off from medicine in 2002. So- and I did some extraordinary things. I mean, you know, I discovered a new kind of asthma caused by a particular occupation. Dyeing cloth. The chemists during, you know, the 1960-70s I think discovered a kind of cloth dye which was totally new. Traditionally, dyes had been plant extracts and which somehow attach themselves to cloth and then when you wash them the colour runs and you know it's- it, it's the- the bond to the cloth is not all that good. But people discovered dyes which reacted chemically with the cloth and became part of the same molecule. So, you can chuck them in the washing machine to your heart's content and you can have one bright colour next to another bright colour and the colours won't run. The only problem was, that when these dyes were being prepared for use, it meant that a powder of these coloured dyes was being carefully measured out from a scoop onto scales to get the right mixture. To produce the exact colour. And some of that powder flies into the air and the workers inhaled those. And of course, the colour, the dye molecules react with the body, with proteins in the body. And if you, you know, ask any immunologist what would happen and they will immediately tell you that's a classic situation. You're going to get allergy when that happens. And a- a man came to my clinic. He was seen by one of my junior doctors, a trainee who came through the door to my room and said, "I think I have a case of occupational asthma." You know, he'd made the right diagnosis. And that guy had nearly died at work and- and had been sent by his doctor to my clinic. It turned out that there was somebody else at the place of work who had not only nearly, but actually died from an asthma attack related to the work. And there's a lot

more to that story. But I did tests on my patient and on other people from that dyeing factory in which they handled the dye and I measured what was happening in their lungs and I proved that they got asthma. That it was caused by this dye and not just by a food dye that I used to check whether it was just a random or psychological event. And I travelled to Leverkusen in Germany to the headquarters of Bayer who made the dyes, and I talked with five of their senior managers and Bayer, as part of a consortium of dye manufacturers, changed the way these dyes are supplied. And instead of supplying them as a powder they supplied them as a liquid, which meant it could be mixed without workers having to scatter dye on to a pan on a set of electronic scales. So, it solved the problem - worldwide.

[4:02:05]

Fantastic.

You know. That's just one example of, of - of things I did. I also tested new medicines for asthma and allergic diseases and for a time was running the biggest clinical trials unit for drugs for hay fever in the world. And it- not only was it the biggest it was very high quality. The reason that I became the biggest was that drug manufacturers kept coming for more because they liked the quality of the work, which was excellent. And I- I didn't get any recognition for either of those things. I should have done. You know, I should have published more and, and, and got the advancement that comes from not making scientific advance, but publishing it and getting recognised for it. I did the work, but I didn't do the stuff because I was too troubled, you know, it was- was hard for me to do the basics, let alone the extra things on top. The research, which was not what I was being paid for, I mean, I was not employed by the university. I was employed by the National Health Service. And the National Health Service wanted me to see patients - more and more of them.

[4:03:24]

I mean, in the end, I actually resigned from the National Health Service one year before I reached retiring age, because there was such pressure to see too many patients, that I was risking a disaster. And I just simply was not going to have that kind of disaster for the sake of what they were going to pay me for one year, because although the thing going wrong might have been precipitated by the fact that the working conditions didn't allow me to do the job

properly, in court, I would have been defenceless. You know, I would have been faced by a judge saying, "Doctor, have you ever heard of such a thing as a stethoscope?" Because you know, it was either examine a patient's chest in case it's lung cancer instead of asthma. It can happen. I either examined the patient properly, or I finished my clinic on time. And if I didn't finish my clinic on time - and that happened repeatedly - the nurses would leave. Nurses who work in an outpatient clinic, they want regular working hours; that's why they're working there and not on the intensive care unit. They- they need to be home when their kids come home - and have food on the table. And otherwise, their husband will, you know, even if they don't react their husband will tell them, "This is unacceptable!" They will bang the table. So, you know, you've got to understand those nurses as well. Without the nurses I could not have done the clinic. So, you know, they were unacceptable conditions and I decided to leave prematurely.

[4:05:14]

Well, I'm aware that we're discussing this in a situation where the NHS is unbelievably stretched -

Of course.

With the corona crisis.

And undoubtedly patients will die, who do not have the corona virus because other parts of the National Health Service are not firing on all cylinders. I mean in my own case, I have an eye condition, glaucoma, for which I'm being seen - I was being seen regularly - at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London. My appointment was cancelled, so my follow-up care is not of the standard that Moorfields normally expect to deliver. But what can they do? They've got- their clinic is unbelievably crowded normally. It would be- you know, you would spread Coronavirus- it, it would be like taking a fire into a petrol station.

Yeah. I'm aware of time so I just want you to tell us. Can you tell us a little bit about your private life and where- you settled in Leicester, or where? Where did you-?

Yes, in, in Dundee, I married my wife, who was born in Glasgow. Who is not Jewish. We had- we moved to Manchester then and we had eventually three children who are of course in their forties now and all have very successful careers. The oldest works for a computer data processing company - a big American company - that works on a multinational basis. And he is one of the top trainers in that company for their own staff. His wife works as a very good and successful marketing specialist for a different company. My second child, a daughter, has set up her own architectural planning consultancy and works for major projects like the - turning the Olympic park in London into housing and recreational space and the new underground railway line across London, Crossrail and HS2, the planned railway line from London to Birmingham. And you know, major developments. And her husband is also an architect. So, my- that daughter took up architecture, the same occupation as my father. And my youngest daughter is the head of the foreign department of Universities UK. So, she's responsible for the part of the organisation representing all British universities. And dealing with students from other countries who come to British universities which is incredibly important for the income of British universities, because those students pay much more than British students. They are subsidising the British students. And she also is concerned with British students who go and study abroad. It's an incredibly important job. And I get comments from Vice Chancellors of universities saying that they like her a great deal and respect her a great deal. She- I have lots of evidence that she is doing a very good job. I'm very proud of her. I'm very proud of all of them.

Yeah. And Martin, when they- when they were growing up, what sort of identity did you want to give them?

[4:09:04]

Yes. I tried to expose them to the Jewish religion to, to, to know something about religion. I didn't force it down their throat, but I read from the Bible to them and so on. And my wife put a stop to that. She was afraid that they would develop a Jewish- Jewish identity, I think. And she put a spanner in the works. And so, they have grown up believing that they are sort of loosely adherent to the Church of England as Christians, although their knowledge about it is minimal. They in fact have grown up virtually without a religion, and I'm very sad about that, but I could not have- I mean, there would have been mayhem in the house if I had persisted. So, you know, I thought peace in the household was vital. And their children in

turn - between them they have seven children, so I have seven grandchildren. And those grandchildren are being brought up essentially without religion. Again, there is some sort of superficial smattering but it is so featherlight that it can practically be ignored. So, I- I think you know, the expression in English of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. People disapprove of fanaticism in religion and of some aspects of religion but they should- when they abandon religion, they throw out principles important in religion which they don't know about, and so they don't miss them. But they're- I- I believe indispensable to a good life. And-

[4:11:24]

So, we discussed yesterday that you found your way back to Judaism. How- how would you define yourself in terms of your identity today?

