

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	82

Interviewee Surname:	Bohm
Forename:	Dorothy
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	22 June 1924
Interviewee POB:	Königsberg, Germany

Date of Interview:	10 November 2004
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	3 hours

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

INTERVIEW: 82

NAME: DOROTHY BOHM

DATE: 10 NOVEMBER 2004

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

TAPE 1

BL: Today is the 10th of November 2004, and we're conducting an interview with Mrs Dorothy Bohm. We're in London, Hampstead, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

Tape 1: 0 minute 29 seconds

BL: First of all I would like to thank you very much, Mrs Bohm for doing the interview with us. Can you please tell me your full name?

DB: I was named Dorothea, Bohm, you want the name I was born with, ja? I was named Dorothea Israelit.

BL: And when were you born?

DB: I was born on the 22nd of June in 1924.

BL: And where were you born?

DB: I was born in a town called Königsberg in East Prussia.

Tape 1: 1 minutes 3 seconds

BL: Perhaps we should start this interview by you telling me a bit about your family background.

DB: Right. My family background. I was born into a middle-class, Jewish culture family, Central Europe, and we were very well-off, so I had a childhood with a nanny and a governess and all that sort of thing. My mother was not a housewife. But that was quite usual in those days. My father was a successful businessman and I remember Königsberg not terribly well, but it was a town of Frederick of Prussia and the philosopher Kant. And there was quite a cultural Jewish community, in which my parents took great part. I remember going to the German school, and my mother tongue is German although the family are

Lithuanians. I don't speak any Lithuanian, but I lived there until the age of nine. My grandfather lived there, and although they were Jewish they were very proud of the German culture. And I still remember my grandfather, who was very good-looking, and looked after... liked his clothes and liked going to the cafes and so on, loving Germany. And after the dreadful things that happened, my father used to say it's a good thing he died before Hitler, because he would have been heartbroken, his beloved Germany turning into a monster like that. Now what do I remember about the school? Not terribly much.

Tape 1: 2 minutes 54 seconds

It was a nice easy childhood, I had a brother who was a year older, I was very well looked after. I do remember that when it came to moving, my father decided in 1932 to leave Germany and to move into Lithuania. I don't exactly know the reason, I also know that my mother wasn't very happy because of the town we lived in incidentally is now called Kaliningrad, so the town where I was born is no longer on the map. It has also been destroyed completely, I believe, by the British Air Force. I think the only thing I remember is that the nanny used to take us to a park which belonged to the Castle. Apart from that, the only other thing I remember in 1932 as we were ready to leave, I was standing... our house must have been quite central, and the windows were giving onto the street, and there was a march-by, it was, I was told the Nazi Youth marching by. And I also remember at school I was asked to read poems and the school inspector congratulated me on my beautiful German. And I said but I am not German. I remember these silly incidents. And I do remember that march past and whether or not I was frightened I don't know. But anyhow we did move, and whether it was due to the fact that the Nazi party had become powerful, or whether my father actually moved because he wanted to go back and start a factory... It is possible that he was encouraged by the Lithuanian government. Now the town we moved to was called Memel and it was in fact in history the town which the Nazis occupied.

First they took the Sudetenland, then they took Prague and then they moved into the Memelgebiet. Now Memel was a little bit like the Sudetenland. It was still Germany but it was given to Lithuania as compensation after the First World War. So we moved to this fairly provincial German so-called Lithuanian town.

Tape 1: 5 minutes 39 seconds

BL: Before we move to Memel, let's just stay a little bit more with Königsberg. You mentioned your grandfather; can you tell me a little bit more about you grandparents and where they come from?

DB: Well it's a little bit confused. Because my grandmother was called Silbermann, and not terribly long ago I learnt that the family was actually German. The Silbermanns had lived in Berlin for a long time. Now my father was born in a small town called Czhaki [?], I've never been there, and they must have obviously been well off because when he moved to Germany his wife stayed behind and she was running, I think it was a saw mill, I'm not quite sure, it was some sort of enterprise. And at that time in life for a woman to be the businesswoman... My father adored her. All I remember of her, being quite small and at that time, by the time I knew her they lived in Germany, so the background is a bit hazy except that they were not amongst the poor Shtetl Jews, they were well off. The house was full of books, you know the whole cultural Jewish... but also quite patriotic as you know...

BL: This was your father's father or your mother's father.

DB: Father's father. The Israelits. Spelt I-S-R-A-E-L-I-T, not an E. There are many Israelites, and many Israelis, but very few Israelits. And I also remember that he was a very active man, a man who liked work, a man who was quite Spartan, not amongst the kind of Central European Jews who like big cars and showing off, he wasn't like that at all. He was quite strict bringing us up. When we moved to Memel I still continued going to a German school, so my cultural background was entirely German.

Tape 1: 8 minutes 1 second

BL: What about your mother's family?

DB: My mother's family was different. My mother was born in a place called Neustadt, Naumiestis in Lithuanian, which was on the border with Germany. And we used to visit regularly. And he, in the village, the grandfather, was a great guy, the only brick-built or stone-built house on three floors. The family had great esteem in that village, and it was a village, and the brother, my mother's brother was the chemist, another brother ran a factory of flax, and when we came to visit we were treated like little royalty. And I remember that extremely well. Now my grandfather there was married, my mother lost her mother when she was very young, four years of age, and she was the youngest of three brothers and two sisters, and he remarried and he married the daughter of a famous rabbi. So the background there was not a Shtetl background in the usual Chagall sense, they were amongst the elite of the Jews there. I remember loving to go there, because coming from a townish background going there and to be spoilt was very nice too. They had apple orchards; they had all sorts of things. We tried to spend Jewish holidays there, which was very nice. My father and mother weren't really religious but felt Jewish. And amongst my favourite memories was going to Neustadt and we used to go into Germany because there was just a little bridge, and they had passed, and the German culture had permeated because it was very near there. And there was as far as I remember there was no anti-Semitism at all. The servants learnt to speak Yiddish. I don't speak Yiddish at all. And when I was a youngster I was a bit snobbish, I thought that Yiddish was not a very nice language. I thought the language was pejorative to German. And I've changed my mind completely. So mother's family I remember being very warm, a wonderful family, a Jewish family. My father's family was quite different; his background was interesting because although apparently, when he was still in the Lithuanian small town, Chaki, I think it was called. He had a bar mitzvah and he did so brilliantly, and you probably know that Lithuania had the most important rabbis in Europe. And he was... one of the rabbis came to see his father and said 'could we take him into the rabbinical school? Because he might make a very great rabbi'. And it was agreed, so at thirteen years he went there. And he stayed for six months and then decided that life was too narrow for him. My father was quite an unusual person. Now all I do know is that at eighteen he moved to Berlin and he spent the First World War in Berlin. He didn't go into the army, he was obviously a foreigner. And he was employed by Ullstein Verlag. Now Ullstein Verlag was very similar to what we have here, Penguin. And he was very brilliant at mathematics. And he apparently introduced a new system of accounting. Now his German became absolutely brilliant. And he didn't talk very much about his life there, but obviously he was a young man of eighteen, he was extremely good looking and all that sort of thing and life wasn't too bad for him.

Tape 1: 12 minutes 56 seconds

He didn't want to stay with Ullstein, he decided that he wanted to be independent. And he met my mother by visiting her father on business and fell in love with her. He was ten years older. She had been quite a spoilt girl, apparently didn't have school but had private tutors, and charmed everybody. She wasn't very beautiful, but charming. Anyhow, they married. Two very different people. My father was very intellectual, academic, very hard working. My mother liked the good life and she was a good friend to everybody and played very good bridge and so on. As a child, I remember her liking the good life and travelling and so on.

Anyhow. Memel. I remember coming to school there, a German school. Made friends. Now the Jewish community in Memel was very strongly Zionist. My father became involved in all the Jewish activities. He was a great believer that one should be athletic, that the body should be used, and he became eventually the president of Bar Kockba, which was like Maccabi, he did a lot. He also became very active in the industrial life of the city and became a representative of industries, representing the Jewish part of it. The factory grew from very little to a big enterprise, and he worked very hard I remember.

Tape 1: 14 minutes 55 seconds

BL: What was he producing?

DB: Producing textiles. Now the raw cotton was brought from Manchester, here's the connection with England. It was a vertical mill, it started off by spinning the yarn and then producing fabrics. A vertical mill meant that everything was done on the place, including dyeing, and producing fabrics. Towards the end he was producing very sophisticated fabrics. I remember being very touched by the fact, I had a very lovely relationship with my father, and he called some of his fabrics in my name. I brought some over here incidentally, when I came.

Tape 1: 15 minutes 50 seconds

Now my father's involvement in Jewish affairs... was so strong that naturally, his children, my brother and I were involved. And my brother was very good-looking, and a rather, slightly, young man. And I was a very serious young girl, and I used to take interest in all activities. And I remember that he was very strict with us, he wouldn't allow me to read books which he didn't consider sufficiently serious. I even sometimes resented the fact that all my friends could read what was called 'Schundliteratur', which was kitsch, and I wasn't allowed to. But it stood me in good stead, because even now I can't read badly written books.

BL: What were you allowed to read?

DB: Oh, I suppose I can't remember, but... German literature. Far too advanced for my age. My father always expected a hell of a lot from me, right through, but I adored him, he was somebody who... was my hero. So when the collapse came, and things began to happen, that hurt me a great deal. Anyhow, let us go back to the first years when Nazi propaganda started to infiltrate...

BL: Just to take you slightly back. You mentioned Jewish festivals. Do you remember what you celebrated, and how you celebrated?

DB: It was always a family affair. Quite a big family. Most of them have gone; many of them were killed by the Nazis. But I only know they were very happy occasions. I remember

Pesach, what's it called, the Matzo being hidden and so on, that sort of thing, fairly traditional, not orthodox. Although grandfather had married this rabbi's daughter. She was a wonderful modern woman, terrifically good fun too, so it was being Jewish without being heavy about it.

BL: Did they keep a kosher house?

DB: My mother, I think, in the beginning did, but then didn't, because some of the servants mixed up plates and so on. So it was a traditional Jewish home, not at all orthodox. My father had friends amongst Christians, and I even remember as the Hitler era approached, his Christian friends used to say 'nothing will happen to you, because you're special, you're a special Jew', the usual sort of thing, right? The first years in Memel were good but then it started. And I remember certain things which became engraved in my memory.

Tape 1: 19 minutes 10 seconds

My father's best friend was a doctor called Dr Hannemann. And we all adored him. And I remember being told that he'd died. How did he die? The Nazis, the Nazi element in Memel had taken him to prison, accused him of abortion, and he hanged himself. That was, I must have been at the time about eleven. Things went on, and I remember the wonderful times we had in Maccabi and Bar Kockba, and my father was very keen that young Jews should be healthy, a healthy mind and a healthy body, he believed. He was very athletic himself; he used to supervise all sorts of things. And so all my life was not Lithuanian and it wasn't German, it was Zionist. And I belonged to the, you know to the group and so on. At school the Jewish children were fine, they were doing well.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 29 seconds

BL: How many Jewish children were there in your class?

