IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Carl
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	23 June 1910
Interviewee POB:	Rindbach, Austria

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Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Anthony Grenville
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THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE

INTERVIEW: 134

NAME: CARL FLESCH

DATE: 30 OCTOBER 2006

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: ANTHONY GRENVILLE

TAPE 1

AG: I'm conducting an interview with Carl Flesch in London. The date is 30th October 2006 and my name is Anthony Grenville. Well, first of all, Carl, I'd just like to thank you very much for agreeing to do the interview with us.

CF: Oh, certainly.

AG: And could I start by asking you what your full name was at birth?

CF: Carl Franz Flesch.

AG: And where were you born?

CF: In Rindbach. That was in Salzkammergut [Austria]. My parents were on holiday at the time.

AG: And what was the date of your birth?

CF: 23 June 1910.

AG: Right, good. I'd like to ask you first about your family background. Do you know anything about your family going back beyond your parents or grandparents?

CF: Yes. It goes back quite a long time. There is, in fact, a German book about the family Flesch, which I must admit I've never read, but there were lots of rabbis in the family and quite well-known people who were experts on Jewish religion, and my grandfather was a doctor in a small Jewish town, a Hungarian town, Moson, now Mosonmagyaróvár. That's where my father was born.

AG: And does the name Flesch have any origin that you …?

CF: Yes, it came from the 'Haus zur Flasche', which in South German was called Flesch. And the Haus zur Flasche was in the Judengasse in Frankfurt am Main.

AG: 'Flasche', for the tape, means bottle. How interesting. But that would have …

CF: Well, the families then dispersed over Eastern Europe, people going to Hungary, to Czechoslovakia and so on. I don't know the exact details, why, and so on. But anyway, my father was certainly born in Hungary and came from Hungary.

AG: Let me ask you a bit about your father. When was he born? What year was he born?

CF: He was born in 1873. And he died in 1944.

AG: And could you tell us a bit about his career, I mean it could take quite a long time, but the high points of it.

CF: Yes, it's a long story, but he was a violinist and quite a well-known one, a soloist as well as a teacher. He has written quite a number of books and interestingly enough his textbooks, which came out in the 1920's, are still selling and being used by violinists, as are his exercises. There are hardly any professional violinists who wouldn't have it on their desk when studying or practising. He became a professor at various universities, starting in Romania, where, funnily enough, he became the court musician to the Queen Mother of Romania at the age of 23, I think. Then he went to Berlin, then he had a professorship in Amsterdam, then he went again to Berlin, where he in the course of years held a professorship at the Hochschule für Musik, who have now recently dedicated the whole concert hall to his name. And eventually, that was after Hitler came to power, he was offered a job, during the war, in Lucerne in Switzerland, where he also became a professor. But yes, in between that, he was in America at the Curtis Institute of Music, so altogether he held, I think, five professorships.

AG: And he must also have performed in very notable circumstances.

CF: He performed all over Europe and America. And Russia, he was in Russia. He did not perform in Japan, where funnily enough his records are selling best now, they probably sell best because they never heard him, but he had a very busy concert life and he was really … but he was one of the few performing artists who was a teacher at the same time. Most performing artists can't teach and he was always very interested in teaching.

AG: Did he perform with any particular notable conductors or composers?

CF: Oh yes, I mean when he was quite young her performed with Hans Richter and he performed with Nikisch in Germany, and then with Furtwängler, who was a life-long friend and who, one could almost say, saved his life later under the Nazi regime.