Well, it- you know, I accept that under halakha I'm not a Jew. On the other hand, my religion is essentially the Jewish religion and when I say essentially, I mean it's a sort of Orthodox Judaism that in Britain is associated with the United Synagogue. You know, not Lubavitch or Hassidic. But not Reform either. So- and, and you know when I go to shul, to synagogue, it's a serious matter. It's a central part of my life. Having said that, you know I couldn't be described as being particularly observant. When I get up, I say the- the extremely short prayer which one is supposed to say on getting up. But I don't routinely- and I- I- I pray after meals at home. When I'm with other people outside the family I don't do that because I'm not trying to make a great show of, you know, being more Jewishly observant than I actually am. And I certainly don't think it's my place to make other peoples' lives difficult in any way to please me.

[4:13:04]

But for you it's important? For you?

Well yes, when I'm at home I put on a kippah and I- I say grace after meals, yes. Which I can say very quickly.

*What, in terms of your British identity you are, you know ...you were raised
...Holland...[inaudible]*

In the Netherlands, yes. Although I was born in the Netherlands and really indistinguishable from any Dutch child when I left the Netherlands at the age of twelve, I never had Dutch nationality. I was stateless. I had a document saying that I was stateless. I believe it's still there in that filing cabinet. In Britain my aunt decided it was important I should have British nationality and she went through a long process to get me naturalised - and my sister. And you know, we had to go as part of one of the many steps in that process to the Central Police Station in Manchester in- at that time- Bootle Street. And it was a big traditional police station. Central police station. And we asked which of- you know, we asked people, "Where should we go for naturalisation?" And nobody we met knew. So, she and I just walked around the ground floor of the building until we came to a door and it was sort of- if you remember- if you know these sort of old American detective films where the, the detective is in a- a room with a, a - a door with a frosted glass panel and on the door, it says you know, "XYZ Gumshoe" or whatever it says on American detectives' doors. And in that style, there was a door with a frosted glass panel and in gold lettering it said, "Firearms, Dangerous Drugs, Explosives and Aliens". And we'd found the right office. And we did whatever it was we had to do there. It didn't take very long but that was one of the incidents during my naturalisation. But I'm very grateful for having been given British citizenship. And then in 2018 I found myself face to face with an old lady in central London who wanted to stick something to my chest. And that was the Queen. And she gave me an MBE medal, which I'm very proud of. So, you know, I'm very grateful for that as well.

[4:15:50]

For your work in Holocaust education?

That was for the work I've done in Holocaust education.

So that's another thing I was going to ask you. When did you start talking about your life and when did you start talking to school children?

Well, I resigned from my post, my medical post, in 2002. And I had some idea at first of continuing with private practice but I abandoned that idea. At the time I was too stressed also to be able to, you know, to, to make decisions on behalf of a patient. If you're too stressed, you're not thinking straight. And, and that actually you know, in medicine is terribly important. So, I gave up medicine because I didn't think I was able to work for patients in the way that I should. And... two years later, the Smith family at a place called the National Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire, discovered that I was now retired. Meanwhile I'd been doing all sorts of other things. I thought of taking up carpentry and gardening and I bought all sorts of books to read and interested myself in new subjects. And I bought maps of Leicestershire and a yellow marker and I went on country walks and then marked the path with a yellow highlighter. And I was trying to colour the whole county of Leicestershire yellow. After years of not having enough exercise. And they got hold of me and got me up there and got me to stand on a little stage in a hall and said, "Tell them your story." And then was a hall full of school kids who had come there to be taught about the Holocaust. And I've been doing that ever since. The centre was set up by a Christian family who went to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, as Christians, and it changed their lives. They decided the Holocaust was not a Jewish problem but a Christian problem. And they devoted their lives to teaching about it, and have- and set up this by now world-renowned centre in Nottinghamshire.

[4:18:19]

But how did they know that you were a child survivor? How did they know that you were a child survivor?

Well, I had earlier joined the Child Survivor Association of Great Britain, so an association of people who were invol- caught up in the Holocaust up to the age of seventeen. And with that group I had already visited the centre just- you know- we all visited it to have a look and to have some talks there and have a discussion and walk around the countryside around it and so on. So, I was already known to them. But I very quickly discovered that it wasn't my story. I mean, when these things happened, I was a kid. And I did as I was told. I don't remember doing anything of my own initiative that's of any interest to anybody. And to my mind that's not a story. Around me were adults. Boy, did they make decisions, did they have choices, and did they make amazing decisions. It's their story. I'm just the one who's left alive to tell it. So that was the first lesson. And the other one took longer to sink in. I, you

know, at this centre people arrive- the kids arrive in a coach in a- in a big bus. And they march up a little hill to the centre. They have a welcome talk. They have a video about the Holocaust, Darfur, Cambodia, Rwanda, and- and maybe Gypsies- the Roma and Sinti. And then they go around the museum. Then they have a talk by a teacher who does nothing else for years, a school teacher who specialises in that. And then they have a talk by somebody like me. And maybe they finish off with another video or something. So, they go through a whole process. They go around the museum.

Yes.

[4:20:29]

And I got a nightmare. The nightmare was that they went back down the hill to their coach with a smug look on their face, saying- thinking to themselves they'd had a- most of a day on the Holocaust and now they knew all about it. And of course, nobody knows about it. I mean, leading professors who have devoted their lives to the study of the Holocaust will tell you that they cannot get their head around it. You know, every time I read another big book about it, that's my feeling at the end. There's not enough information. I don't know enough. I don't understand it. Nobody knows all about the Holocaust. And I wanted to- wanted them to go down the hill back to their coach thinking, "That was a terrible shock. That was something I didn't know. I don't understand the half of it, but I sure want to know a lot more." That's what I want to achieve.

And how do you achieve that?

And so, I decided to cut short the personal story. Have a little break, which I use for question and answer and then talk about genocide in a wider context. Nazi killing in a wider context too. I mean, not only Gypsies and mentally disabled and Jehovah's Witnesses and Poles and so on, but also Soviet prisoners of war, for example. And you can't cover the whole of it, but just to make the point. Then I talk about other genocides in the twentieth century before and after. You know people said, "Never again", but we're not good at it. It's happened again and again. And then I say the twentieth century was contrary to widespread belief. Not the worst century in history. The further you go back the worse it gets – percentage-wise. In total numbers yes, the numbers were greater, but the world's population has skyrocketed. As a

percentage, the percentage goes up the further you go back. And even in pre-history it was worse than in any historical period. So, I talk about really the very broad context. Very briefly. And then I start talking about: Why? You know, this has happened throughout history. Why? So, I dismiss very quickly the theory it's all due to one man. "Hitler made tens of millions of people misbehave. Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Tse Tung and so on. Just one man caused all this." This is nonsense and there is lots of research to indicate that it is nonsense. And then I talk about the psychological experiments on people off the street or university students, showing that very ordinary people do terrible things when they're put in certain situations.

[4:23:32]

Milgram – Milgram's experiments.

Yes, and Zimbardo – Milgram and Zimbardo, indeed.

Yep.