DB: Quite a lot. I can't remember how many, but probably a third must have been Jewish. They all came from well-off families. It was a German Lyceum, I remember extremely little about it, which is extraordinary, it's just gone. I know that we lived extremely well, that I was always known... my father was called Tobias, Tobias... not as Dorothy but Tobias' daughter. Because everybody knew him and adored him and so on. I remember being at the hairdresser having my hair cut, and the girl there used to say, she is Mr Israelit's daughter, you see, and so it put a stamp on me. We lived on the main street, all our windows were facing the street and the time came when the Nazi thing became very real, and although it was still Lithuania, at school they started saying Heil Hitler. And I walked out. And I also remember, sorry to say that the only girl who stayed, we all left, was an orthodox girl, and I couldn't understand it, I just couldn't understand it. Anyhow, the threats became stronger and stronger, the propaganda over the radio became heavier against the Jews, names were cited, always including Tobias Israelit as one of the people they would definitely destroy. My father was an optimist.

Tape 1: 22 minutes 13 seconds

He somehow thought it wouldn't happen. Now the Austrian refugees came through Memel and there was a Hachshara and my father was very active on that and I remember in our home welcoming quite a lot of the people.

BL: When was this?

DB: Now this must have been 37 perhaps? When was Vienna? '37-'38 yes? And I remember visiting with him; you know the Hachshara was a preparation for the Kibbutz. And they were trying to prepare the young people for emigration. And father used to do a lot for them. He himself somehow, didn't believe it would happen, which was crazy, absolutely. He had a friend in Czechoslovakia, who was a very great textile man, who consulted with him, should he emigrate? And my father said you must emigrate, and he became one of the most important textile companies in Israel. I've forgotten the name now, but it was the big company in Israel. Father stayed on, the factory grew quite big and had a good reputation with cotton fabrics and he employed, tried to employ the same number of Germans, Lithuanians, and Jews. And he built it into a mill it had its own shower rooms, canteen, which was quite unusual for that part of the world, and an internal railway so that the heavy parcels could go by internal railway rather than being carried. There was night shift as well, he worked very hard, he never took a holiday but he liked it, and his energies were devoted to running the factory and his Zionist activities. I don't ever remember him being ill or going on holiday I remember him being a heavy smoker, which in the end was not good for him, but he was my hero. And as the approach of Hitler became more plausible, he... a lot of the Jewish families would leave Memel and go to Lithuania proper that was Kaunas, Vilna was not Lithuanian then, it had been taken by the Poles, and the Poles and the Lithuanians were, didn't like each other at all. We had family in Poland and it was difficult to be in touch with them.

Tape 1: 25 minutes 2 seconds

Now father decided not to leave. He was asked by the industrial people not to leave because it would create panic. That was not a very clever thing to do; I think we should have left. But he stayed, my mother stayed, by that time I had a baby sister, who was a year old, not even a year old, but we stayed, and it came to a stage when we were afraid of putting lights on. And whenever I went out and looking Jewish I was kicked, and told some awful things, so I started being afraid of going out.

BL: By whom?

DB: By the Germans, well, by the Lithuanians, or by the Memler Germans right. So anti-Semitism had taken root very strongly. Father stayed to run the factory. My mother was very loyal to him although she wasn't terribly courageous; she decided she would not leave until he left. As I told you we had a lot of friends, non-Jewish friends, who assured him whatever happened he wouldn't be touched. Being a great optimist, which helped him later in life, he listened. But those few months were terrible.

BL: Which month, which timeframe?

DB: We're talking now about January, February 1939. Now the Nazis moved in March. And those months were pretty terrible. I was 14. All my friends had gone. But it was father who decided on things and he had decided we should stay. He was also told by his friends that he would be warned when the Nazis actually marched in. He kept busy. He kept the factory going, and I was in the house when the phone call came saying 'Get out. The Nazis are marching in'. And I remember being panicked trying to find him and I found him and we were told we've got to leave. Now father was a brave man. And certain things that I remember... that he tried to get into the factory. He had three porters, and he came back to the house having been told that he was not allowed to go in. His creation, right? And the porters were his friends. And he came back to the house and he didn't know I was there to see him

and he started to sob, and this was the collapse of my hero, this was a terrible shock to me. Anyhow, he told us that we must take the last train out and he would meet us at the station. By that time we had prepared things. And although this big flat was still lived in by us many of the things had been sent to a place called Šauliai, it was the second city in Lithuania, Lithuania proper.

Tape 1: 30 minutes 9 seconds

We went to the station, and my father was there, my mother had taken the German nurse, she was going to come with us for my baby sister but he jumped off the train. My mother wouldn't have gone on the train. He stayed behind. And I remember extremely well the journey. My mother was in tears. What would happen to my father? I can't remember the journey at all but we arrived at that end and there was a phone call from my father saying somebody had to come, with some keys which will be found and although I wasn't at all brave at 14, I was very much still a little girl, I took the keys and I ran to the station. Because there was nobody else who could go back, my mother had the baby, there was a German nurse, and then we started the journey back and this was supposed to be the last train back. And I don't know how, whether I had money, I don't remember anything, except that I found myself on the train, and that most of the people on the train were journalists going back. And the journey started, and instead of taking perhaps three hours, it took seven or eight hours, and then a journalist, who recognised me, he knew my father, I was the only girl, the only woman there, and he started to look after me. He said you know, I'll look after you. And I don't remember but I remember it made a very big impact on me, and again my father's relation. And the train stopped and there was nothing at all, and we had no food, nothing, and he said, come let's see if we can find food, and they said the train wouldn't leave for another two hours. And it was my first experience of seeing a shack where the peasants lived. And having been so well protected by everything for me it was amazing. Anyhow I started getting worried. My father wouldn't wait, and what would happen? Anyhow, we did arrive finally and my father was there.

Tape 1: 31 minutes 45 seconds

What I also remember, my misery at seeing..., it was a small station obviously, I can't remember where it was, and there were people sitting on their few belongings. And the misery on their faces, there were many Jewish workers; you know the others had left. And later on when I saw, on television, what happens to refugees, and it was just the same. Anyhow that was a terrible night, my father said I had to wait for him, so I sat up the night, and somehow I don't know what happened. I don't know what the keys were or anything. But I do remember him coming back and somehow we must have got back to Lithuania.

BL: How did you get back?

DB: Probably by train. You know this memory is gone completely. I only remember my father being there and what he did during the time he stayed I don't know. If they had got hold of him he wouldn't have lasted at all. He was a well-known figure, he was a Zionist and so on, everything the Germans hated. Anyhow back in Lithuania and of course I didn't speak Yiddish, I didn't speak Hebrew, I was a Yekke. I also remember many of the Jewish workers came to him wanting to be paid, because they'd lost everything. And I think he did. It was then arranged that I should leave. Because my father had a visa for me, I was allowed to go because of his connections with England and I was registered at a school in England. Those

last few months I don't know. I only remember that my father tried to be brave, but I had seen him reduced to somebody who was vulnerable. And at that age for me that was something that was extraordinary occurrence. But he was a good man, and he instilled in me a sense of pride, in being Jewish and being of the family that had respect, and when I came to England, years when I was terribly unhappy, I came in June 1939. Now my mother I remember... I was taken in by the mother of a chap... because incidentally it was interesting... because many of the boys from wealthy families, Jewish families were sent away. But no girls. My father was a great feminist. I was sent out. But I was the only girl really who was sent out. And my mother at the station said 'stay with us, stay the summer still with us and go when the schools starts.' And my father said no, she is to go now so that by the time school starts she will have had some English. So if I'd waited, that would have been it. That was the thin line that would have been it.

BL: How many months did you stay in Lithuania?

Tape 1: 35 minutes 26 seconds

DB: Well I only stayed from March till June.

BL: And Kristallnacht, did that affect you at all?

DB: I don't remember. But I remember that the man who became my husband, Louis, travelled to England on Kristallnacht in 1938 and he saw things on his way on the train from Poland, he told me later on about Kristallnacht.

BL: But you don't remember anything?

DB: No. Because I must have been thirteen. I don't remember. It's very strange there are certain things... I do remember being called 'Jüdische Kröte', Jewish toad, yes?

Tape 1: 36 minutes 18 seconds

and being kicked, my father being afraid of going out, I also remember putting on the lights, it was dark, we got telephone calls, the radio was on, with all that hate propaganda, and my father's name always being mentioned. So because of that I think I've forgotten a lot of things. I don't remember about the school, I don't remember the name of the teachers. And somehow the life of a quite pampered youngster, who was loved and well-off, suddenly turned.

Tape 1: 36 minutes 58 seconds

BL: When you went to Lithuania proper, did you go to school in those few months or...

DB: No, I couldn't. Because there was no German school. The only language I had was German. So it had been decided, my father had intended to send us to university in England anyhow because he was a great Anglophile, but he had sent my brother in 1938 to England to school, to Brighton College, so being sent to England that was something that was an escape. There is one thing I should say that in '39, or '38 the factory, which was a model factory, was visited by a delegation of English... and they were going to buy the factory. My father was asked not to do it because it would create panic, and unwisely he didn't. So it showed he was

a very brilliant chap, but wasn't very wise. Somehow he couldn't comprehend that the thing was going to happen, although he'd seen it happen. But he paid very dearly for it, but his life was saved... Well, let me tell you. I came to England, I came to school, I remember being in a Jewish school for the summer holiday called Arieh House, and I also remember standing with a gas mask when the war was announced, in the playground.

Tape 1: 38 minutes 44 seconds

BL: Where was that school?

DB: Arieh House in Hove. There were children from well-off Jewish families from all over the world. Talking about it... Now I don't know what happened then. I was supposed to go to a very, very expensive school called Roedean and I couldn't stand the idea of going to Roedean because it was very different from schools that I was used to, because children, girls had to wear hats, had to wear black stockings and things like that. It was very regimented. And ... they were children. And at fourteen I was more or less you know, grown up, with boys, and you know, the sort of much freer environment.

Tape 1: 39 minutes 31 seconds

Then I came to school. Arieh House was alright but I learned no English. And my brother's headmaster at Brighton College suggested a school in a place called Ditchling, in Sussex. I went there, and I was accepted. By that time I was fifteen, I had no English whatsoever, and it was a school where a lot of diplomats' children were, girls, compared to the Lycée, it was quite primitive. People were absolutely wonderful. I was the first Jew and the first foreigner they'd ever seen there. And I think my love for England dates back to that time they were absolutely wonderful to me. And I started off by... It was the first year of the war, the phoney war, right? And for me being thrown into this very English environment. And Ditchling was, the Ditchling Press that published Virginia Woolf and so on. That was an extraordinary sort of change from the life I'd had before, and I started being very unwell. The first year everything went wrong. I started getting inflammations on my hand, my eye dropped, and I used to have to wear a black patch, till lunchtime when the eye recovered. So the time was really difficult, but I was helped by the fact that these people, they were two, they were called Mary and Ann Dumbrell, two women, and a French teacher, they were all extremely sympathetic to me. Things they said, you know, 'would you like to take riding lessons?' And I said 'when I go back it will be a car, not a horse'. There was a little bit of money. My parents had wealthy friends, so... but I also knew I had to be independent. And I started to swot, and I worked incredibly hard, and the other kids didn't. And for some extraordinary reason, I managed within three terms, to finish school. And I think they sent out to the Ministry of Information for examination, my case history, and maybe that helped, I don't know, but anyhow I managed to get a School Certificate. I was only sixteen, and by that time I knew nothing, what happened on the other end. And I think on my birthday, on the 22nd of June, the Germans took over the rest of Lithuania. I hope I got the dates right. It was 1940.