AG: Could you tell us how that came about?
Tape 1: 5 minutes 54 seconds

CF: Well, at the beginning of the war, my parents were in London, but my father had engagements in Holland, and they got permission during the first days of the war to go to Holland, which everybody said would remain neutral as in the First World War, which of course was not the case. And when the Germans invaded, I had a very busy day trying to get them out. They could have got out, in fact, by joining the Vic-Wells Ballet, which was touring Holland, if they had had the wit to go to the British Embassy, which of course they didn't and I couldn't contact them direct. The man who arranged that was Sir Adrian Boult, as a matter of fact, and that was a very good friend. So they stayed in Holland, the Americans gave him an immediate visa and labour permit, but the Germans wouldn't let them get out. So they stayed in Holland, my father was not allowed to concertise, of course, nor officially to teach. He wrote another book at that time about fingering on the violin. And my parents were arrested three times. My father was Hungarian nationality, so the Hungarians were neutral at the time, but then he lost his Hungarian nationality and became a stateless Jew, which was very dangerous. And the third time they were arrested, they were told, "Well, we'll tell you tomorrow what's going to happen to you." And Furtwängler had written a letter to a very high-up Nazi trying to get my parents permission to leave Holland, and my father had a copy of that letter and he gave that to the police woman who arrested them, and she passed it upstairs, and on that they were set free. So indirectly Furtwängler really probably saved their lives. And then, as I say, my parents were stateless, but they got the Hungarian nationality back because after the First World War my father had been playing in Hungary, and a German review said, "The German violinist Carl Flesch" and my father wrote a letter to the paper saying, "No, I am an Hungarian", and on that his friend Dohnanyi - he was a well-known composer - and another friend, who was a pupil of his, got the government, persuaded the government to reinstate their nationality. And then they were permitted to go first to Hungary, where my father gave a concert – it was a great success – and the second was forbidden already, or had to be cancelled because the Hungarians were big anti-Semites. And then he was offered this job in Lucerne as a teacher on a newly-founded university there, a Hochschule for music, and that's where he spent the last 18 months of his life, very successfully teaching.

AG: If I remember rightly, there's a Carl Flesch Prize

AG: Yes, there was, after he died in Switzerland, to commemorate his name, the Carl Flesch International Violin Competition was founded, which went for almost 50 years. Then the City of London had taken it over, the City of London decided not to have any more competitions and the thing just fizzled out, unfortunately. It was very prominent, one of the most prestigious competitions.

CF: Were there any particularly notable winners?

AG: Well, there were quite a number of winners, it's quite funny, you often have that, that winners will not have the career their first prize promised, but one of the most

notable winners was Maxim Vengerov, who was very well-known. He walked off with all the prizes, except the one for the best performer who had not got into the finals. Since he was in the finals he didn't get that prize, obviously. He is very, very good and a very nice man. I met him.

Tape 1: 10 minutes 37 seconds

AG: And did your father have other, I mean, he must have had lots of notable acquaintances. You mentioned that he knew Dohnanyi. Did he know …?

CF: Well, he knew, of course, almost, I wouldn't say everybody, but a lot of contemporary musicians. I mean, I have written a book which I based on correspondence which he had from famous people, I mean Kreisler, as I said Furtwängler, Huberman, Artur Schnabel, with whom he was connected for a very long time, Piatigorski, Feuermann, all people he knew, practically everybody. He also knew Huberman but didn't like him. Huberman liked him, but he didn't like Huberman. They were too different in interpretation somehow. But Huberman sent him pupils, and he was a client of mine, in fact, in my own business, and he was a nice man, but my father had a dislike towards him.

AG: What about Richard Strauss?

CF: Sorry?

AG: Did he know Richard Strauss?

CF: No. No, I don't think he did.

AG: But you, I know, defend Furtwängler against the charges often laid against him.

CF: Very much so. Furtwängler undoubtedly was not a ... certainly not an anti-Semite. The leader of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra was a man called Simon Goldberg, a pupil of my father, and the leader of the cellists was a man called Graudan, also a Jew, and I had a letter, which I put in my book, in which Furtwängler wrote to my father and said how he regretted that they had both resigned and how they had left it in the lurch at a time when it was so important for German music to be recognized abroad. So he didn't initially realize the whole seriousness, and he wrote to my father letters when he visited London, he wrote from the German Embassy. I am sure these letters were censored, he didn't mind at all. No, he was certainly not a Nazi. He may have been a member of the party because everybody had to be, but he was anything but a Nazi.

AG: What sort of man was your father personally? How do you remember him?