And how that is corroborated by history. Christopher Browning and *Ordinary Men* [*Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. 1992] And, and every genocide the same story. You know, "We were neighbours on good terms for more than ten years" and you know, or "shared a desk at school. Played on the same football team", and yet that person became one of the persecutors. You know. So, what is it about normal people? You know, I dismiss the idea that they- the perpetrators are mad. Because mad people got kicked out of the SS.

So, Martin- so what is your main message to the children you want to-?

The main message is that history is absolutely hundred percent vital. You have to learn history. There's no escape. If you don't get that right, you will get everything else wrong. But history is not enough. We have to understand human behaviour. And although we don't know everything, there is a terrific lot of knowledge and it is extremely helpful in getting a different insight into why populations misbehave in ways that lead to things like the Holocaust.

And basically-

Recently-

Yeah. Go on-

Recently I took part in a university workshop here at the University of Leicester in the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. A workshop about graphic novels about the Holocaust. And I was introduced to a graphic novel which stunned me. It's called *Irmina*. It's about the grandmother of the- Barbara Yelin who- who drew it and wrote it. How she starts off as an ordinary German young lady who goes for a kind of finishing course in English to London bef- during the Nazi period before the war. Befriends the first black student in Oxford who is treated with racism by others. Goes back to Germany. Marries an SS officer. Gets drawn into supporting the Nazis. And after the war, after Nazism one day receives a letter from the West Indies, from the High Commissioner I think of one of the islands there, who invites her to visit him. And sends tickets. Turns out to be this guy who she befriended in Oxford. And this life cycle story of an ordinary German person who was not at an extreme as a perpetrator or a victim but in the middle.

Yeah.

An ordinary person. This is so important, you know? And this gets missed in conventional Holocaust education. There needs to be a whole revolution in Holocaust education and I'm trying to be part of it.

[4:26:51]

The focus on the ordinary- on the ordinary person?

Well, on, on why it is human behaviour - is what it is.

And Martin-

Not concentrate only the extremes, but to concentrate on the majority of people without whom Hitler would have remained an insignificant little ex-corporal.

Yeah. And what about the message based on your own life history? For anyone who might watch this in years to come?

You know there's a, the- the president of China was once asked about some event in Chinese history and he is supposed to have said, "It's too early to judge." And, and this is often quoted as a kind of joke because he was thinking in a time scale of- I think thousands of years.

Yeah.

So, I could say it's too early to judge. Look, I- four of my medical colleagues in Leicester committed suicide whilst I was working here as a consultant including my partner in immunology. There were two immunologists. The other one committed suicide. Of course, you never know what is in anybody else's mind. You never know everything about them. It may be that they were subjected to stresses that I just don't know about. But my feeling is, I was under much more stress than they. That, maybe there's a lesson out of that. That leading a very difficult, very stressful life... it's a religion of course taught by, it's a message taught by religion. It's very much a part of Judaism that if the Almighty permits you to suffer misfortune, he also provides the means to deal with that. I mean, I would like to recommend a lesson of patience and resilience and, you know for every good person- for every bad person there is in the world there is also a good person. I mean, whilst there were bad and terrible people who influenced my life, throughout my life there have been people so wonderful that- I cannot describe it. I mean, even currently, people I've met not that long ago. They- people I would never expect to become friends with. And they are so wonderful you, you just- there's no describing it. So, both of these things exist in humanity. And you know if you are suffering from extreme horrors, which drive you to and beyond the limit, remember that these other things also exist. And if you hold on, and if you show courage, the good things will happen also. And courage is not an optional extra in life. I think every human being needs it as part of their essential equipment. Even if you're not in the Holocaust.

[4:30:15]

And in our situation today, probably as well, in- with this corona-

In every situation. And certainly today. Yes.

But Martin, since you were so dependent on the adults' decisions, is there, what is your biggest- I know it's getting late, I ask you one more question and then maybe we can do - just to round up.

Sure.

What- what is your biggest regret, or what do you feel for yourself in terms looking at these decisions, adults made for you? Where you lived, who you were with-

Well, I have so many regrets. I mean, you know, too many to- to enumerate. The loss of my parents, of course. The fact I was not allowed to go to Israel, join my Jewish family. The fact that I was – a spanner was put in the works of me becoming a Jew, at a stage when it would have been possible. Other things that I'm not prepared to tell you-

That's fine.

But they're deeply personal, and I'm not prepared to record them or state them in anything that is even slightly public.

Of course. Of course.

Which I regret deeply. Terrible mistakes I've made in my life. But there it is. I mean, you know- I'm aware that I'm surrounded by many other people who live in extremely difficult circumstances. I'm not the only human being who's ever suffered difficulties in life. And, you know, one's job is to make the best of life with the means that are given to you.

Yeah. And do you sometimes- do you sometimes think how your life would have been let's say if- without a Hitler or...?

[4:32:20]

Of course. Absolutely, yes. Absolutely, yes. I'll tell you a final little story. I mean, one day, it's many years ago now, probably about ten years ago. I was walking with three of my granddaughters in a- a park in North London. Golders Hill Park. It was a nice, sunny day and it was a beautiful park. And my oldest granddaughter ran ahead of us, and she found in this whole park, the only puddle. And she tried to- I think- jump over it and she slipped she landed in the middle and slipped in the mud and there she was on her back covered with mud. When we got to her, she was- had picked some tall grass beside the puddle and she was trying to wipe herself down. She was in tears, not so much because she had got mud on herself, but because we had come by car. She was in tears because she thought she would make my car muddy. And of course, I calmed her down, reassured her. I took off my shirt and covered the top part of her body and then in the car I had a blanket which I put on the seat and I took her shoes off and we went back home and the car wasn't made muddy. And then I put all three grandchildren in the bath and they had a bath together and I taught them the song, "*Mud, mud, glorious mud*", by Flanders and Swann.

I know it.

And we sang that. I taught them to sing that. And they ended up laughing in the bath and having a great time. And I told my oldest granddaughter that I admired her because she landed in a bad situation, but she did what she could with what she had. There's a lesson there.

Ok. Ok - Ok Martin I know you have to- we have to finish. I need to read you a consent form. I will send you a form and I'd like you to also show me some photos. So, if you may. Not now, not now.

I haven't got time now. Yeah, I really [inaudible].

I know. But maybe if we could do one very short session. I'm sorry I haven't- if that's possible.

[4:35:00]

So, I'll stop the recording now - and we are on. Today is the 30th of April 2020 and we're continuing our interview with Mr Martin Stern. Martin, we have come to the end of the interview. One thing I wanted to ask you is you said you never spoke about your experiences and at some point, you started talking. When- when was that and how- what happened, you know, that it became important for you to-?

Well, I think it was 1997 that I had a heart attack. I had an appointment to record my story for the Spielberg archive of survivor testimonies, but the interview had- the video interview had not yet occurred. So that really made me realise how close I came to dying without telling the story. And also, an incident happened whilst I was on the coronary care unit which made me tell the senior nurse my background. And I don't want to go into detail about that at the moment, but it was an incident which upset me very severely, and in the circumstances, dangerously. And afterwards I told one other doctor at work who I had to work with and you know I- I became a bit less reticent. But I still didn't really tell people in general. And then after I retired- I retired in 2002 and about 2004 the Smith family Mrs Marina Smith asked me to talk at the National Holocaust Centre. I think in between I had talked a bit more freely. But not in detail.