Tape 1: 42 minutes 48 seconds

Now what happened to my father is interesting, and to the whole family. The Soviets came in, they took over Lithuania. Now my father being an arch-capitalist, never mind a Zionist, was on their list, but for six months they put him in charge of the textile industry, with a communist young man and then after that there was a knock at the door, I was told that much

later, and they came to fetch him. Took him away, and left my mother and the baby, and my father then was taken onto a cattle truck where all the Jews and capitalists had been put, to Siberia.

BL: He was taken from where?

DB: From Šauliai. Where he had... He talked about the journey to me, he said that all the young didn't survive. It always puzzled him that it was the young who were the most vulnerable. He said the moral strength wasn't there, and he said that the journey was absolutely terrible, and then in the end he was taken to a camp, in Atal, it was called Bisk, where he told me that for eight months of the year the temperature was below forty. How he survived I don't know. But he survived. And he said the fact that he saw the young just dying, and he knew that my brother and I were safe, and he had this extraordinary capacity, as I told you he was quite a Spartan man, occasionally he talked about things, but when he talked about things, my mother said he started to scream in the night. So I didn't have the heart to talk to him.

Tape 1: 44 minutes 56 seconds

Now my mother was taken away later. And she was taken to a less difficult place where all the women were. But it was still, you know, a camp. Now his life was saved because a week after he was taken by the Soviets the Germans invaded. So if he'd been there, like his brother, he wouldn't have survived. So he had to thank the Soviets, the Communist Russians, for saving his life. I once asked him how did you survive? How could you manage? He said 'they did not take my dignity away'. A book has been published in Lithuanian by a chap, not a Jew, who was in the camp. And he wrote that he was going to commit suicide because he couldn't take it anymore. And he said before doing that, he wanted to talk to somebody who he admired, and it was a man called Tobias Israelit, whose face he found fascinating and his whole behaviour and he went to talk to him. And he writes that my father had said to him 'do you believe in God?' And anyhow they talked and he said 'try to survive, try to live' things will get better and the guy in fact survived. And somebody in Israel translated it for me, and I've got the page, my children have got it. My hero, my father survived.

Tape 1: 46 minutes 43 seconds

BL: But all of this obviously you didn't know.

DB: I had no idea. For twenty... I mean, I didn't know they were alive. I knew nothing, nothing, nothing. And somehow or other... I mean it was difficult, because life, my teenage was terrible.

BL: Just to go back a little. Can you remember the journey which brought you into Britain?

DB: My journey? Of course, I remember the journey very well. We went by train, and we had to cross Germany. And as we came to the border, a Nazi chap came in, and I was looking at one of the albums, and he looked at one of the pictures, which had a Magen David on it. And he asked me what it was, and I said I belonged to this club and so on, and he let us pass. But I remember how frightened we were.

BL: Who did you travel with?

DB: Well, the mother, a friend of my family, who brought her son, who has since died, and a cousin. There were the two boys and myself. Extraordinary enough, my father somehow still believed that it wouldn't happen. And I had thought I would go back for the holiday.

BL: And where did you arrive in England?

DB: We arrived, we crossed Hoek van Holland, and then was it... Dover? Or Harwich? Harwich. And I was incredibly sick on the way. And a very miserable youngster. I also remember that I stayed with a Jewish family in Willesden. And I was given a ride round London and my first impression of London was a city of castles. Because they took us obviously to see the Houses of Parliament, and Buckingham Palace and so on, and then we were immediately sent to Arie House, it was not too bad. My misery began when I came to the very English environment. It was strange, and everything was so incredibly different. And suddenly I was a refugee. And somehow I always kept a pride that my father had instilled, he used to say 'what you have in your hands is nothing. What you have in your head is there'. I remember in later years being told that I didn't behave like a refugee. I was somebody who was always quite proud you know. It helped me to survive. It was very difficult. There were times when I wanted to commit suicide; I thought you know, what's going to happen? It was very, very difficult. But I do remember with great gratitude many of the English who were kind and good. I struggled very hard in the beginning, and I had nothing, and I was too proud to accept anything.

BL: You said it was different, it was very different, the English environment. What was different?

Tape 1: 50 minutes 22 seconds

DB: Oh God, everything, the food, the manners, the language, the behaviour. Everything. I remember once seeing that there was a woman, a charwoman at the door, and I was told that she is a lady. A charlady. First thing I was told is... my English was very basic, but having to learn, you simply learn... What was different? Everything was different. Nothing was the same. And at that very vulnerable age, that transition from being a child to being a woman, no. Shall I tell you this? I survived. And in some way, it was either a question of becoming stronger or just giving way. I had a friend who, a young woman, the same age as myself, she became a prostitute. I managed to get through the war. Incidentally, do you want to know about the later years? I left the school.

BL: When you were sixteen?

DB: Yes. With a School Certificate. What was I to do? I was too young. I had wanted to be a doctor. Because of my family's home, most of the young men who visited were doctors. In Germany the Jewish doctors were the intelligentsia, right? And I always thought that a doctor not only is somebody who helps. But is also a very interesting human being. And I wanted to study medicine. I would have made a terrible doctor, let me tell you. And what was I to do? I was too young. We all hoped this war would finish. Anyhow. I came back to London to stay with that family and the real war started. And I was in London during the first Blitz and there was no aircraft. There was no defence at all. But I also remember that this Jewish family in Willesden went to the shelter, and I hated being in the shelter. I wanted to look up and was always being told by people, the air-raid wardens 'you must go inside', and one memory of

that family was that there was an old lady, the grandmother, and she was the only one who was afraid. And I thought what has she got to be afraid of? She's had her life. For some reason I remember. I think of it now.

BL: How did you get in touch with that family?

DB: It was through contact with my parents, who had friends, very wealthy friends, who wanted to adopt me but I wouldn't have it. I said you know, they thought my parents weren't alive and so on, and I said no.

BL Were they nice to you, were they warm, or...?

DB: Yes, yes. But they were not my family. And then the war really started. And I remember being very impressed by the way people took it. I don't remember people being afraid, it's extraordinary. That's why I must have been so impressed by this woman in the shelter you see. I remember going by bus, which should have taken ten minutes, taking an hour because everything had come down. I was very lucky, because a cousin, a first cousin of my father's doctor Silbermann, who had brought me into the world, had come to England, to escape the Nazis in Germany, in Königsberg. His wife was a German woman, called Eva, a wonderful lady, who was an art historian, and a Bauhaus photographer.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 0 second

And there is something I must say, and that is that this woman had made Sami come to England, said I'll stay, I'll come later. She was asked by the Nazis to denounce him. She wouldn't, and they killed her. So here was a wonderful German woman. Now Sami came here and worked with refugees I think as a doctor and he and he started to try and help me. At sixteen, without family, and without money, I was very vulnerable, and he suggested that I might be interested in taking up photography. My father had been a Leica specialist in the early days and I used to hate being photographed, because my brother had beautiful regular features and always photographed well, and I didn't, so it was my reaction to a camera.

TAPE 2

BL: This is tape two, we are conducting an interview with Mrs Dorothy Bohm. We were talking about your decision to become a photographer, so could you tell me about it more?

DB: Yes, this extraordinary coincidence that the man who brought me into the world, the lovely doctor Silbermann, suggested that I might be interested in becoming a photographer. And when he asked me, I said I didn't know what photography is about. And he had a good friend, a woman called Germaine Kanova, who was half Czech and half French and had a wonderful studio in Baker Street; he took me there and I was impressed by what this person was doing. She was a wonderful photographer, a portrait photographer, also still lives and all sorts of things. And she said: 'You're very young, if you like you can come and work with me and see how you like that'. Well, I was impressed by her personality, by the work she was doing, I thought to myself yes, why not? But then the Blitz started and London was impossible to carry on living in, all the Colleges were asked to leave, and businesses, particularly young people and so on. So she moved. I was again at a loose end. At that time I thought photography might be of interest, and I was enrolled in Manchester University College of Technology which had a vocational course for photography and they made a very special effort to take me in, I was only sixteen, I was supposed to be too young, but again you

see how lucky I was with being granted some privileges, and I started a photography course there. This was during the war. What it did it taught me to be a technician. It taught me nothing about the art of photography, and I'd always been very interested in painting, reading, that sort of thing. And I did alright. Life was..., I was very poor, I couldn't afford anything, but I also took a job after college to earn some pocket money, and it was with Kodak, and I was wearing gum boots, and working with them, the chaps, and I had one incident I do remember. We were two women working, and I used to go after college, and I was listening to a conversation between two women workers, and she said 'Oh, I don't like the Jews'. And the other one said 'Oh I can't stand them'. And I had been friendly with them. And I said 'Have you ever met any Jews?' They said no. So I said 'I happen to be Jewish'. And this was the second year of the war. In Manchester. That remark stayed with me, made me very unhappy, actually. That was it. And these were working-class women, who had no contact at all. Anyhow, the upshot of this was that I had a wonderful friend, a girl only a year older, but much more sophisticated and mature than I, and she was a Czech, was Jewish, but didn't know why she was Jewish.

Tape 2: 4 minutes 1 second

And I remember talking to her about it and... Anyhow, she was a good friend to me, and she was secretary to the Czech, some Czech organisation, and young Masaryk was her boss, and she belonged to the... I don't know whether you know about the Ministry of Information, MOI, and she was on the panel of speakers, and one evening, the boss, somebody called Tom Swan, who was the head of the Northern Ministry of Information, was in her place, and we had discussions, and I must have talked quite heatedly about what happened, what Germany was about, what being Jewish was about. He came up to me and said Dorothy, would you join our panel of speakers? And I was horrified, I said 'How can I?' He said 'I've listened to you, if we put you on the platform addressing the great British public, who are slow to hate, and they see somebody like you, and they will believe what you say', and most of all they were paying quite well. By that time I had been working as a photographer, earning two pounds fifty a week, for which I paid for my room, and the pound fifty for clothes and food, so you can imagine there wasn't much left.

Tape 2: 5 minutes 39 seconds

BL: Did you have any contact with any refugee organisations? Did you get any help?

DB: Nothing, nothing. But I tell you I did a lot afterwards for the... so this is interesting because I then... Tom Swan, who became a father figure to me, he was wonderful, he used to take me out to lunch because he knew I couldn't afford lunch, and they were paying quite well, I was travelling around the country, talking about what the Nazis were doing. Well, a panel of speakers like Graham Greene, I mean, I was the youngest among them, they just chose me because, you know.... Rotary Clubs I addressed, I travelled all over the country, miners, I had a car came to collect me, and a chauffeur, and travelled in the blackout all over Lancashire. And I had contact by that time with the former ambassador of Lithuania, so I got news of what was happening.

Tape 2: 6 minutes 36 seconds

In fact somewhere among my papers I have various comments on what I spoke. I had to choose a nom de guerre, it was Alexander, Dorothy Alexander, because, for obvious reasons.

And I also spoke for the Red Cross, the Russian Red Cross and things like that, so I was active, quite active.

BL: Which year was this?