CF: My father, it's very difficult to say, he was a very strong man, he had a very immediate authority, I mean, I never remember him raising his voice against anybody because when he said something people did it. And he was rather reserved. There's an

entry in his diary in which he said, “I love my pupils like a father, but like a father I cannot show my feelings.” That sums him up. But he was very well read, very well educated, I mean self-educated, because his schooling didn’t amount to much, I think. So he … I mean, it was very difficult to be the son of a famous father, that was not his fault, it wasn’t his fault that he was famous, but it certainly isn’t the right thing for the children. But I got on very well with him, no doubt about that.

AG: This sounds like your gardener, so I think we’re going to just have to […] Just continuing after the break, you were just saying that it was not easy to be the son of a famous father. Did you find that a bit of a burden when you were a boy or a young man?

CF: Well, not as a child, I mean, it was wonderful, everybody gives you attention, much more than you deserve. When you start growing up, you see, you have this man before you who is famous, and you … and then the question is, how do you react to this? I myself reacted by saying, well, I can never be as famous as he is, there’s no point in doing anything, and I became a terribly bad pupil, became very neurotic in my youth, I mean, I went through quite some lengthy psychoanalysis to get rid of it as far as one can get rid of these things. But I certainly don’t recommend famous fathers. Because you have the same … take Churchill and his son Randolph, Thomas Mann and Golo Mann, Schnabel and his sons, it’s always the same. I once contemplated writing a book about the children of famous men, of whom of course one knew quite a number until I realized that I would have to put all of them down, they were all my friends, I couldn’t write a book about it, so I left that. But it is certainly very difficult.

Tape 1: 16 minutes 5 seconds

AG: What sort of person was your mother? What was her maiden name?

CF: Her maiden name was Josephus-Jitta, she came from a very prominent Jewish family, I think her uncle was in the International Court in The Hague and so on, and she was Dutch and …

AG: How do you spell that?

CF: Josephus-Jitta?

AG: The surname.

CF: J-O-S-E-P-H-U-S hyphen J-I-T-T-A. It’s quite a … I didn’t realize, but when I listened to the German radio on the first day of the Dutch invasion, I heard somebody suddenly say, on the German, “[The page of (?)] Jitta has now closed”, so I didn’t realize the family was that famous, but they apparently were. My mother was … she didn’t have it easy as an artist’s wife, to her my father was the absolute everything, you see, but she did not neglect her children, she was very good to her children. That my parents weren’t very well trained in child psychology is something that you can’t blame them for, it was

sort of par for the course at that time, you see, but she was a good mother, there's no doubt about it.
AG: When was she born, what year was she born?

CF: She was born in 1882.

AG: And how did they come to meet?

CF: My father was a professor in Amsterdam and there they met, and I'm not sure that the family of a rich young girl was very happy about some penniless fiddler getting into the family, but anyway it was a love match and they did marry, and as far as I can say, it was a good marriage, it had its ups and downs, especially as artists are very much sought after by women, I mean, although my father to my mind was not really a woman's man, I think. He was quite successful, half the year he was away concertising, so there must be situations where it's not easy to escape temptation. But my mother was able to cope with it anyway. Artists' wives are a definite chapter, I mean, they are very often attacked by other people. One of the main examples, the wife of Fritz Kreisler, who was kept on a very, very short leash.

AG: When did your parents actually get married, which year?

CF: In 1906.

AG: And were you the first child?

CF: No. My sister was the first child, very promptly in 1907 and …

AG: What is her first name?

CF: Her name is Johanna. There are dozens of other names, but I mean … called Hanni. And I was born in 1910. I was a twin actually. Unfortunately my brother was retarded from birth. Today, with the present state of medicine, I'm quite sure they would have been able to remedy that, because he was really basically probably the most intelligent of us three children and the most gifted.

AG: What was his first name?

CF: Fritz. Actually when my parents emigrated they left him with … he was in an institution, Bethel, I don't know whether you know the name, Bethel is a very famous Christian institution, and they saved his life, I mean, Jews and especially retarded people were, of course, prime objects of persecution. And they really saved his life so that ... and they kept my brother … of course, I mean, my parents had made sufficient provision financially for my brother, of course, but the money was in the French Zone and Bielefeld, where Bethel was, was in the British Zone, so no money … they didn't mind at all, they just kept him. And it was quite interesting, because as Churchill said the only good German is a dead German, but I knew after the war immediately when I heard about

my brother's … that he had been saved, that there really had been good Germans in Germany all the time, which to some extent helped me in my attitude towards Germans.
Tape 1: 21 minutes 6 seconds

AG: That's a remarkable story, I would have thought that someone who was in an institution for handicapped people and Jewish stood virtually no chance of surviving. That is remarkable.