And what about -

Only to a few people

Your children? Did you tell- talk to your children about it?

[4:37:19]

At some stage I took my children on a- a sailing trip in the Netherlands and then we were sailing in the north-eastern Netherlands and I took them to the Westerbork Memorial site. And I then- one of them had to return to England to work for some exams. The two girls I took on a trip through Germany. We visited Cologne. We visited a series of towns and arrived at Weimar. We had a look at Weimar in the morning and Buchenwald in the afternoon. And we then went to Terezin in the Czech Republic. And I showed them around

that. We spent the night in Terezin. And then one of my daughters went to join my wife on a different holiday in Italy and with my youngest daughter, I continued the journey. We passed Dachau but didn't visit it. My daughter, my youngest daughter was too tired, I think, at that stage. And a trip back through Germany. And at that stage I told them something about my past. I had told them very little before that.

And how did they react or...?

They reacted calmly and absorbed it. There was no great reaction. It's- they were receptive.

Yeah. And what was it like for you to go back to Terezin? Did you recognise anything, or?

Absolutely. It- I was amazed at the extent to which it looks unchanged. You know, of course one could just drive in and out of it, which we certainly couldn't do during the war but the buildings were still the same buildings they still looked very similar. I could recognise the buildings easily, but my memory was playing tricks on me because the orientation of some of the buildings was different from what was in my memory. So, I had difficulty walking from one place to another until I sorted out this kink in my memory. We didn't succeed in entering what had in the Nazi period been called the 'Hamburg barracks' because it was occupied by the Czech army and they wouldn't let us in. But we had a look around the streets. We went to the museum. I showed them some of the buildings I stayed in from the outside. And I told them a little bit about things that happened there.

And was it important for you to go there to- was that?

Yes, it, it was. It was in many ways not a very satisfying visit because both girls by that stage were showing great signs of tiredness. And you know being teenagers they didn't have my ability to continue functioning when you're not feeling hundred percent.

[4:40:56]

And did you ever go back again, or?

I've not been back since. I should go back, but I haven't been back. I mean, it's a great mystery about- the- years ago I went to Bet Terezin the kibbutz in Israel which was founded by Terezin survivors. And there on the wall of their little museum, was a statement that a 100 children survived out of 15,000. That figure I've frequently heard quoted. In Yad Vashem there was an exhibit saying that 2,600 children survived. And there are various other figures. And I have tried on many occasions to ask people who should know better than me or to look up in books or on the internet how this discrepancy comes about. The figure of 150 survivors, child survivors, is sometimes also mentioned. From the number of survivors I have met, one way or another, the figure of 100 seems inherently highly improbable. For example, the number of people coming for the annual commemoration at Bet Terezin who would have been children at the time seems too large for there to have been just 100 survivors. One argument that's been put to me by an English - British teacher is that maybe the discrepancy results from the higher figure including children who only arrived there in the last days at the last minute. This is a possibility. But all my attempts to find out from Yad Vashem, from the NIOD - the war documentation centre in Amsterdam - and from an academic in Britain who claims to be an expert on Theresienstadt, and Stephen Smith making a phone call to the, the direction of the memorial site at Terezin, none of those things have cleared up that discrepancy. Which I find embarrassing. It's certainly embarrassing not to know the- the answer to the problem, because what I would like to know is where do the figures come from? What is the evidence?

[4:43:38]

Yeah. Maybe they'll find out in the future somehow. But also, you- you said before that you'd made contact to Mrs de Jong - later.

Yes.

How did that happen?

Well, in the 1980s I took a holiday from my job as a hospital doctor to go to the Netherlands and try to find her. And...I had her married surname, Cassuto. I discovered from the population register there were exactly six people with that surname in the whole of the Netherlands on population register. I started looking through telephone directories to find the

name Cassuto and phoned a few people and got the wrong ones. And, no, they didn't know of the lady who'd looked after me. And I had to go back without succeeding. But then I got in touch with the Netherlands Red Cross, and they had records of people returning. And in the lists of people returning from camps there was- her name, and my sister Erika's name and my name occurred in sequence for the people returning on the Rhine barge on which we arrived in the Netherlands. They contact- they still had contact with Mrs de Jong. And they asked for her permission to re-introduce us, and she agreed. And I arranged a visit to Zandvoort where she was living. She had moved from Amsterdam to the seaside resort town. And, you know, on a sunny day I went there to her little flat and met her again. She was now an old lady of course. I would not have recognised her in the street. But as soon as she spoke, there was something familiar about her voice. And I made a number of visits. I used to phone her frequently. Not necessarily quite daily, but very often.

[4:46:04]

Was that important for you? Was that?

Absolutely, yes, very important. And on one occasion I got my sister to come to Zandvoort and we- the three of us were together for the first time since the end of the Second World War.

And what was her perspective on- did you learn something from her point of view which you hadn't...?

Yes. When we were taken from her, her husband had not returned. She knew that he had been arrested and removed by the Nazis. She assumed that he would be dead, but he wasn't. He returned from a concentration camp. And when I met her, he had died. She already had breast cancer. It was a source of great sorrow to her that she had never been able to show us to him. They had adopted another boy. He turned out to be a great problem. And they ended up separating. And I think they lost contact to a considerable degree with him. Subsequent to her death in the 1980s, a- a few years ago I was contacted by the son of that adopted son who runs a café in Amsterdam opposite the church next to the Anne Frank House. And he wanted to know more about his adoptive grandmother. And so I made a trip. His name is David de Jong. Or, in Dutch, [pronounces with "a" sound like in car] David de Jong. In other words his

surname is- was her maiden name. And I went with him and his brother to a very nice restaurant. We had lunch together. And over lunch we had- I told him what I was able to remember about Mrs de Jong – Katarina Cassuto de Jong. He- I- I took a great shine to him and his brother. I mean they- they're both very decent people and when I go to Amsterdam, if I go to Amsterdam now in the Covid crisis, you know, I- I try to stop by his café and at the very least shake his hand and say hello.

So, you continued the link?

Yes, indeed.

What I was thinking, I mean-

Not yet. What I've not yet done is to visit her grave. He has explained to me exactly where it is. And my visits to the Netherlands in the last few years have been very short visits. And I have a number of people who I make a particular point of visiting. And I have not managed to fit- fit in a visit to her grave which I would very much want to do.

Mnn. Mnn. I just also wanted to ask you just one question about the Child Survivors Association. You say, you joined it and it's important for you because there is some sort of shared experience.

[4:50:00]

Yes.

Do you find you have- there are similarities to other child survivors? To other- which survived in different situations?