DB: We're now talking about forty... '41, and '42. Wait a minute, no it was later, because I'd finished college and I was working. I finished my photography again, because I had to. I did a four year course in two years, they said it couldn't be done, it wasn't difficult. And then my first job, an interesting point, in fact one should say it; I was offered a job in Manchester in the poshest part of Manchester, a shop selling cameras, and optics. A Jewish chap, who had seen me come in and he knew I'd finished College, and he said 'Would you like a job?' I said I needed a job. And he offered me a job, and I hadn't realised that I wasn't allowed to sit. All day long I had to stand. At College I was called Dorothy... I refused to be called Dotty, I remember... Israelit, because my certificate and all that... Now this Jewish chap said to me 'I'm sorry but I cannot call you Israelit, Miss Israelit'. Now this was a Jew in Manchester. So I said Ok, the other family name is Alexander. But that again left a terrible impression. Sad.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 3 seconds

BL: He was worried that other people would notice that you were Jewish, why? ... What was his concern?

DB: I don't know, he said he couldn't call me Miss Israelit. Anyhow, so that was Dorothy Alexander, and I then chose a name for talking. And there was a very interesting... I would always start the talk by saying who I was, I would always start the talk by saying who I was, that I was Jewish, that I'd come over. And I was eighteen by that time, not sixteen, and I had left college and so on, and I was working in a studio... I stayed one week with that guy incidentally, just one week and then I was offered a job by another Jewish chap who opened a portrait studio. Samuel.... What was he called? ... Samuel Cooper. An English Jew, who was quite nice to me, but underpaid me terribly. Because normally at eighteen you still got a family and so on, but it was tough, and I worked incredibly hard. And in the end I was running the studio and then I was offered... I was also teaching photography by that time. But the Ministry of Information ..., Samuel Cooper was very impressed, and he used to give me time off. And visiting during the blackout in various places was an interesting experience, and also, it was interesting to see, going to miners' clubs and going to Rotary Clubs. One experience in Manchester Library, and I remember saying 'How can I, you know', and Tom Swan said 'Ok, I'll come onto the platform'. And something that I love about England was that in the middle of the war, I was allowed to say... they never checked what I was going to say, and I never... I would just make a few notes, I'd just talk. And they would announce me, and say 'Whatever Dorothy Alexander says, has not been vetted in any way and we are not responsible for anything she says. Now can you imagine that in any other country? No.

Tape 2: 11 minutes 23 seconds

Another experience which I had which was amazing, on D-Day, invasion of Europe, I was offered, and for me... being given something like £200 a week, lecturing, to the American Air Force in Blackpool, I didn't have a holiday, that was my holiday, but I made some money. And when it was announced that the invasion of Europe was taking place, there was a question, is she allowed to talk to the troops? And they came back and said yes, and there I was, and I could have said anything. No wonder I like England. It's been amazing really, these were not Jews incidentally, but all my friends, all the people I was in touch with knew I

was Jewish, knew I was European; even now I'm called a European photographer. There is a kind of lack of curiosity in this country, which allows one to be quite free? And although I haven't mixed very much with the Jewish community as such, I started doing quite a lot later on. But that's much later.

Tape 2: 12 minutes 38 seconds

BL: So how many talks did you give for the Ministry of Information?

DB: Oh probably once every two weeks, something like that.

BL: There were questions, or...

DB: There were questions, and I had the answers. I spoke quite freely, and this, you must remember, was in the middle of the war.

BL: And what instructions did they give?

DB: I was supposed to tell the English that the Nazis were really bad, that what happened really did happen. I remember them saying 'The English are slow to hate, and they can't believe some of the things', right? And here I was, having seen what happened, and so on. So for them an 18 year - old being able to tell these people. And I have somewhere, in my archive, reactions about the talk. Obviously it did some good, because the Ministry then offered... would I like to then become a professional speaker for them. I said no. Because after I'd talked, the night was impossible for me to sleep. I mean, every time it happened. Don't forget that I was a very vulnerable person. But people like Tom Swan, and later on I had some friends, all English, all behaving in the most wonderful way to me. And I had no axe to grind, this was a sincere feeling of trying to try and tell them you're fighting a war, it's worth fighting, it's worth defeating.

Tape 2: 14 minutes 37 seconds

Right through those years I never believed that one could lose you know, and we were very close to losing, weren't we?

BL: What about your brother?

DB: My brother is an entirely different kind of person. He was very good-looking, girls liked him and he liked girls, so he didn't partake in anything like that. And although we were in the same town, we didn't have an awful lot of contact. He was...

BL: So he was not a support to you?

DB: Not at all, I was always a support to him. When I had some money to go on holiday I gave it to him. A good chap, but not serious. I think the reason was that he left his home a year earlier; he did not see what was going on. I think if he had lived through that last year it might have made him more serious and more responsible.

BL: You were probably not affected by internment because you were Lithuanian...

DB: I was a friendly alien Lithuanian, and even a friendly alien, even to talk, things like that... I was supposed to be home by nine o'clock, I think, or eight o'clock in the evening. I remember sitting on a bus in Manchester, and a chap sitting next to me, slightly drunk, started to talk and he said 'You're not from Manchester are you? And I thought 'Oh my God'... he said 'I know where you're from. You're from Sheffield'. Because I started getting worried, that he would report me. Oh God. And yet in spite of all that I was given all the honours and I remember having always a chauffeur with a car to take us out, and only once did somebody try to touch me and I reported him and he got into terrible trouble. So that was that. It was an interesting time. Actually I got to know lots of places in Lancashire, and the blackouts on the roads, and then arriving there, and people talking to me. Somewhere I've got various papers, saying what I'd said had meant something to them. You see if you get somebody like that talking, it, at least that's what I thought, I must have been alright. And Tom Swan remained a wonderful friend. And later on, I knew my parents were alive. My mother didn't know about my father either. The history there is extraordinary. And I had a sister who was a year old when I left, and twenty two years later I saw her.

Tape 2: 17 minutes 28 seconds

We had no language in common. Hers is Russian. We have no memories in common, no childhood. Nothing. She's a wonderful person as it happens. But no, it's been a very strange...

Tape 2: 17 minutes 48 seconds

BL: Where did you live at the time you were giving these talks?

DB: That's a very sad story and I don't know if I want to talk about it. I stayed with somebody who was very unkind to me. A relation who... treated me very badly. I didn't have a room, I had a sofa in the living room, whenever he had a lady friend, I was locked out and things like that. That's while I was at College. College was alright. In my youth in Memel I'd been a table tennis champion and so I took up that at College and I beat all the chaps. There we were only about seven girls and hundreds of boys. And that's where my great wonderful luck started. I met the man who became my husband, Louis. Who again, survived by a very thin thread. He'd been sent to England, Louis Bohm, by his father in 1938. His father had also textile connections with Britain and Louis came here and started to study. And his best friend, a brilliant mathematician, in 1939 in the summer, they were going to go back home to visit the families in the Lodz, and Louis decided not to go, he wanted to earn some money during the holiday. His friend went back, and didn't survive. So both Louis and myself, there was such a narrow line that we both survived. I want to believe in God, but I do believe in fate, there must be something. And meeting Louis, who was four and a half years older than I was the most wonderful thing for me. His mother and sister were killed in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Tape 2: 20 minutes 0 second

And when he met me I was sixteen and I hadn't realised until years later, that his sister was the same age, and at sixteen had perished. And he started to sort of... not my brother, but Louis, started to look after me... I was madly in love with him, because he was very handsome and wonderful. He was President, Secretary of the International Students' Union at Manchester University. And unlike most of the boys there, who were boys, he was a man at 20. And meeting him was the most wonderful thing. We were introduced to each other in

Manchester by somebody who knew both his father and my parents. And we became friends and he somehow helped me. But he knew I wasn't ready for love or anything like that. I was quite late growing up that way. And he protected me in many ways. He had nothing. Neither of us had anything. I remember he had a College scarf and a rusty old bike. But being with him meant a great deal, and we did get together and we got married and we stayed together nearly fifty years. And he was... losing a mother was a terrible thing to him. He wouldn't talk about it. My daughters often ask why doesn't Daddy talk? Because I used to talk about my father a lot. He wouldn't. Only on his birthday he would look at one of the albums, we don't know how his mother and sister died. We know that his father was asked by his mother to go when the Germans came and said we'll follow later. And he escaped via Italy and Turkey, went to then Palestine and he never forgave himself that he'd left his daughter and his wife behind. He would have perished just the same.

Tape 2: 22 minutes 25 seconds

So this is the story of the family. When I think about why did I survive, and others didn't..., a lot of the family just went; and why my father's life was saved. He remained a rather amazing man, right through, you know. The Red Cross, I don't know how they found me, because I'd changed my name... Once I heard that they were alive, they still were together. My father was allowed out of his camp, after Stalin's death, but had to stay in that area with that dreadful climate, and had to report to the Police every day. The stories that he had were amazing. Solzhenitsyn's book, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* came out and my father read it and said to me could he be in touch with Solzhenitsyn? So, I said 'Why Papa? He said I would like to tell him it was so much worse. I didn't of course. But my father, when people met my parents, who were allowed to come out through the intervention of Harold Wilson, we've got the date haven't we? '68. There's another long story there. There is so much to say I don't know....

Tape 2: 24 minutes 8 seconds

BL: Let's go back to the forties when you met your husband, how did your life develop then?

DB: Well yes, between us we had no money whatsoever. By that time he was doing a Ph.D. And I was earning a little bit of money. We're now talking from 1942 onwards. He liked cycling and we went on cycle rides and so on. I had one most wonderful friend. That was an old lady, I don't know how old she was then, but she must have been late sixties perhaps, and she came from quite a famous aristocratic family and I got to know her through Louis' contact with her brother, who had been the managing director of a big textile firm. And when Louis came over here his father had suggested that he should be in touch, and they liked him. This woman..., I think they could have been Jewish, I'm not sure. Riefstahl Nordlinger, the family came from Germany. Now this woman was an extraordinary lady. Absolutely wonderful. And somehow she became fond of me, and I loved being with her, and she was a great lady who had lived in Paris and her family had been friends with the Proust family. And in the middle of the war, in Manchester, Rusholme, where they lived in a beautiful house she was talking about her life in Paris, and meeting Cocteau and being friendly with Proust, and it was her who helped Marcel Proust to translate Ruskin, because Ruskin had lived in Rusholme. All these things. And here I was listening to her wonderful stories about her interesting life. She had wanted to be a silversmith and in France you can't be as a woman then, so she was sent to Germany. She was a fantastic feminist and somehow she befriended me and she was wonderful to me and it meant a great deal to me, the way she lived, the way she talked and so

on. And extraordinarily enough, this contact has resulted in me now being offered a very prestigious exhibition of my Paris photographs at the Musée Carnavalet in Paris. This is where Proust's bed and his room, you know his walls, because of his asthma, were covered in cork, and that Musée Carnavalet, which is the museum of Paris, has reconstructed his bedroom. So I got to know France through this woman, and it has remained a wonderful place for me. I love the French.... I don't love the French in that way, I always wish Paris had been peopled by the English, but as a town, yes. And their literature and their regard for culture.

Tape 2: 27 minutes 42 seconds

Because in this country it was considered in the early days, I had to apologise to my mates that I was working so hard. It wasn't really done. It's changed now, but in those days certainly... The fact is that I wanted in College to do four years in two years was considered mad. 'It can't be done'. Of course it can be done'. My husband used to say 'The impossible takes longer and you know where that comes from', and it's true. Anyhow Louis was the most fantastic person to have on my side and he was always able. He liked problems for example. Can you imagine anybody liking problems? He was a wonderful partner and a wonderful father to the kids. And when he died ten years ago, and for me, anything that I might achieve now it doesn't matter, because he's not there to see it. And he was more religious than I, he used to go to Synagogue.