CF: Well, he was, of course, hundred per cent Jewish, but I should mention that we were all baptized, we children, a week after I was born, so I am a so-called Liegegoy, as it's called, so my brother was, in fact, by religion a Christian, which didn't make any difference obviously to the Nazis. And he played, in fact, the organ in a local church there. They managed anyway to save him although several other people I knew were killed in that … I'm still in touch with them and immensely grateful to them for what they did.

AG: So presumably your family was not at all observant.

CF: Sorry, no what?

AG: Your family were not at all observant.

CF: Not at all, no. Religion really played no part in … I regarded myself as a Christian. But, funnily enough, I had only Jewish friends. Quite by … not by choice or anything, but by accident. There is something in the Jewish character which goes far beyond religion, in my opinion.

AG: And apart from your father's professional connections, were their friends mainly also German-Jewish?

CF: No, I think artists are in the peculiar position, they are between various religions, classes and all the rest of it. So I think it was fairly balanced. At that time, you see, nobody really worried very much about that, I mean, it played no part until Hitler came to power.

AG: And could you tell me a little bit about the family home? Where was it, first of all?

CF: Well, we lived in Berlin in a very nice … Lützowplatz.

AG: Sorry, what was the name?

CF: It was called Lützowplatz, which in fact I once recognized from an aerial photograph during the war, when it had been bombed. Then my father started to teach five months a year in Philadelphia in the Curtis Institute. So he gave up this Berlin flat and he bought a house in Baden-Baden, which he liked very much. And when he came back from America and that job ceased, we lived in Baden-Baden, where he gave courses, private

courses, and in fact the Baden-Badener liked that so much that the last 25 years there's been a Carl Flesch Academy in Baden-Baden, which is an annual event and almost as prominent as the Baden-Baden races … which is going very strong and is quite a force in this type of thing.

AG: When you were still a small child, where you still living in Berlin?

CF: We were, yes, I was in Berlin. I went first to a private school, then I went to a grammar school, Mommsen-Gymnasium.

AG: Which Gymnasium?

CF: It was called Mommsen-Gymnasium.

AG: Ah, Mommsen after the historian.

CF: Yes.

AG: Where is that in Berlin?

CF: That was, I forget exactly, it was in the West End, not very far from our house. I was a very bad pupil and my parents being away half a year, I went to Salem … the school which Kurt Hahn founded, who also founded Gordonstoun. And that was a very interesting time, certainly good for me.

AG: How old were you when you went to Salem?

CF: Fifteen.

AG: And when you were at the Mommsen-Gymnasium, did you mix at all with other boys? Did you have friends there?

CF: I had good friends there, yes. As I say all Jewish, one exception, I think … they were nothing in particular. But Mommsen-Gymnasium was, funnily enough, it was a state school, it was a grammar school, and in our form anyway there were about fifty per cent Jews, which was quite unusual, and during all the upheaval in Germany, Kapp Putsch and all the things of course, there were two opposing factions in our class and there were fights, not between … not general fights, but between the two strongest boys of each. And I'm glad to say the Jewish boy practically won.

Tape 1: 26 minutes 23 seconds

AG: So you were aware of anti-Semitism, anti-Jewish feeling in Berlin in the twenties?

CF: Well, … yes, especially as my sister, who went to a private school, one day came home crying because someone had called her a Jew girl. I didn't feel very strongly about

it, but I decided together with some friends to go to the school and beat the girl up who had said it. I must have been ten at the time or something like that. And we went there, and my sister of course was desperate about it, and she went home. Our nanny then came and took me away. But that was the only time I did anything really very particularly Jewish. Why I did it I don't know, but I felt like it. But I did regard me [sic] as a Christian, as I say. And the real anti-Semitism really only came to the fore when Hitler came to power. Before that, we Jews really looked down a little on the goyim, I mean, we thought we were something better, also at university, there's no doubt about that.