Well, it's extraordinary, I mean if you saw us together, you know, there are people who are tall, people who are short, people who are thin, people who are fat, people who are fair haired, dark haired. They may have a Hungarian accent or they may have come from Poland or the Netherlands or France and speak with a French accent. It's- it's and psychologically and in every other way, we are the most diverse and varied group almost you could imagine. I

mean, there- there are no Africans or Asians amongst us, but still within a European context we are extraordinarily different from each other. And the stories are all so very different. I mean, there are people who saw their parents horrifically abused and murdered in front of them. I didn't. There are people who were hidden by people in Belgium and treated quite well. There are, you know, there is someone who as a baby was carried across the Pyrenees by her mother or maybe she was just old enough to- to toddle a bit, I don't know. But there are people who survived - quite a number of people - who survived the final days of Bergen Belsen which were horrific. I never went through anything as horrific as that. There are extraordinary stories. Really, all the stories are extraordinary. There were people who were in Auschwitz. And were practically dead when Auschwitz was liberated. The subsequent histories are extremely varied. There are a few who've been very successful in life. Made their way and have become quite well off. And there are others who are severely troubled and... you know, have had a difficult life to this day. And yet, it's good to get together, because I sometimes explain that you can- for someone in our position you can divide other people in the world into two groups. There are those to whom you can't explain and those to whom you don't need to explain.

[4:52:30]

And the people to whom you don't need to explain mostly are people who've had the same, an experience within this very wide spectrum. And I think that's the beauty of meeting up. We don't have to explain to each other. We don't spend all our time talking about the past. It's not taboo, and it does crop up in conversation. But we don't make an excessively big thing of it. The most successful activities in my view have been going to the theatre or of the opera together-

Yeah.

Which we have done repeatedly. And that used to be organised by the wife of one of the founders of our group, John Franzman. His wife, Susan, organised many of these theatre and opera outings. It's been carried on to an extent by others since they moved to Israel. The other prime founder was a doctor called Alfred Garwood, who is now - he lives elsewhere. It- the group is largely a London group. There are members in other parts of the country but for fairly obvious reasons, age, and travel distance, are not usually seen at our meetings.

And... you know, it's good to be amongst ourselves as a group and of course all of us have left – lost family. So to an extent a group like this is a kind of substitute family to some varying extent, you know. I've become very friendly with some of the members and friendly but not to the same depth with others. So- but, but it's- it's a very useful and valuable group. And I joined it when I was in utter despair. I didn't know where to turn. I mean, there were so many things terribly wrong in my life that, you know, I was clutching at straws. And I asked a number of people who I could really go to for help. And there's an organisation in Israel called AMCHA. I went to see them, and had good conversations with an administrator in AMCHA but he- I mean you know on several occasions I visited him. And he was a nice chap and he was an intelligent, decent man. And had some, you know, very nice conversations with him, but he explained that really this was an organisation for survivors in Israel and not open to me as I didn't live in Israel. My friend, Professor Aubrey Newman recommended that I should go and see one of the professors at Yad Vashem. And I did. I went to Yad Vashem and I found this office, and you know, asked him, you know, where I could really turn for some kind of help. And you know he was sitting at his desk doing his work; he clearly didn't like this interruption. And he suggested I should go and see this artist called [Yehuda Bacon?], who's meanwhile died. I never did go and see him so- but he was a Holocaust survivor. So how useful that would have been I've no idea. Again, my visit to Israel was rather short so the opportunity was limited anyway. Maybe if I'd tried harder, I could have done that. And then somebody told me about the Holocaust Survivor Centre in Hendon, so I went there. And at about that time the Child Survivor Association which had been set up independently of that centre had been absorbed into the Holocaust Survivor Centre which had taken over the funds and the administration.

[4:57:03]

And gradually trouble brewed up. The people who had set up the Child Survivor Association no longer had any control and decisions were made for them. I mean they felt they were being treated as- as children, really. Now there were many older survivors going to that centre who were very happy having a bridge afternoons and Yiddish classes and all sorts of things organised for them. You know, the centre organises things and it's available there. You can go there. We wanted to organise our own things. And when we wanted to do that, we found the funds were not there. They'd been absorbed and we had no access to them. And the people at that time running the centre became very unhappy with John Franzman and

Alfred Garwood the- our leaders, who were- had set up the Child Survivor Association. And they expelled them. Expelled them physically from the Child Survivor- from the Survivor Centre in Hendon. When I said expelled- they were not admitted when they came to a meeting. And a rabbi who was the husband of one of the managers of that centre, was standing there with his foot against the door keeping John Franzman out. And the bulk of the members of the Child Survivor Association left the Hendon Survivor Centre and started from scratch. We wrote our own book of memories, which is still for sale as *We Remember* and that was sold. When people went to give a talk, they would take some copies of this book along. And although it was essentially self-published, not quite. It went through a proper publisher in the first instance- was- for the second edition it was self-published. And that's fairly expensive to do but in fact it was profitable. And so, we accumulated a small fund. But for obvious reasons, our numbers have gradually declined. It- John Franzman and his wife Susan who had played a great part in helping to run the Child Survivor Association went on Aliyah to Israel. And it- we were not able to run ourselves as well as in the past. And we joined the Association of Jewish Refugees, which has... taken over the administration and we pay fees to- membership fees to the AJR. And that has worked very well. We remain a kind of still identified group within AJR, just as there is a Kindertransport group. Again, they have their own kind of cohesion. And they seem to function effectively and sensibly. They are both a group on their own and they are with- under the umbrella of AJR and can participate in wider AJR activities as can we. So that's been a happy relationship and, and that's the situation now.

[5:01:05]

So, it's interesting, it just reveals the difference between the child survivors and the older survivors, you said, with Hendon.

Yes – yes. I mean, you know, there are-

Culturally speaking?

Yes, there is- I've been told by child survivors who have been identified as survivors longer than I have, that the older survivors have in the past been rather dismissive of the younger generation. "You don't remember anything" is the remark that got quoted. It's true we

remember far less than people who were teenagers or you know maybe aged seventeen or were young adults or adults when they were in captivity. We remember far less. That's just a fact. It's true of me. But it's not that we remember nothing. You know, and what we remember is still useful, it is still important.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

And do you find it helped you, personally, to join the Association?

The Child Survivor Association?

Yes.

Yes - yes absolutely. It's given we a circle of wonderful friends. I mean, you know, we are extraordinarily different from each other. And maybe if we weren't survival- survivors we wouldn't naturally form friendships. But we have this background, and we do.

Because one of the topics, you know, which- which sometimes comes up in my interviews is how much counselling or help people received and how much they wanted to accept. You know, and in a recent interview. You know, for example Helen Bamber who talked about the Boys so her point of view was that they didn't receive enough of that kind of counselling and-

Yes.