BL: In Manchester?

DB: In Manchester and here in London too. For me my religion is the way I behave. I think in the name of religion so many terrible things have been done, I find it difficult. My father incidentally towards the end of his life would read the Talmud, but he didn't become religious, which most old men... I mean he lived till ninety or so.

Tape 2: 29 minutes 20 seconds

But he was proud of being a Jew, he was proud of what had been achieved in Israel; he died before all those terrible things now.

BL: Did you and Louis meet with the Jewish community in Manchester?

DB: Not really you know, no. No. We had each other and that's really what mattered. We had a group of friends, mainly boys, who had also come over they were all Jewish, although one of our best friends was a Pole, Janek Valashik, terrific guy, who couldn't, a Christian Pole, who couldn't settle in England, and Louis persuaded to go back. He did go back and then of course it was still under the Soviets and he couldn't be in touch with us, but my memories of Janek are terrific. All the other refugees there were Jewish, Jewish in the sense of the spirit, not the religion. I'm not really a group person. But all my English friends they all know I'm Jewish, they all respect my Jewishness. I have English friends and an Art Historian called Ian Jeffrey, who said the only people worth knowing are Jews, because they are the only ones who really think, and I said 'Ian, there are many stupid ones as well', because I believe that one shouldn't say that 'all Jews are clever, all Jews are this and that', it's not true. Incidentally about this house. Years ago, Louis started doing well, he was called a visionary in industry, he was never interested in making money but he made it, and we gave away a lot. We helped a hell of a lot, lots and lots of people.

Tape 2: 31 minutes 34 seconds

I started working for the Baltic Jewish Association. This was to help the Jews who survived, who were in Soviet Union, to come to Israel. Now there I took a very prominent part, I think I did everything, right. We sent parcels to them. There are many Jews in Israel now...

BL: This was in the fifties?

DB: No, this was in the seventies. The Baltic Jewish Association, who did everything to collect money and to then send parcels to Lithuania. And I did all the work. In the beginning I was sewing them by hand and so on. And we paid the duty here so the parcels would be allowed in. And we paid the duty here at the Moscow Narodny Bank so to make absolutely sure that the parcels would get there. And I have pink labels that they have arrived, and that saved a lot of Jewish people. You see they had to sell these things on the black market in the Soviet Union, but they made a lot of money. And I remember sending things like Jersey cloth, or whatever we were told, and we had means of finding what would sell well. And then many of the people then were able to leave the Soviet Union because they had enough money to pay. You know the story, do you?

Tape 2: 32 minutes 57 seconds

They could get out and they could pay. So that's one good thing I did in my life anyhow.

BL: You were telling us the story about the house.

DB: Oh yes this is interesting, because talking about being Jewish. I always liked this house. It was one house. And I remember going... And it was being sold by Goldschmidt. So I went there and they said 'Madam, could we find out, do you happen to be Jewish?' And I said yes. And they said they were not allowed to sell the house to Jews. And this was in the 1960s right. And I remember being absolutely... And Goldschmidt was a refugee, from Germany. Would you believe it?

BL: The estate agent?

DB: The estate agent. That was terrible. Absolutely terrible.

BL: What was the explanation?

DB: Because Church Row being a famous street in England, lots of important people had lived in this street, including next door-but-one H.G. Wells and somehow there was a latent anti-Semitism. I was incredibly shocked. Now, it's alright, there is a Rothschild living here, and my neighbour happens to be an Estonian Baron down there, he's not Jewish, I thought he was. And next door there are Jews and so on. But there was a time when Church Row was not....

Tape 2: 34 minutes 19 seconds

BL: How did you get the house then?

DB: We didn't. I only got this fifteen years ago. And things have changed. We lived in Hampstead, in Greenaway Gardens. It wasn't really a house for a family either, but we lived there it was alright. But this is just to show that anti-semitism is there. Not amongst the people

that I mix with, one is, I don't know... and this is the Hampstead where, don't forget, all the refugees came you know. But they wanted to keep this street English. Things have changed so much. London isn't London anymore.

BL: Just to go back to the forties. How did the end of the war affect you?

DB: Oh my God. 'How did the end of the war affect you?' I've got one picture. We were just incredibly thrilled, yes. What did we do? By that time we still didn't have money. This was '45. I still didn't know anything about my family. Nor Louis, except that he already knew that his mother... His father at that time was already in Palestine. Did it change anything? No. Just a new chapter started. And if I tell you that we never, never believed that the war could be lost. Which is an extraordinary thing, because it was so close. We always had this incredible optimism that you know... that Britain would get through.

Tape 2: 36 minutes 5 seconds

My feeling towards Germany. I still can't believe that people actually, Jews, go and live there now. And yet I know they've done... you know. I try not to, you know carry on hating them. Because there were some good Germans, German Germans. End of the war. We got married. Finally.

BL: Which year?

DB: 1945. Because his father had said that we can't possibly get married. We had nothing except ourselves. How can you get married if you belong to a generation who believed that a husband has got to look after his wife? And I agreed to get married under the condition that Louis would continue to do his PhD and not give it up. I started a studio of my own, borrowed £300 and I became the breadwinner. And I'm still proud of that. And he did get his Ph.D and I was working and making a living, not a big living.

BL: In Manchester?

DB: In Manchester. Next to the *Manchester Guardian*. And because he was at the University we got a concession and I had a studio in ... at the University. I looked much younger than I was actually, and I wasn't earning much money, there wasn't very much money for clothes and so on, no make-up, nothing. Strangely enough, the struggle, I don't regret. It's odd that. But I was lucky because we got out of it. And when I heard the news about my parents being alive, they still were together.

BL: When was that?

DB: This was '68. I saw them again... wait a minute. Probably in '57. Right.

BL: Thirteen years after the war. Twelve years.

DB: And then with Louis' help we started to help. And they survived mainly because of the parcels we sent. If you saw pictures of what my parents looked like then. And I have a sister who worked in the most terrible conditions. And she's wonderful. She was an economist. And very intelligent. My father was a great mathematician. That's one thing he regretted, I'm hopeless at it.

BL: Where does your sister live?

DB: My sister was in Riga, because my mother was allowed to go back. They weren't allowed to go back to the place where they lived before in Memel that was out of bounds. And I saw my parents again in 1960. I went to Riga. And I was called to the Foreign Office, and they explained to me that if I went back, and anything happened to me there, they couldn't help. But we went. We took Monica with us. I thought having a child with me would somehow soften... I was fourteen and something when I left, and then came back as a married woman with a child. As we sat in the car, Louis was with me, and Louis turned around and says 'You look so much like your father'. You see. He had obviously changed a lot, but he had a tremendous sense of recovery. He still believed life, he believed in things that are good... He even said to me that some things in Communism would have been good, but they didn't allow it. He said that sometimes they made him change quarters. Because they said that this was too good for him, and the young official who took him apologised. You see things like this helped him to survive. And he built his own house, and he was as proud of that as of having built his own factory. You see it's that sort of survival sense he had. My mother took it in quite a different way.

Tape 2: 41 minutes 13 seconds

BL: What was it like to meet your parents after all this time?

DB: What was it like...? If I tell you that when I was in Manchester and there was a family that was very nice to me, a Jewish family, used to invite me, I was at College with their daughter, when I went there, she was calling them Mummy and Daddy, I just couldn't bear it, I stopped going there. I only mixed with people like myself who didn't have a family. So my relationship in many ways changed. Instead of being the child with parents, I became the parent, because I had to look after them. And I did. But it was due to Louis mainly who did everything. We worked for ten years trying to get permission to get them to come out. And I'm sorry to say all the Jewish members of Parliament we approached said 'We can't touch it with a bargepole', because it was a political thing. It wasn't. And then we had the chance to get a letter to Wilson, who was meeting Khrushchev, and within three days permission was granted. And I had a letter from David Ennals, who's now a big shot, he was then secretary, this was the leader of the Opposition, Harold Wilson could do it. And he was wonderful. And I had to go on TV, I remember and things like that. I was smoking, I smoked up to forty a day, I nearly killed myself. Because I was told if anything happens, the permission could be withdrawn so be very, very careful. And when the press came they besieged the house to talk about it. But they survived and I thought a few years of life, they managed to live. I took my father to see various specialists, and they said he has no right to be as well as he is. He's got a hole in his lung, he's got this and that. He wanted to live. And he started to paint.

BL: By this time you also had three children?

DB: Yes. Quite late because we couldn't afford to have them before. Helping my parents took quite a lot, but they survived and my parents still had a reasonable good time when we managed to get them out. The Jewish Chronicle gave a lot of attention to them coming out. It was the first time a Jewish couple by the name of Israelit came out.

Tape 2: 44 minutes 4 seconds

I had hoped just a few years for them. But they managed. There's an interesting story. When my father was in Siberia, one of the chaps was somebody who could tell fortunes. And father told me that at the worst possible time, he went snow-blind, all sorts of terrible things happened to him. This man told him that he would survive, he would see his family again, and that he would travel by aeroplane across the world, and it all came true. Extraordinary thing. I don't believe in these things myself. But father said when he was told that, he thought... He did travel, the first time by plane, they came over by plane. And secondly, he went to South Africa to stay with my brother over there.

BL: How did your brother get to South Africa?

DB: My brother. [Giggles] I told you he was a great ladies' man, and he, we bought him a ticket to go to South Africa, because he had to escape an English girl who wanted to marry him, because she thought he was wealthy, and he wasn't. And a cousin of my dad's had been in touch with us and he was doing well in South Africa, he remembers my father, when he was a young man, giving him his first watch, and things like that. So he was very fond of Tobias' son, so he looked us up here and he said anytime come to South Africa, and I said 'Would you have my brother?' He did. And he did quite well there. He married, twice, women fifteen years younger than himself. He has three sons, and so on. So his life has been very different from mine. He's a good chap. But his sense of responsibility in me, too strong, hasn't worked on him. I should have been the boy in the family and he should have been the girl.

Tape 2: 46 minutes 20 seconds

BL: Had he met your parents as well?

DB: Yes, but he didn't like... Louis and I go and see them. We went to Russia three times, to the Soviet Union. Each time it took me about two or three weeks to recover from the terrible shock I had when I saw them there, the conditions they lived in. Unbelievable. And each time it somehow... you see we were trying very hard to get them out.

BL: What sort of conditions were they?

DB: In a house where they had one room. The toilet was outside, the kitchen was out of a room in which they washed their things. Ah. And the way they looked. And when we went to visit them, having got permission, we weren't allowed to stay with them, and we were shadowed all the time. We stayed in the one hotel where foreigners were allowed to be, and when we came back, we realised they had gone through my things. And a very terrible narrow escape was the first time we went, it was 1968. Monica she was three. My father told us some of the stories and he gave us some papers to take back to London and we had the papers with us and on the way out, at the airport, we were, everybody was being searched, and I remember doming to the end of the queue, the search, and there was like a Nazi official, but she was a Soviet Communist, they even looked in their shoes. Now she was called away to the telephone. Again I believe in fate. If they had found these papers, first of all, we wouldn't have been allowed out, secondly I don't know what would have happened to my parents. It was an indictment of the Soviet system. And we being ignorant and stupid, we didn't realise that we were taken out. So it was a fraction of a second, and we had Monica with us, my daughter.