AG: You have memories of the time of the First World War?

CF: Well, very, very few. I remember that we were in Holland at the time and I remember I must have been, well, I must have been four, my parents coming to my bed and saying very seriously that war has broken out, it didn't really mean anything to me, so I was in it at the beginning, but apart from that I had very little … We never starved, I mean, there was a lot of black market dealings going on, very officially, I mean, the one thing I remember about Germany was there was, they wanted of course money all of the time. There was something called Der eiserne Hindenburg, the Iron Hindenburg – Hindenburg of course was the general who had won the Battle of Tannenberg – and they sold nails for, I think, a Mark a piece, which you could knock into that statue. There were also gold nails, which were 100 Marks, I remember. And the very first film I ever saw was a film that was called "Hindenburg hat Zahnschmerzen", Hindenburg has toothache, which was about a little boy who played being Hindenburg and he got sweets and he ate them all and gave his sister none at all and got terrible toothache, that's all I remember. It was the very first film. Otherwise I can't say that I remember very much about the First World War, I mean, nor the revolution. I know that my father played on the day of the revolution in Hamburg and the concert took place, interestingly enough, because the people tried to keep up cultural pursuits. Also during the war, when the war started, they thought, of course, all cultural life would be finished, but nothing of the sort. I mean, it went on as before. Like in this country to some extent.

AG: Do you remember things like the great inflation?

CF: Oh yes, yes. I mean, again it did not really affect me but I remember my father showing me a pound note and saying - it was right at the beginning of the inflation – that's worth 20,000 Marks, you see. And then of course you had what's called Notgeld, every town printed its own money, I mean, unfortunately I lost the collection which I … it was very, very quite artistic money which they printed. And then, of course, the Mark became worth a billion. And then many, many people lost everything they had and that, of course, was one of the reasons for Hitler, you see, there's no doubt about that.

Tape 1: 30 minutes 50 seconds

AG: Just continuing after the interruption. Could you tell me something about your school at Salem. What was that like when you first went there at fifteen?

CF: Salem was co-educational and I have come to the conclusion that whilst co-education is quite good from other points of view, certainly is not the ideal, was not the ideal form of education because at that time – it was in the 1920's – girls of course had to be protected and they were a complete and utter taboo and that had some effect on the boys, I mean, there were friendships of course between boys and girls, completely platonic, as far as I know, and after school I once met five old Salemers - we just got together somewhere in Munich – and I suddenly realized that the only other person who still was on his first marriage was me, more by luck than judgement I might add. But it obviously did not have a good effect on it, but it prevented, of course, homosexuality on the other hand. Hahn, Kurt Hahn, was quite horrified about the question of homosexuality. He was in my opinion a homosexual himself, but a completely latent one, I mean certainly not in any way active, and you were not allowed in Salem to touch each other, it was called 'kleben', if you wanted to fight, you had to challenge the other boy to a boxing match. I boxed three times - I hated it I must say – I lost two fights, I won the last one against a man who later on became quite a well-known scientist, atomic scientist …

AG: What was his name?

CF: Hans Jaffe was his name. He went to America, was also a Jew. That was the only one I won. So … and, in fact, I didn't know what homosexuality was. Really, I must be unique going to boarding school, leaving a boarding school, and not knowing what homosexuality was. And a friend of mine – I know it because we heard when we left school, I was with a friend, we heard that someone had been evicted for homosexuality and we looked at each other and said, "What's that?" Really that's very unusual for boarding school. We had two cold showers a day, and it was quite cold in winter anyway, and, of course, that suppressed to some extent any homosexual feelings. Sport, nothing that meant bodily contact, you couldn't play football, you didn't play rugger, hockey was the game, because hockey, you have sticks, so … So Hahn was very, very strict on that.

AG: What was the atmosphere of the school?

CF: Oh, very good. I mean there were very wealthy people, there were very poor people, there were people, sons of princes, the royal family and so on. It didn't make any difference at all. It really only mattered what you were, what you were yourself. It took me a term to find out that a boy called Berthold, who was a sixth-former, was the son of the Prince Max von Baden, who was really the owner of the castle in which Salem was situated. So that was very democratic.