So, I don't know what you feel for yourself-

[5:02:59]

Well, there are widely divergent views about counselling and psychotherapy within the Child Survivor Association. Many of the members have had counselling and, or psychotherapy. At the Hendon Centre there was a lady who was at the time we were there carrying out counselling. I don't know it for a fact, but the impression was that she was self-taught or

mostly self-taught. It was not an impression of great professionalism. I mean, I as- as doctor I have certain expectations of what happens in a professional relationship between a therapist and a client, and I don't think those things were observed. And there were a number of people in the association who not surprisingly for a Jewish group, were fond of psychodynamic therapy. You know, the thing that grew from Freud's work. I, I, I on the whole, dislike it. I believe as would most psychiatrists in the UK, that it is not really science. And that its efficacy is highly doubtful...at best. And that it makes clients dependent on that kind of therapy. They remain in therapy for a very long period. It's expensive, and given the lack of evidence that there is any advantage over just talking to a friend, I wouldn't support it. But there were members in our group who were very enthusiastic about it and over a long period were under such help, if it is indeed helpful. I myself try to influence the policy of the Child Survivor Association in the direction that any psychological help that people needed should be sought under the advice of their own family doctor, or whatever source of help they chose that we should not be propagandists for any particular school of psychotherapy. There have been very unfortunate stories in attempts to practice therapy on survivors. For example, in the Netherlands there was a psychotherapist, now notorious, I believe he was a psychiatrist who used to get his survivor clients high on cannabis.

[5:06:20]

[Bea laughs]

And again, and I know of no evidence that that was wise or beneficial. And it is generally viewed as something of a scandal in the Netherlands that this happened. The value of psychotherapy, you know, there is a lot of debate. It's not useless clearly, I mean, I don't have any serious doubt that it saves some people from committing suicide, but- and probably helps a lot of people to function better. But I don't believe that psychiatry really has all the answers that it might have in twenty or fifty years' time about depression or post-traumatic stress. And so, I believe in keeping an open mind but being wary of quacks.

And can you see-

And the self-taught.

And can you see for yourself or for the other child survivors that the trauma is transmitted to future generations? What- what do you think about?

Well, I- I think that is generally accepted. You know, I would accept that each of my three children has in fact had a kind of handed down trauma. They may not be terribly aware of it, but I think it's there. They certainly didn't have the kind of life I would have expected them to have if I had not been a survivor. And I think this is true for other people too. I think there's a high incidence of trouble. I mean it so happens that my three children are well functioning adults, with marriages and children of their own and they have wonderful spouses. And, you know, wonderful children. But it isn't always so, that relations are good. Now, of course people who have not been through this kind of trauma fall out. It's quite frequent.

Yeah.

So again, somebody would have to go into that methodically and statistically, and maybe it's been done but I'm not aware of such work.

And do you think some of the second or third generation will take over- will take on this- the young, the Child Survivors Association or is that- is that-

[5:01:05]

Yeah

Like, for example the Boys, or-

Yes. Yes, as you just suggested the 45 Aid group is now really taken over by the next generation.

Yeah.

And according to Ben Helfgott it works quite well. I mean I haven't seen their work. I have met his son who is involved in a consultation group in the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

and he's a sensible, professional guy and no doubt will do a good job. But I- I can't make a judgment about how well that functions. In the Child Survivor group this is not so prominent. We're a younger so of course, this may happen later. I have tried to discourage my own children from taking this on...for- for two reasons. One is, I don't want to burden them with it. And the other is- I don't think they are able to do it, and certainly not able to do it particularly well. Now of course my family is not a Jewish family however much I might go to shul and however much the Jewish religion might be my religion. But I'm the only one in my family. So, it- it may be different in- in families that have remained Jewish. Personally, I think it's impossible for the second generation to do the same that the actual survivors did.

You mean the Holocaust Education?

Yes. But they will be able to do their best. Also, I believe very strongly that Holocaust Education must change. I think education relating to genocide must remain a permanent part of school education for every child, throughout the world, for all time. In my view. For many, the Holocaust should occupy a central place in that. But if you're an Asian or an African you have got a great choice of horrors that you can choose to teach the same fundamental points about humanity. And I would expect them to do that. Just as we take cognisance of what happened in African and Asian countries, they should take cognance- the cognisance of the Holocaust and the horrors that have occurred in Europe. Everybody in the world should care for everybody in the world, is the ideal.

Yes.

And if not care, then at least pay attention, and learn to an extent that is appropriate. But up till now, the- this teaching has been based on history, survivor testimony occupies a very large part and it plays the- the vital part of survivor testimony is that a story, particularly coming from a person who's telling their own story, you know, grabs the attention.

[05:12:32]

Yeah.

All human beings have a natural facility for telling and listening to stories. Children, for listening, particularly. The- our stories are untypical otherwise we would not be survivors. They are unbelievably untypical. But the object is to get the mind engaged and having got the mind engaged, we should then go further and teach about genocides more generally. About what it is about humanity, the psychology the sociology, the anthropology, the criminology all the 'ologies' that have to do with human behaviour. We as the human race need to understand ourselves a lot better.

So, in a more universalist-

Yes, if we are to conquer this tendency to kill each other in large numbers from time to time. And that is important not only for the prevention of mass killing, it is also important for all kinds of ordinary interactions between human beings. You know, one's relationship with people in one's own family, at work, in the nation, in the local community. The peoples' interactions- there is no conception of human interactions without what psychologists call a "theory of mind". The "theory of mind" means - you have to have it. I mean, you know if you, if you didn't have a "theory of mind" you couldn't interact with other people. You would treat them like a stone or a doorpost. The problem with a "theory of mind" that we work with is that it is folk psychology or sort of inborn or instinctive psychology. And- it's ok. It obviously has enabled us to survive up to a certain point but with huge problems. Disadvantages. All kinds of conflict, which become- can easily become violent and even if not violent can be immensely, immensely destructive.

You have taken- Martin, you have taken part in the Forever Project-

Yes.

So you are one of the ten interviews in this three dimensional film.

Yes.

Filmed in three dimensions. What was it like, and what- do you think that is the future of Holocaust testimony, Holocaust education?

[05:15:20]

No, I think the Forever Project is just one stone in a large wall. It's one element. Some years ago - quite a number of years ago now - the then rabbi in Leicester, took a small group of young Jewish boys to an Anne Frank exhibition in the museum in Leicester. And these young lads were taken into a large hall in which there were boards with black and white photographs. You know, these photographs would have been taken with a Brownie box camera in the 1940s. And these were kids who at home watch high quality colour television. You know, it moves, it's coloured, it's got sound and they were looking at black and white photographs. And it completely turned them off. They were yawning and playing about and it didn't make any impact. And I had driven there in my car and the rabbi was sitting next to me in the passenger seat and on the way back I stopped the car as they were quarrelling with each other in the back, and I said, "You think this is something that happened long ago, far away and it's of no concern to you. It is sitting eighteen inches away from you." Now, one of those boys - he was a very nice boy, I mean, I was very fond of him. And he was my son's best friend at, at primary school. So, using a means of communication which is technically - that's been left behind what children are used to, creates a problem. So, I think making images that are technically as good as one can make them and as future proof as one can make them, is an appropriate - entirely appropriate idea. I think this is the importance of the Forever Project that in, one hopes that in twenty years' time, this will still be pretty good and will still make a connection with children.

And have you seen yourself? Have you seen the finished product?

I have seen a bit of it, yes. Yes.

[05:17:52]

And was that strange?

Yes, it's very strange yes, yes. But mostly I've seen somebody else's. But it's not - it's very clearly not the same as having a live presenter. We all respond to what we see going on in the auditorium. You get very different kinds of groups of school kids. And I change what I say never mind, you know -

Yeah.