Tape 2: 49 minutes 12 seconds

And Louis hadn't even hidden the things, and we had the papers there. These papers were because my father was hoping to get compensation, and a lawyer friend of his in Königsberg, someone who dealt with all this, needed these papers in order to make some applications.

BL: And these were papers from who?

DB: I think it was mainly from the Germans. Which my father did get incidentally, in the end. But that moment, this woman was called away. And I remember sitting, and we were flying to Stockholm, no, in fact we flew to Tallin, I think, and everybody started to feel relaxed you know. It was a British plane, or maybe Scandinavian, or whatever. It was dreadful. So we had not only the story of the Nazis but the Communists as well.

BL: Can you tell me a little bit about your career as a photographer?

DB: Oh, my career as a photographer. OK. What did I do? I started a portrait studio in Manchester, at a time, in 1945, when everybody else was closing them. I had worked, served my apprenticeship in that studio where I was photographing all kinds of people. During the war everybody wanted portraits to send to their sons, or daughters, in the army and so on. So I learnt quite a lot. And it was wonderful, because my Samuel Cooper, who at the time was doing nothing and I was running the place, was asked by the Manchester College of Technology would he come and teach the people coming back from the forces, who had been photographers, but needed a reintroduction. And he said no, I've got somebody working for me who could do it. So only two years of having left College, I came back as a teacher. It flattered me, because it was nice. I didn't know that he had recommended me. But I didn't carry on. Photography during the day, and then in the evening... No, it was too much. By that time I already I had the Ministry of Information thing. And doing my own studio was not easy, because they were times of shortages: film, papers and so on. And I remember my friends queuing, to try to get film. Because to get an allowance from Kodak as a bona fide studio I had to prove it. Anyhow we did it somehow. And the studio was hard work but interesting. And then my husband started working and making money and I was able to travel with him. He was working for a firm started by a wonderful couple of Viennese chaps, one was Tugendhat, whose son is now writing on Economics, and a brilliant chemist. And Louis was recommended by someone in the refugee community to be employed by them, so that's the Jewish part. And another remarkable woman, I've forgotten her name now. But I also remember meeting her daughter. She was working for the refugees, and she liked Louis very much. And she was a remarkable lady, I wish I could remember her name. And she had one daughter. And I met her daughter. And her daughter said to me 'My mother has been mother to lots, but never to me'. Which stayed in my mind, because she had been wonderful to everybody else, but neglected her own child. Anyhow, he got the job through the Jewish connection, these two chaps were Jewish. A lot of the people who came from Germany or Vienna were Jews but didn't know that they were Jews. And the saddest to me were those people who, including my friend Eva, became refugees but didn't know why. Whereas with me I knew I was Jewish, I was proud of the fact that I was Jewish, I was proud of Jewish history and so on. In her case there was nothing, and she didn't want to have children, because she didn't want to bring a Jewish child into the world. Can you imagine?

Tape 2: 54 minutes 10 seconds

Very sad that. Anyhow. My career started to take off. Not because I had been trained as a photographer at Manchester, I got a prize for portraiture and all that sort of nonsense. But I started to take photographs because I wanted to take them in my travels, I started photographing, things I wanted to photograph. And somehow, we lived in a house next door to somebody called James Cousin, who was a director... a friend of Snowdon's at the Design Centre, who was an inventor of the High Speed train, he lived next door to us, and he was interested in photography, English again, the family was Clarks, the shoe people, Clarks, and we became good friends. And he liked my photography and he showed it to various people and there was somebody called Paul Riley, who was the head of the design centre, who also liked my work, and gradually, things became known that I was not a bad photographer. And incidentally, Abram Games, you know Abram, it was due to him that my first book was published. You know about his wife, do you? Marianne.

BL: Yes.

DB: She was a wonderful lady incidentally. Abram was extremely gifted as we all know, and he became a friend of the family. He had a love-hate relationship with photography because his father was a photographer in the East End. And he helped him as a youngster. But being an artist, he found that photography was usurping a lot of the graphics. Anyhow, he introduced me to various people and so on, and my first book was published.

Tape 2: 56 minutes 3 seconds

BL: When was that?

DB: It was published in '69. *The World Observed*, with an introduction by Sir Roland Penrose, who was you know who he is, and Lee Miller was his wife, and I had an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in the Mall, they'd moved from Dover Street to these beautiful premises, and I'd got to know Maxwell Fry, who lived... designed one modern house here, and I started moving in the right circles, including Michael Kustow, who was the director of the ICA.

BL: Sorry I need to stop you because I need to change tapes.

TAPE 3

... to give credit to a wonderful Rabbi called Rabbi Papo, who came to Manchester as a refugee with his lovely wife, and who was not an Ashkenazi but a Sephardi. Now he and his wife were wonderful and there were times when for example I had flu, and I lived in an attic room, and they came to see me and removed me bodily to his study to look after me. I remember he didn't try to... I several times went with him to the Synagogue, we got married incidentally in Manchester, got married in the Synagogue.

BL: Which synagogue?

DB: Wilburn Road.

BL That was an Ashkenazi Synagogue or...

DB: Ashkenazi, yes. And Louis and I decided to do it, because we thought our parents would have wanted it. The war had just finished so I had no clothes, no hat or anything like that. It was a most wonderful wedding, and when he was asked 'will you take her as your wife, he said I certainly will'! And he actually carried me. And it was compared to weddings which my children had afterwards, it was the best possible thing we could have had, and people, our friends, collected money so we could afford to paint the room we were living in, you see. And when you see me living now, and before this house we lived much more ornately, in a very big house and so on, it's difficult to think how it was at the beginning. Now Papo was a tremendous chap, and a great help to me,

BL: Where was he from?

Tape 3: 1 minutes 57 seconds

DB: He was from Austria, he had written books, he was an amazing personality, and his friendship and Madame Nordlinger's were the most important aspects. Not the young people, it was these two older people.

BL: So what was the full name of the Rabbi?

DB: Papo, P-A-P-O. He then went to Africa unfortunately. But he had a great effect on me because of his wisdom, I said to him proudly: I fasted on Yom Kippur. And he said 'Which day did you fast?' And it was the wrong day. And he said OK. And I did this because I felt that people were going hungry, and I had to do something, and I liked doing menial things, because I felt I was doing something which other people had to do. I didn't have to. That stayed with me all my life actually. So this was the Jewish element. I remember going to his synagogue, and all the songs, everything was different.

Tape 3: 3 minutes 10 seconds

BL: So did he become a Rabbi in Manchester?

DB: Oh no, he was a famous Rabbi in Vienna.

BL: But in Manchester he was not?

DB: He was a Rabbi, yes. Yes. He had a synagogue. Ja.

BL: He had a pulpit?

DB: Ja. But he was an intellectual...

BL: In that synagogue you mentioned, or..?

DB: No, I don't know, it was a Sephardi synagogue, and I'm afraid I don't remember.

BL: Probably there is a Museum today...

DB: Yes, he was a remarkable man you know. And his Judaism was something so real, so spiritual you see. And this is what appealed to me. It's not the Laws, the rites and rituals of

our religion, but it's the spiritual element of it, the history of Jews, and the survival part of it. No, he was terrific. So I had this very English aristocratic lady, and Rabbi Papo.

BL: And did you speak German with Rabbi Papo?

DB: No, I stopped speaking German when I came to England, because Louis of course was Polish, so we had no language in common. I went to Switzerland and spoke German there, I still... no, I prefer reading French rather than German. And what is very nice is both my daughters, and my grandchildren at school, are always praised for their language, their English language. Louis and I used to love reading dictionaries. And towards the end he used to say to me 'Perhaps I should have been a historian', because he used to love history. I have a bookcase full of interesting things which I will leave to the University when I go and I said to him, but if you had been a historian, you wouldn't have been able to do all the things you managed to do and to help, because we did a lot. I mean we did contribute money and energy towards helping the... Baltic Jews to come to Israel. I was instrumental in starting a photography department at the Israel Museum. I have very close contact with them even now, and our name Dorothy and Louis Bohm is on the founders' list. My feelings towards Israel remain strong, and I have photographed it, I had an exhibition there, which was good.

Tape 3: 5 minutes 41 seconds

BL: When was that?

DB: Let me try and think... It must have been about '82. I have a catalogue of the work, with a very nice foreword and everything.

BL: So in the seventies and eighties your work became known and you were published...

DB: I had eleven books published in all .

BL: And how many exhibitions?

DB: Oh I can give you a whole list of them. It's OK. I feel quite humble about it. I mean photography has been like a lifeline. It's been like a visual diary really. If God had given me a chance to choose a talent it would have been writing. Because in writing you can express everything, right? Photography the way I do it is a means of keeping things alive. Because things disappear and that's why I photograph. And that's why I have the pictures of my grandchildren and my husband there, and I kept them as they were when he knew them, when they were little. So photography has been a very strong part of my life. I was sixteen when I studied. But it's not been a money-maker for me at all. It's never been that. And I was lucky I could do it. I struggled very hard when I had my studio, I made a living for us, but then it became something, that became an obsession.

Tape 3: 7 minutes 14 seconds

And because I'm very visual. I wish I weren't, because when things are ugly I, it hurts me.

BL: What scenes were you drawn to?

DB: Humanity. When I had my first exhibition at the ICA, the journalist asked me ‘Mrs Bohm, why do you always photograph peasants?’ And I said: ‘-They are not peasants, they are people’. Because I’d photographed in Europe from the late 1940s to 50s, all over Europe, the United States and Mexico. I had a chance to photograph Koestler for example. I didn’t want to photograph famous people. I wanted only people, the anonymity of people, right, and then things that are ugly for a minute because the light is there, and I kept to the light. **Tape 3: 8 minutes 14 seconds**

Sometimes I look at the pictures now, because this girl is working on my archive. The V&A in fact wanted my archive, and they had agreed to take it in, which was very complimentary to me, and then my daughters asked me would I leave it to the family, and I said I’d be delighted to if you can cope with it. So there are moments in life that have gone. I’ve photographed Paris, since 1947, I went there on the 1st of May, for the first time, and the picture is typical of the period perhaps. I photographed London, because Paul Riley said: ‘You’ve photographed all over the world, why not London?’ And I started to photograph London. And I’ve had three books published. Somebody is doing now a limited edition of the seventies. It’s part of history, I suppose. And I have pictures of Israel, because by the time I photographed there it was already Israel, not Palestine. And yet when I had the exhibition at the Museum of Israel he didn’t include those, but I’ve got them, and they are pictures of places like Ramat Hasharon, where Louis’ aunt lived, which was then agriculture, that was the scene, which is now a modern suburb. And I photographed the people toiling the land in Israel, and so on. So I’ve got to leave those pictures somewhere, they are vintages and they are printed by me and so on.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 2 seconds

BL: You said for you photography meant to capture something, to keep...

DB: Yes what I saw, absolutely, to keep it, absolutely. Now this is the difference between photography and painting, you see. In painting you can imagine everything, in photography it’s got to be there, interpreted by you. And somebody is now keen on doing a retrospective of images of women. And I said everybody’s photographed women. And this guy Ian Jeffreys, he’s a very important teacher at Goldsmith’s, said ‘Not the way you see them’. I see them in their environment, I’ve also seen the role of women. I wonder what you would think women did in the forties. It was a different approach you know. So I’ve seen... I see it with my daughters and granddaughters, the role of women... now women can achieve anything, which is wonderful, right? And my husband’s father said: ‘You’re marrying her, now you’ve got to look after her.’ When he died, he said he did admire me for what I did. But at the time he was dead against it. A woman? Not just looking after children and so on.