AG: Because Prince Max von Baden had briefly been Chancellor of Germany.

CF: Yes, he was the man, he was used … I think he was the one who offered the Allies the … to stop fighting.

AG: Yes, the armistice.

CF: And he was hated by the … He was a nice man, very musical, in fact, the reason why I came to Salem was first my parents applied and Salem said they were full. And my father had met Prince Max - he was very musical – in Weimar at a festival, and he wrote to him. And Prince Max, of course, arranged it and said in return my father should once play at the school, which he did, it was a great success. So that's in answer whether my father only knew Jews. He also knew other people.

Tape 1: 36 minutes 5 seconds

AG: And how did you get on at Salem?

CF: I was very average, I mean, … when you were in Salem for some time you became, could become a colour-bearer, which I did, you see, but I was nothing particular. But I liked it, I got on well at Salem, I mean, by and large it was good for me and I am glad I was there and I am glad I met Hahn, who was a very interesting and very domineering, not domineering, is the wrong word, but he was a Svengali really. If he had told us to jump from the first floor window onto the street, I hope we wouldn't have done it, but we would have considered it, and he was very impressive.

AG: What about the other boys, did you make particular friends?

CF: I made particular friends, nobody was in any way particularly remarkable. There I also, there were Jewish boys of course, but I had a number of Christian friends, I mean. Unfortunately they all are practically all dead now. The only person I know who I am still in contact with is a girl, a woman, two years older than I am, she's a psychoanalyst and she's still working. She writes me. So ... But we were about 300 boys and girls, I think, and there was nothing very, very … I don't think there was anybody very remarkable whom I met. I made my first declaration of love when I was in Salem, I remember, on a bicycle to a girl of fifteen. Well, as I say, it was all very platonic, you see, and anyway my love was not ... was unsuccessful. But I've still been … she's then married a Nazi, I know she was denazified, but I've been in touch with her, we kept in touch, but if she's still alive I don't know. But we did keep in touch after the school until it fizzled out.

AG: So presumably you did your Abitur at Salem?

CF: Yes, we had to do that in Konstanz. Salem didn't have yet the right to have the Abitur. And there was one thing in Salem, you did not lie. I cannot recall after the first day I was there a lie having passed my lips in Salem. If everybody, if nobody lies, you don't, you see. And I remember that, as you mention it, because in the hall where the Abitur was, we had that together with the boys in Konstanz itself, and there were three columns of seats and we were in the middle column because to keep the others from cheating, I think. But they could absolutely trust us. Yes, absolutely no lie, which was not a good preparation for life actually. You see, you have got to lie sometimes, it's something you can't help.

AG: Any other features of Salem that you call to mind?

CF: Well, there was of course a lot of sport, which I was very bad at, and we played against, our hockey team played against other teams, and schools and all sorts of local teams, visitors and surrounding towns. I was very bad. My son, who went to Gordonstoun because I couldn't get him into Highgate School because of numerus clausus [quota] because he was a Jew. And after the headmaster apologized to me, he said "We only take a number of Jews and your son was not the best, so we couldn't take him". So I got annoyed and Prince Phillip had just been marrying the Princess Elizabeth at the time, so Gordonstoun was very high up, and I said, "Well I'll show you" and wrote to Hahn and asked him would he take my son, because these headmasters are always very pleased if old boys want to put their sons in the same school, so he took him, and my son was good at every sport, I mean …

AG: He's good at everything.

CF: Yes, absolutely. It was amazing. I don't know where he's got it from. Not from me.

AG: And how did you get on yourself in your Abitur?

CF: I got a average, I got a „voll befriedigend", as far as I remember, which is I think B or A minus, I don't know, I mean, but it was sufficient. We went, as I say, to Konstanz, we threw all our school books into the Lake Konstanz when we came back [laughs].

Tape 1: 41 minutes 29 seconds

AG: And did you then go straight off to study?