And the pace at which I speak and teach and- and this is just a 'fire and forget' system. You know, somebody presses the button and the thing just carries on like a robot, which it is. And it clearly is difficult to maintain children's attention the same way as when there is a live presenter. You know, if I'm sitting there and the children are yawning, or talking to each other, which does occasionally happen, I look them straight in the eyeball and pause, and you know, I can talk to them. [Laughs] And it works. The- the computer can't do that.

No.

So, the National Holocaust Centre fully understands it needs to learn how to use this new material.

Yeah, I think the future will show how it's going to be used. I- I've seen a few presentations and it's interesting. I think it's interesting.

It's useful material and, but- but- and they will find a way of using it; I am sure. It's better than not having it. I mean, you know, at least one of the people who made such a- one of those films has already died. At least one. Maybe more than one, I don't know.

[05:19:54]

Thank you, Martin. I think just shall we finish up with what I wanted to ask you now. Because we are in this Covid situation and people at home. Do you think the survivors are dealing with this isolation better or worse or, how- how do you feel about being at home now and isolated to some degree?

Well, personally, it's frustrating but I go out for a walk every day - rain or shine. Yesterday I walked six and a half kilometres. [both laugh] And- and I try and find the hills and go up them. So, I see a bit of sunlight when there is any, and I feel the rain if there is any and I see the trees and so on. It's- it's so- I can mitigate the isolation. It's different for somebody who can't walk so well, who can't see so well. Their family is not visiting. It's early days, but I'm

deeply worried about my fellow survivors. I'm trying to prepare as many as I can to use Zoom because whilst obviously there is the telephone, you know, don't underestimate the telephone. A telephone call when you're sitting on your own for a week. You know if somebody phones you up and you remember that somebody is thinking of you it's not such a little thing. But being able to see each other is good. And we do find that. At the moment we're having a lot of technical problems with Zoom, because people are new to this, people are not particularly intensive computer users. So, things which might be easy- I mean I had to use computers heavily in my work so it's- it's not so hard. And there are other survivors who can cope very well. But the majority, have difficulty just using a computer other than just reading email and using the internet using a web browser. So- and, and Zoom is not totally straightforward. I mean things like Facetime are much more straightforward but don't have the same scope as Zoom. So- but I have been trying to promote Zoom and I've taught a number to use it and I hope that number will expand. Because I could foresee that in three months' time, never mind in twelve months, people will be going up the wall.

[05:22:38]

Yeah.

And I have been in touch with others, with professionals, people in the AJR for example, you know, saying, "Where can we find a few people to help with this? How can we promote social contact to break the isolation to the extent we can?" I believe that depression is a social disease. I think it arises from interactions with other people. And I think that when some action makes it better, that action is also interaction with other people. You know, it- it appears to be a fact that pills can make it milder but then you know aspirin can make pain better. Its pain is not caused by aspirin deficiency.

So, you're worried about a depression possibly as a result of this isolation?

I believe that lack of supportive social contact is very dangerous for traumatised people. Holocaust survivors are traumatised people. They've been traumatised not only during the Nazi period, but subsequently, because they are not normal people. And other people who don't understand this, add to the trauma by treating them as oddities or rejecting them. It's –

You know, the survivors have more to cope with than people realise. And social isolation is an added stress. It's bad for people who are mentally perfectly healthy.

So, you're thinking-

Yeah - predisposed. Who- who- you know.

They're more vulnerable? More vulnerable?

[05:24:36]

Absolutely. Absolutely. The word 'vulnerable' is absolutely is right. Spot on. Yeah. We've got to protect our fellow survivors, yes. And a lot of that I think should be done by survivors because you know, there are professional people and I think they are essential, because you know professional counsellors and psychotherapists and, and people who are not actually counsellors or therapists but who have the caring skills of interacting socially with older and disabled people... know things and have skills that an untrained survivor however empathetic does not have. You know, you've been taught as a professional how to handle interactions and how to handle various problems. So, I hope there will be a lot of involvement by people like that. But I also believe that for a survivor nothing is quite as good as a friendly pat on the shoulders, metaphorically, by another survivor. I think there's something unique about that. So, I think a lot of it has to be done by ourselves for each other.

Yeah - yeah. Well it's also such a strange situation that so many survivors sort of very close often to their family and now their families can't see them and can't take care of them and-

Yes. Yeah.

The people in the homes you can't even access - at all - so, you know. But the younger survivors who have communication possibilities- but as you said, there is the phone. OK, Martin, thank you so much. Is there anything- we've covered- this was quite a long interview. Is there anything you would like to add which we haven't discussed which you think is relevant?

I can't think of anything at the moment. You know you can never cover everything anyway.

No, I'm just amazed how detailed your memory is. It's quite extraordinary.

[05:26:48]

Yeah. But you know when I met Mrs de Jong again, she and I compared notes.

Yeah.

And it became very, very clear that she remembered things I didn't remember. OK, she was an adult so you would expect her to remember more than I remembered. But it was also true the other way around. I had very definite memories of things she didn't remember. So neither her memory nor my memory was complete. Obviously one possible explanation is that I have invented some memories. But I- although sometimes when I've been able to check my memory with reality, there have been distortions. For example, in Theresienstadt, where part of the town had turned itself though ninety degrees in my memory.

Yeah.

You know? And in the- the building I was taken to in Amsterdam, the colour of the bricks was not the colour I remembered. *But* there had been you know sixty- sixty years during which those red bricks had weathered. They were now less brightly dark red. They were - there was more of a greyish tinge to them. I think that was probably just the effect of time. And the other thing is, I remembered approaching it across a grassy square. And there was no grassy square. It was on a street. Buildings on the other side. So, my memory appeared to be wrong until I discovered that those buildings had been built since. There had indeed been a grassy square. You know, and that sort of thing occurs all the time. There was again a distortion in my memory in the shape of the building. So, I have discovered errors, but on the whole I've been surprised by how good my memory is. There's another illustration that I remember that in the last days in Theresienstadt - in the last days whilst the Nazis were still running it, there were explosion sounds, like bangs, in the far distance. It sounded to me like cannon fire or something like that. And I mentioned this to my friend Professor Aubrey Newman who is a historian. He said, "That's nonsense, it can't be true. There was no fighting

in that area.” And he was right! You know that area was not fought over. It was the- the Soviets walked into it after the Nazis capitulated. So, I believed that maybe I had, you know, I had a false memory. But then I discussed it with my friend Stephen Frank who was there as a- you know- two years older as a child at the same time. And he said, yes, they heard the bombing of Dresden. Now he was with his mother. He had an adult with him who could explain what was happening.

Yeah.

Mrs. de Jong I didn't stay with after the war, so she couldn't discuss it with me.

Yes. But at least when you-

So again it- it seems- I mean certainly, Stephen Frank also remembers hearing those distant bangs.

[05:30:21]

But at least when you met Mrs de Jong, you could corroborate. I mean you could share this memory. I mean, there must be children who- there's nobody else who they can share any memory.