Tape 3: 11 minutes 21 seconds

BL: You don’t stage photos. You capture natural...

DB: Oh no. Yes, in still lives I do, that’s a still life. And I work on this balcony with this light. That is one of the pictures... the V&A has quite a few of my pictures in their collection. Being a photographer, having been a photographer all my life, I don’t have tunnel vision. I will photograph. And although I’m greatly interested in faces, people, not staged, I still had my studio in Manchester a year after Monica was born. And I’ve never gone back to photographing in a studio, so if I photograph it’s in the environment and available light, and

so on. The BBC2 made a film on me called *Dorothy Bohm: Photographer*, in a series called Contemporary Arts and Crafts. And it was quite interesting. But compared with this you see, this is wonderful. I remember the house being invaded, we had a big house with their equipment and everything. And they were interested in my background, they were interested in my background, they were interested in the way I look at things, and it was quite interesting. And they were nice people. And I remained friends with the woman who was the director. So photography has been part of my life, but not to the inclusion, exclusion of family. The most important thing is still the family. And I'm very lucky that they're OK. I have one daughter who is a doctor, a very good doctor. She's married to a wonderful Englishman who can trace his family in Gloucestershire back many generations, who is interested in Judaism, in fact I gave him a book about Judaism. Their two daughters, they know they're Jewish, because Yvonne of course feels Jewish, because she is Jewish, but she's also English. Monica is very international and very, very Jewish, and so the link is there. But one thing I must tell you is when they were little we did not want to haunt their childhood with memories of the past. It was too close to us and too painful to us, so we didn't talk much about it. But Monica when she was seventeen, and we flew to Israel with her and as she came over Israel she started to cry. That was extraordinary, her feelings towards feeling Jewish and what she knew about it, and she did the literature of the Holocaust. And there was Louis and me trying not to burden them with it. The other girl is Jewish but in a different sort of way right. But for Monica it's the history of the Jews and the past and so on. So there.

BL: And you spend a lot of time not only in London but also in Sussex, with your children

DB: Yes, that was our English... My husband wasn't really a capitalist in the true sense, he was never interested in money, I think that's why he made it. And he loved the country, and I always said if he hadn't married me, I was very much a townie person, he would have gone to Australia and been a sheep farmer, and when he made money he became a director of Ayal,

Tape 3: 15 minutes 14 seconds

he was instrumental in making man-made fibres. As a textile chemist, he believed in it, he knew the textile industry was very conservative, but he also knew that chemistry could do a lot. And he worked with ICI and Courtaulds and he was one of the first people who actually worked with Courtelle® and man-made fibres. And so he became successful, I think Warburg supported him and so on, but he remained a boy-scout all his life, which was different from many people who became wealthy and flaunted their wealth. He was not like that. And so Sussex... we bought a farm, we took over a four hundred year-old farmhouse, and I remember taking somebody from Golders Green when it was being redone. And that person said 'You're not really going to live there are you?' They couldn't understand it. And I also remember one... we lived for a very short time in Golders Green, my parents, we found a place there. And I bought a jacket, and I said to the woman in the shop 'I want it for the farm'. And she said to me 'A farm? A place where there's a lot of mud?' It was incomprehensible to her, you know. A funny memory that. Anyhow, Sussex was very lovely and it was a great escape from the stresses and strains and he found it, and he did quite a lot of things there. Sussex in the sixties was not commuter-land you know. It was really still farming. But we enjoyed it, we had a lot of friends, coming to stay. And I photographed. And I am going to talk to someone at Sussex University, who's a friend, David Mellor, he's a professor, and I saw him recently at the V&A, there was a big do. And I said to him, now 27 years I've photographed country life, I must do something about it. Because I must say until recently I never thought about what do I do with these pictures, but I must...

Tape 3: 17 minutes 56 seconds

BL: In a way you came back to Sussex, that's where you started in England.

DB: Yes. And if you'd told me that one day I would go back being a landowner's wife or a gentleman's farmer's wife, owned a property with four hundred acres, can you imagine? No. And yet the first year here in England, in Sussex, was incredibly sad, incredibly difficult. I can't tell you. I try not to think about it. And yet in a way it made me able perhaps, to cope with things afterwards, which my brother didn't, he couldn't cope with it. So, Sussex, yes. You're quite right, the contact is there.

BL: How do you think the refugee experience shaped your whole life?

DB: Oh, immeasurably. I became what I am because of that. If I had stayed, you know, had a normal life with my family, my father was such a strong character. He would have dominated all of my life, I would have become a daughter in his image right. A wealthy girl, I always thought somebody will marry me only because I am Tobias' daughter. So having been cut off from that completely and there you are on your own, you're nothing, you aren't a name... It was tough. I struggled very hard. But I made it, and I'm proud that I did. And as I say, because of the kindness of most of the people, and not all refugees had the same experience, many of them had terrible experiences. I was just very lucky.

BL: How would you describe yourself in terms of your identity?

DB: Jewish. Proud to be Jewish. Wanting to see Israel back to a normal sort of life. I think the most terrible thing for me is what's happening there. I mean it's got to be normal again, it's got to become a land where people can live without being afraid and it's got to live with its neighbours. I still think so. And I admire what's been achieved, I mean even I have seen it. It's a tremendous achievement. It's got to be a light onto a nation which was meant to be, and I'm very pained by what's happening. And as we know in this country the message is terrible in many ways. They distort many things, the press is against us and so on. Yet when I talk to all my various English friends, they try to understand. I try to tell them there are so many people, so many liberal people, so many good things there. It's not easy. I don't want to be on the defensive either. I would have had a retrospective at the Israel Museum last year, it was definitely set to be and I would have been very happy, and somebody in America was going to tour it. But I can't so the retrospective is going to be in Paris. It's very painful to me, what's happening now. I find it difficult to comprehend you know.

BL: Do you see yourself as British?

DB: No. I don't think about it. It doesn't worry me one way or the other, the description. I'm called a European photographer right. I am a European. But I've travelled a lot. I like America, I wouldn't like to live there. And since we lived in Paris, had a house in Italy, I lived in Switzerland, so Europe, and that's why I can photograph everywhere. I don't belong anywhere really. To me this is a disadvantage, because it would be nice to just belong somewhere. And yet I'm told by my various photographic people it's an advantage in your work. I just would like my grandchildren to grow up in a saner, a better world, right?

Tape 3: 22 minutes 59 seconds

And having lived through the war and having been so optimistic at the end of it, and to see what's happening now, not only in Israel, all over the world. It's a great sadness. I worry about it.

BL: For your grandchildren, is there any message that you have, based on your experience?...

DB: Try to live your life so you don't have to be ashamed of what you do, and do every day that you can have a good conscience right. That's all. Nothing more than that. And creativity I think is important. And I hate the idea of our world being so materialistic. You know when we had very little, when you got something you were happy. Now if you are able to have everything, does it matter? And in some ways I don't regret the tough times, you know. No. But I don't want to live to a very old age. I think the fact that people live so long and are unable to lead a dignified old age, is very sad and I see it all the time now, so that's one message and I would like my children to realise.

Tape 3: 24 minutes 25 seconds

BL: Mrs Bohm is there anything in this discussion you would like to add, any other topic?

DB: My Jewishness is so much a part of me that I don't put it apart. Israel matters a lot to me, I would like the Jews to have a land in which they are free. Now that's I think incredibly important to me. That's why I have given you the episodes about not selling the house to a Jew, about the two working-class women, during the war talking about the Jews. I mean the Jews have contributed so much to the civilisation of the world, right? And I'm very much a European Jew rather than an English Jew. There is a difference you know.

Tape 3: 25 minutes 27 seconds

BL: You spent quite a lot of time on the Continent, I read, in Ascona.

DB: Yes, Ascona. Ascona was fantastic.

BL: We didn't discuss it at all. Can you tell me briefly about it?

DB: Well Ascona was a magnificent escape from war-time Manchester right. Grey, dull, I told you already visual... it was a very ugly place to be in. Grey, dark. Mancunians I found to be the nicest of people. Even now, most of the people I befriend come from the North. When I had a chance to go to France first in '47 and then to Switzerland, it was incredible. At war-time England to be in Basel where I had a cousin, it was amazing. And she suggested a place called Ascona, which was an artist's colony. And I fell in love with it. Absolutely in love with it. I mean the light, everything about it. And I started to speak German there. Because we had a lot of people...

BL: When was that?

DB: Now Ascona was from '47 on. And Remarque lived there, and Paulette Goddard, you know now it's become a resort, full of the usual things. But then it was an artists' village and I became part of that community. Louis for a while lived in Germany because he had to. He had to work in a laboratory and I refused to live in Germany, I couldn't.

BL: Where did he have to go?

DB: Mülheim. Now he was working... I'm trying to think what the research was.... I think it was on plastics. There was a famous professor and so on, and he was sent by his company and he had to go. And I said please don't make me live there. I just couldn't. You know. Even the German language at the time was... made me shudder. So Ascona, and the Swiss Germans and the refugees there were quite a different thing. And I really started to mix amongst the people there, and I was much younger than most of them, and many of them used to drink, and I didn't drink, but they somehow accepted me and I started to photograph, encouraged by an artist, I loved doing it. And I really became a photographer there. I photographed a tree, and I showed it to a wonderful older man called Paul Vogt, who had a very interesting history, and he said 'If I photographed like that, I wouldn't stop'. They encouraged me, there was no money in it at all, that was not the point at all. I just took photographs. My archive now... No, it's downstairs. I photographed the lake, I photographed the different moods of the lake. Ascona belonged to Switzerland, but it was in Ticino, so it was the Italian part.

Tape 3: 29 minutes 16 seconds

And I was quite a romantic person, I still am despite everything, I still believe that one has to believe there is such a thing. He said to me why didn't you wait for the sun? I said I wanted the mist. He couldn't comprehend it at all. I can show you the pictures up there. So Ascona really became the foundation of what I was to become as a creative person if I am, and it sort of paved the way for all sorts of things, I mixed with people who were interesting, much more interesting than my Manchester contacts, except for those two people I mentioned. And the others were good middle-class bourgeois, and I got away from the bourgeois atmosphere, which I wanted. In fact both my kids started to walk in Ascona. But Adenauer discovered Ascona, and from then on the Germans came, and from then on I stopped going there.

Tape 3: 30 minutes 27 seconds

And then love of Italy, everything done on a shoe-string as they say. Third-class in wobbly carriages, and being offered wine and sausages by the other people in the compartment, but that was good. I got to know the country, I got to know the people, France, Spain. Louis was doing a survey for Shell Chemicals, and I went along with him and we travelled everywhere in the fifties. And Spain under Franco was a very different country. And because we had somebody to take us around, we could see all the places. And I've got the photographs. These are the questions asked: why did I photograph peasants? They weren't peasants, they were the people who lived there. It was pretty incomprehensible to a journalist. And Israel. Israel I photographed. And I think my ability to deal with people without them knowing they were being photographed was quite important. I learned that as a studio photographer, and being able to deal with all kinds of people. And children are far too easy. I love them, I still love them. When I get depressed now, I look at children. It will be interesting what the next twenty years will bring. And for Israel I hope to God it will solve itself. It's one tremendous sadness because my whole childhood was Zionist. I wasn't a Lithuanian, I wasn't a German, I was just a Zionist you see.