CF: Yes, actually I must have been one of the youngest students because I was still seventeen when I went university. I went to Freiburg, and Hahn had recommended me to a professor there, who – I don't know whether you know, in Germany anyway you start your studies usually with Roman law, and this man was against it and started right away with German law and with the result that I never learned Roman law, I know nothing. If in my finals I had been asked about Roman law - I had had a professor who was, one knew who was going to examine you, if it had been, I would have had to learn all this within a fortnight. Luckily it wasn't necessary.

AG: Presumably you lived in Freiburg?

CF: I lived in Freiburg ... in digs, and then I went to Berlin for one term and lived at my parents, and then I went to Heidelberg for one term, and then I went back to Berlin, and then I lived in digs because my parents no longer lived in Berlin except during the winter, when my father was teaching at the Berlin Hochschule, so they rented a furnished flat themselves.

AG: Sounds an idyllic German student life, going to Freiburg, then Berlin and Heidelberg. What was it actually like studying law in the late 20s, well, early 1930s? How do you remember it?

CF: Well, I mean, I was not a member of a Verbindung, of a student union, they all tried … And actually there was no anti-Semitism because the Verbindungen, you know, the student unions, invite you to an evening to try and make you join them, and I went to several. And I didn't like it, especially as I hardly drink, and they ply you with everything, so I almost fell asleep instead of getting drunk, you see. So I didn't join and I had some good friends, especially in Heidelberg I had one of my best friends, we were life-long friends – of course, they're now dead – I met in Heidelberg. I also met – I got into psychoanalysis – the son of Karl Abraham, Karl Abraham was a pupil of Freud, he had already died, but I mean … so I got into psychoanalytic circles in that way. So otherwise there wasn't any organized student life unless you joined a Verbindung.

AG: But do you look back fondly on your university days?

CF: Not really, because it was a time when I was very neurotic and I did not really study a lot because really I couldn't. I mean I learned all my law in the last three months and it was sufficient for me to pass, also I think with "voll befriedigend". So I wasn't all that happy as a student because, as I say, I was very neurotic.

AG: Was this the time that you actually had the analysis?

CF: Yes.

AG: And did it sort of do the trick, if I can put it like that?

CF: Sorry?

AG: Did it do the trick? Did the psychoanalysis help you?

CF: It was a gradual process. I had a very orthodox analyst, a man called – quite a well-known man – called Theodor Reik. Not Wilhelm Reich who he is mixed up with, but Theodor Reik. And it's a very slow process. I must say I am very grateful to my parents and my father that he paid for it at the time, for at that time he had lost all his money in the American stock exchange thing, and had to sell his Strad to pay his debts, you see. And there was really no money left, so I was very selfish, I must say, and my father tried to get me over to the Adler method, which was much quicker and therefore cheaper. And I discussed it with Reik and Reik was quite a cynical man and said, "Look, if you have money, go to an analyst, if you have no money, you go to Adler." You see, he was quite honest about it. At which point I should have had the sense to go for the other method, which was probably just as good, I don't know. But I stayed and I had quite a long analysis, which unfortunately then was broken off because Reik then had to go back to Vienna and I was without an analyst - for some time anyway – and that was just in the middle of my exams, so I had quite a difficult time. But I survived it anyway.

Tape 1: 47 minutes 26 seconds

AG: And after you passed your exams, what did you do then?

CF: I became a Referendar, that is to say three practical years which you have to have in your training and you become a civil servant for that, swear an oath. And as a matter of fact, I could not have become a civil servant unless I had been a German. And we were Hungarians and so, since I was too young to do it on my own, the whole family became German. And it must have been in the 1930's, sort of the wrong move considering what had happened afterwards, but I mean nobody thought of Hitler at that time as a serious menace, you see. And so I became a civil servant, because you weren't paid, you see, but you were a civil servant, and we civil servants were the first to be kicked out by the Nazis on the day of the boycott, on the – I forget was it 30th March or 1st April? -

AG: 1st of April.

CF: 1st of April 1933

AG: But had you already done some time as a Referendar?

CF: Oh yes, I had already been a Referendar for one and a half years, you see.

AG: Where was that?