Oh- yes another very interesting incident- at some point whilst I was in her flat, she was making a cup of tea and she started whistling a tune. Now, you know, OK - old lady whistling a tune. But it was a melody that was played over loudspeakers in Theresienstadt and I think this was at the time when the Red Cross visit was due to take place. They put loudspeakers in the squares and they played, you know, popular Viennese waltzes and Rossini – you know, popular classical music. And it was a melody that was played again and again. And I looked at her and I- I told her what it was. And she sort of looked at me. I think she was testing me to see if I was an impostor.

What was it?

I mean, you know, she couldn't- I was now a grown man. I'd been a little six year old boy the last time she saw me. You know, it was- it was not a stupid thing to do.

What was it melody, what was it? Do you remember it?

I don't remember it now. Until a few years ago I could, and I actually hummed it at the Leeds School of Music and he told me exactly what the piece of music was which I didn't know. I'm terribly sorry. There are so many of these light classical pieces.

A classical?

I can't remember which one it was now. Yeah.

Amazing. Amazing. OK Martin.

She was- you know, she had only primary school education but she was not stupid. She was a very sharp and very decent lady, you know, even as she was dying.

And so, she was happy that you recognised this music.

Oh, yes. I mean, you know she was- she was- her experiment-

It worked!

I guess it gave the answer she wanted, but she did the experiment, yeah. [Laughs]

[05:32:34]

OK well that's a- that's a lovely- lovely thing to finish on. Martin, thank you very, very much for having agreed to be our first Zoom interview for AJR Refugee Voices. I'm going to read you now the consent form if I may, which I'm going to send you as well. One moment.

[Bea reads the Agreement]

[05:33:46]

Yeah. No problem whatsoever. That's all-

Is it alright? Any special conditions you can think of or anything you're worried about. Anything we have discussed-?

As long as it remains under the control of the AJR I'm happy.

It's AJR- it's an AJR project. It's all AJR. And as I said, I don't know whether you would mind. Maybe I'll make- cut a little bit of a beginning and maybe we'll put it somewhere so that more people will be encouraged to come and do this. Is that OK with you?

Yeah, sure. OK. Yeah – yeah.

I don't know what you thought about this Zoom. I did- have you ever done something like this before on this- in this length?

Well, I think it has a definite advantage over using the telephone. You've got a video image now. You know it's not what we would use in an ideal world, but given the fact it's not an ideal world it's an amazing second best.

It's amazing. I mean, what's amazing about it, it's not limited to any geography. You know?

Yeah, yeah – yeah.

I have to say it's- this is wonderful. I have to say, I'm very positively surprised. Because I couldn't imagine, you know, that one could maintain this. I think it's wonderful.

Yeah. One of the things I want to do, is to teach a class of school kids in Land's End with a group of school kids at John O'Groats at the same time, just to make the point: geography has disappeared.

I tell you what, I know Land's End quite well. I think the nearest school is in St Just. There is a big primary school there.

OK. Right.

Land's End doesn't have, but St Just, there is a big primary school.

Would you know the name of the school? I mean I was just going to look it up on the-

Just Google it. There's only one primary school in St Just. St Just is the nearest town to Land's End. It's about three miles. And it's a nice- I know the school and it's a nice little town.

Well, OK. OK.

That's a good idea.

Well, I mean, you know, it would draw people's attention to the- and for the National Holocaust Centre of course it means now they're national.

Yeah, exactly.

[05:36:02]

[Photographs]

Martin, I know you wanted to show us one photo. You wanted to show us a photo.

Yes. Hang on. I could also fairly quickly get photographs of my parents. I'll have to run upstairs for the one of my mother, but the one of my father is downstairs.

We can wait, yeah. I can't see anything. You need to-

Line it up?

Yes - yes.

Is there a reflection or- it looks OK to me.

Not it's fine. It's fine.

Photo 1

So, this is Katrien Rademakers - she had remarried. She was now Katrien Ulrich - in her final years when she was still living in Amsterdam. And we had a wonderful relationship up till the time she died.

So, this was the lady who took you first – in?

She, yes, and her husband. She lost her husband for the crime of looking after me as a five- - year old boy.

And just tell us the husband's name again.

Her husband was Jo Rademakers. His full name was Johannes Rademakers. He was an architect.

And you said he died in Neuengamme.

He was murdered. Yes, he- he died in Neuengamme.

Ok. Any more photos? We can wait.

You want me to just get my-?

Yeah. We'll wait for you.

My Dad-

[05:37:30]

Photo 2

I don't actually remember my father like this. The picture gives a very different impression from the one that I remember.

OK.

I mean, here he looks as a pomaded, you know, rich young man. I remember him looking much more ordinary and certainly not with his hair slicked like that.

Yeah, but he's young.

But this was my father.

And his name please? His name?

Rudolf Bernhardt Stern born December - 5th December 1911.

And when do you think this photo was taken? Does it have a date?

It doesn't.

No.

This version of the photograph was made by the husband of the family that looked after my sister in the Netherlands. It was prepared from some original print by a photographer in Amsterdam and the original print I think is lost.

OK. And your mother? You said you had a picture?

Yes, for my mother I'll have to go upstairs. I'm sorry. I've separated my parents which is perhaps not the best thing to do but-

OK, we'll wait.

It won't take that long. I just don't want to break my father's picture by putting it away carelessly.

Of course.

[Pause]

[05:40:02]

Photo 3

So – here is my mother. I think that would have- photograph would have been taken by my father with his Leica 3 miniature camera. And probably with my mother leaning on the balcony of our flat overlooking the Vondelpark in Amsterdam when I was three years old, I would guess.

That's a lovely picture. Can you move it back – a bit- move it back a bit? And to the side, the side of you. To the side of you? Other side. Yeah - yeah. That's nice. That's a lovely picture.

So, this is the woman who refused to divorce my father when she was being pressurised to do that by two Nazi officers in Amsterdam as she lay dying in hospital.

Oh, you had- you didn't mention that before.

Yeah. I did actually. Yeah.

In hospital? They came to the hospital?

She was dying of childbed fever.

Yes. I mean, the Nazis- the Nazis you didn't mention. They came to the hospital?

Yes, according to a woman who looked after me when I was two years old so she knew the family. She...I was in telephone contact with her. She lived in Australia when I spoke with her. And she told me that two Nazis officers came to the hospital to pressurise my mother into divorcing my father. Yes.

[05:41:44]

And she didn't do it.

She refused.

Yeah. OK. That's- that's a lovely- thank you. Thank you for sharing your photos. And, OK! That's it. After many hours. Thank you very much.

OK. Right. OK. Well, success with your project.

We'll be in touch and Martin, what I'll do is- I can now, it's very easy. I will cut this together and send it to you so you have a copy as well.

Thank you very much.

Because that's now all easy- it's all digital so I can just do it and share it with you. OK?

Yeah. OK, Bea.

Thank you very much and speak to you soon. All the best, bye. Bye - bye.

Yeah. And perhaps even in years to come we will even meet face to face once there is a vaccine.

Yes, I'm sure. Exactly.

Once it's safe. But it will take a long time, I'm sorry to say.

[End of Zoom interview and photographs]

[05:42:42]