Tape 3: 32 minutes 17 seconds

So this ideal which now in fact it happened, but it is now very much... it's a dream which came true and a dream which got to be... I can understand that the young Israelis don't even know what it was like. They have a land and they're proud of the land and in many ways they're very international aren't they? But I think it's got to come back, which is normal, but which must be normal. No more now.

Tape 3: 33 minutes 2 seconds

BL: Is there anything else you would like to add?

DB: Not really, except that my life has been full of lots of things, full of tragedy and sorrow and full of great happiness, and it's been a rich life.

BL: Thank you very much.

PHOTOS

Tape 3: 33 minutes 41 seconds

BL: Could you please describe this photo?

DB: This was taken in Königsberg, with my paternal grandfather, my brother and myself. I was born in 1924, I was probably about four here, so that's it. My brother just a year older. And as you see we come from a very middle-class background. This is the grandfather who was so proud of Germany and German culture.

BL: What was his name?

DB: Hirsch Israelit.

Tape 3: 34 minutes 28 seconds

BL: Can you describe this photograph?

DB: Well on this you have my brother and myself with my mother, who was very fashion-conscious as you can tell. It must have been again, in the late twenties. And on the other photo was my father, who was very good-looking, and my great hero and there I am again, I think it's outside my grandfather's house in Königsberg.

Tape 3: 35 minutes 3 seconds

It's very difficult for me at the moment to identify with this little girly there, brought up fairly strictly, dressed *comme il faut*, with white socks, I think I was a very good little girl. The nanny called me Sonnenscheinchen, 'little sunshine'. I think my rebellious nature came out much later.

BL: Where was it taken?

DB: In Königsberg, probably in a studio.

BL: Can you please describe this photo?

Tape 3: 35 minutes 55 seconds

DB: In 1937 we spent a months' holiday in a Jewish Kinderheim, a children's home, which was the first time that I ever left, you know the place where we lived, Memel. And I remember also my first visit via Berlin. In the Kinderheim there were the children of well-off Jewish families. Marienbad of course was a spa. My mother used to go to Karlsbad for her gallstones. It was quite good to be travelling. I was quite curious. How old was I? 12 or 13. 12, yes. It was quite an interesting experience to meet children from different countries.

As you see on the picture I look a quite serious, very orderly youngster, well-groomed.

BL: Where are you?

Tape 3: 37 minutes 12 seconds

DB: In the picture I am somewhere in the second row. With a short haircut. I look quite serious again, but I was enjoying being there, and they were all Jewish children from various different countries. And a good time was had by most of them.

Tape 3: 37 minutes 46 seconds

This was in the same Kinderheim, in Marienbad that was Sudetenland, and of course, the part that Hitler first took over. [We were having a meal, and obviously a very disciplined, not a very raucous group of children. I am on the right, wearing a dark jacket, and next to me is my brother.

Tape 3: 38 minutes 25 seconds

My early teens were dominated by Zionist interests. And here I am a member of the basketball team of Bar Kockba, which was like the Makkabi, and this picture has a particular significance, because the way from Lithuania to England I had the album, and as we crossed the frontier of Germany, and as we crossed a Nazi official came and took the album away and said what is that, pointing to the Magen David, which we were wearing on our blouses, and I said it was my youth club, and of course I was frightened, but he let it be. The activities in the basketball team, I'm afraid quite a few of the girls featured haven't survived, some are in Israel now. The activities of Bar Kockba were mainly to do with sports, camps and singing, Hebrew songs and feeling very close with the idea of the establishment of a Jewish state.

Tape 3: 40 minutes 2 seconds

This picture of the Jewish classmates of my German Lycée in Memel, I cannot remember the entire number of pupils but the Jewish contingent was quite good and we stayed there until the end of 1938 when they said 'Heil Hitler', and I must have been amongst the first to walk out. Some of these have survived, others haven't. Two of my best friends have survived, and one in particular, I am in the front there, looking down. So it's extraordinary to see these pictures and to go back in time.

Tape 3: 40 minutes 56 seconds

My sister was born in July 1938, and here we are still in Memel, that's my mother, myself and the baby Dina. The times were already very, very difficult and we were very anxious at the time, I was a very worried young teenager. The baby was very sweet. She's now in Israel. There's fourteen years between us.

Tape 3: 41 minutes 54 seconds

This is me, a few months before Hitler came, this is in our apartment on the main street, I was sitting at the desk. Most of the furniture from... had been removed already for the possible escape into Lithuania proper, and I remember quite well these were the glass doors leading to my father's study, he loved birds and there was a canary there. You can see I was already very serious and probably extremely worried. My brother was already at school in England and I had finished with school and the fact we didn't know what the future would be must have been worrying me then.

Tape 3: 42 minutes 51 seconds

This photograph is the other one by the desk, was taken by my father who was a very enthusiastic Leica photographer, amateur of course. I don't know where it was taken, in what part of our garden, I think my father took it knowing that probably I would be sent away, and I look rather sad. And that was it, I was 14. Not a wonderful time. And I can't remember when the picture was taken but I know what it felt like then.

Tape 3: 43 minutes 42 seconds

This is a portrait taken by a professional photographer who chose me to portray a young girl from Europe. It must have been taken in 1941, and I must have been 17. And I think there is sadness in my eyes. I didn't normally wear a scarf, but he put it on, portraying a European. I don't know who he was, but it was in an exhibition of portraits.

Tape 3: 44 minutes 17 seconds

This is me at 15, at school in Sussex, I was wearing a coat which I must have brought with me from Europe. The first year of the war. The phoney war, a very English atmosphere, very, very different to what my life had been before.

Tape 3: 44 minutes 47 seconds

This is the beginning of my life in England. The school had never had a foreigner, never mind a Jew, before in their midst, and here I am with my English school colleagues. It was amazing that they accepted me, but they did.

Tape 3: 45 minutes 31 seconds

This is a picture from the first years in Manchester, taken at a party somewhere. There's me at the back wearing a scarf. Most of the other people on the picture were much more privileged than me, and you can see it in my expression. The chap with the moustache is Frenkel, who did an awful lot for Zionist causes. I didn't quite belong there.

Tape 3: 46 minutes 10 seconds

This is me at probably seventeen, in the portrait studio at the College of Technology Manchester University where I was studying photographic technology, and we were playing around, fooling around a bit, so it was some of the more light-hearted moments of my teenage life.

Tape 3: 46 minutes 41 seconds

This is a group of our friends, my husband is on the left hand side with a lot of hair, standing up, I'm in the front with the white collar. These were the people we mixed with they were all Jewish from various parts of the country and it was quite a close group of friends. Some from Poland, some from Czechoslovakia, none of them I don't think, were English.

Tape 3: 47 minutes 24 seconds

This depicts my new status as a wife to Louis Bohm. We had just got married, on November 11th 1945, a strange date that we chose, and here we are, we had quite a modest two-room apartment in Rivington, Manchester, and this was the beginning of a new life for both of us and the beginning of a long partnership in which we shared everything. And I think in this picture we can see that we were hopeful for the future, which turned out alright for us.

Tape 3: 49 minutes 7 seconds

Right. This is a very happy picture, it was taken on Lago Maggiore, in the Ticino, the Italian part of Switzerland, where I met a lot of wonderful people, much more bohemian than the environment in Manchester, and I became a photographer. And I started to photograph the lake. Louis was not spending all the time with me I think he was at the time working in Germany in Mülheim, he used to come at weekends. There were lots of interesting people, a lot of people who were in the arts, Ascona then was a village of artists, probably one of the happiest times of my life.

Tape 3: 50 minutes 4 seconds

This is my picture of motherhood. I became a mother quite late. Partly because we couldn't afford to have children before, partly because there was a time when I thought I would like to adopt a child, I felt there were so many unhappy orphans, and perhaps one shouldn't have one's own children and one should help others. I'm very happy that we did have our own children, there's Monica looking down at her sister Yvonne. I became a mother in my early thirties, and that has been perhaps the most important change in my life. The children matter more than anything else.

Tape 3: 50 minutes 49 seconds

On this you see my parents, my sister, my husband Louis, and my three year-old daughter Monica. We got permission to visit my parents, I hadn't seen them since 1939. I took our daughter with us because I thought it would make things easier. Although the picture looks quite normal, the conditions were not normal. This was Riga in 1961. There was fear and there was anxiety the whole time we were there. We were being shadowed and followed. And we stayed in a hotel and when we came back one night we saw somebody with a torch looking through our things. And I remember friends of my parents who were able to return to

Riga, talking to us, asking us to help to get out. So the picture looks a normal family, I'm afraid it wasn't so.

Tape 3: 52 minutes 20 seconds

This is a picture taken with my parents after they were allowed to come out of the Soviet Union helped by Harold Wilson's intervention with Khrushchev. This taken in Trafalgar Square, we found them a place to live in Golders Green, we thought they would be happier there, it was difficult to begin with because I still had my young family to look after, my parents didn't speak any English. Amazingly it didn't take long to get used to the good life they had here and on this picture you can see they are happy.

Tape 3: 53 minutes 20 seconds

This is me with my beloved Rolleiflex. I took most of my black and white pictures in the early days with a Rolleiflex, as all respectable photographers did. I still have the camera and I've produced some interesting pictures in the 1950s, 1960s when I turned to 35mm. This was taken by somebody who wanted a picture of the exhibition I had in my early images at the Institute of Contemporary Art. So, very much the photographer here.

Tape 3: 55 minutes 14 seconds

This was taken in Gloucestershire, in the home of my younger daughter Yvonne, who is a doctor in Gloucestershire and this is to commemorate a very delightful weekend we spent with Yvonne and her husband Martin on the farm. There's Monica, Yvonne, and the four grandchildren. I had just bought them the scarecrow, and the scarecrow became part of the family, and it was a very happy and delightful weekend for me, spent in the company of my beloved family.

Tape 3: 56 minutes 17 seconds

This is a picture we took in Marrakech, where we spent a few happy days in 2003, there's Hannah and Benjamin. These are the children of Monica and we are very fond of each other and they are a lovely couple of grandchildren.

Tape 3: 56 minutes 41 seconds

This is a picture of me as a tiny grandmother with my two tall granddaughters. They are the daughters of Yvonne and Martin Nicholas, and that is Sarah and Harriet, who is called Hattie and we are standing in the wood which has been photographed by Cezanne.... That has been painted, not photographed by Cezanne. This was the country where Cezanne was born in Aix-en-Provence where I have a small apartment and it was the fall and you can see how beautiful it was. I photographed Provence a lot. And the picture is nice because you can see how protective my big granddaughters are towards me.

Tape 3: 57 minutes 30 seconds

Now this is the first book that was published with my pictures, and I'm very fond of it, and I think the introduction by Sir Roland Penrose is very important to me, and he talks to me as a

European, and he talks about my sensibilities. The book is now long out of print but it's something that I'm proud to have done.

Tape 3: 58 minutes 8 seconds

This is the cover of a book published by the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where I had an exhibition of these pictures, and the pictures selected by the curator and the exhibition was very successful and I loved being there and having the pictures in the Museum. It meant a great deal to me, and the pictures again showed the work I did in the late 1950s and 1960s.

BL: When was the catalogue produced?

DB: At the same time as the exhibition, it was in order to commemorate the exhibition. And it was one of the few catalogues I was told that the Israel Museum sold out of.

BL: Mrs Bohm, thank you very much for doing this interview.