CF: In Berlin. Well actually, the first three months I was in something called Bad Freienwalde, which was near Berlin. There – we were four Referendars, three were Jewish, I and two others were Jewish – people became very friendly and you were in a very lower court than what would be here, in German it's an Amtsrichter, here it would be a magistrates court. And it was the habit of the magistrates to invite Referendars once or twice to their house, and they did not invite us, he did not invite us. We laughed about it. And in fact it was in Freienwalde that I, the only time that I attended a Nazi rally. Well, we thought at least we'll know what it's like. It was a local rally, nothing particular, you see, and there were speeches and people clapped, of course, we didn't, you see. And after about quarter of an hour, an SA man came to us and said, "Excuse me, are you Jewish? We said, "Yes". "Would you please leave the hall?" That's all that happened. So at that time there was no danger really, it was all still quite civilized. But it changed.

AG: And how did you get on with the locals in Bad Freienwalde or did you not have much to do with them?

CF: Well, I didn't have much … no, no really we … apart from my landlady, who I remember … Freienwalde was near enough to go home over the weekend to Berlin, which we did, but my landlady let rooms and the bath, they kept the coal, you see … I remember she had to have a major operation, when the coal was removed so that she could have a bath and she was clean enough for the operation. But I never had a bath in

Freiburg [sic], as I said, we went home at the weekend. I mean, we shaved with some hot water which was put in front of your door, I mean, it was all very primitive, but you look back at it and compare to what things are today.

AG: And where did you work as a Referendar in Berlin?

CF: I worked … I got myself attached for a year, for three months, to the sexual offences unit, so I met so many pedophiles, prostitutes and so on … it was amazing, you see… read all the pornography that was going, which of course becomes extremely boring when you have read one or two things …

AG: Where was this unit …?

CF: It was …

AG: Was it in the middle of Berlin somewhere?

CF: It was called Strafkammer für Unzuchtsachen. And I'm sure there were many, many miscarriages of justice, I mean, boys, little boys, I mean, saying that had been molested whilst all they'd been doing was playing with themselves, you see. The mother washing them would say, "It's inflamed there, what's happened?" Then he would say, oh it was so and so. I saw terrible cases there.

AG: And how long were you at this court for? How long did you work there?

CF: Well, for not quite three months, because that was the time near the boycott, that was …

AG: What happened to you?

CF: Nothing. I just wasn't allowed to … In fact, it was quite funny because I was asked to take a statement on 31st March in the afternoon, to take a statement from an S.A. man who had been in prison, on remand, for pick-pocketing, so I took this statement – so they didn't only do Unzuchtsachen there – I took the statement and then I packed up and he said, "Isn't it wonderful how they will throw out all the Jews tomorrow!" And he was not anxious to be anti-Semitic, on the contrary, he wanted to be in my good books, you see. I said, "I'm a Jew, I'm still here", was all I could say. And then of course I had the file, and I wasn't allowed to go into the office the next day. So I kept the file and this man is possibly still on remand, unless he became a Gauleiter – one of two options.

Tape 1: 53 minutes 47 seconds

AG: Had you been aware – well, you must have been aware of Hitler coming to power – did you see all this going on in Berlin?

CF: Oh, absolutely. I mean … but if you ask me why he came to power you really still don't know it. It's really unexplicable, inexplicable. I must say that Hitler, you don't feel that now when you hear him, but at the time he was the best orator around. You had to listen to a whole speech, which would usually take between one and two hours, starting on a very low key and going, developing. He was a fascinating orator, there's no doubt about it. And I hope nobody else will be as good an orator as him. But … he came to power, of course, as the Nazis - at that time when he came to power – were slightly on the wane, they had lost votes. And the only – you know that, no doubt – the only way they came to power was because of the investigation the Chancellor at the time, Brüning, did into the East Help [Osthilfe], you see, which had been frauds by large agrarians in funds, which were deterred … should have gone to the small farmers, and Brüning did an investigation. Then these people went to Hindenburg, the Reichspräsident, who was a Junker [like] themselves and said, "You can't have that, you can't allow that". And at that time Hindenburg then dismissed - which was constitutionally possible - dismissed Brüning and put Papen, von Papen, as Chancellor, instead of Hitler, as Vice-Premier. And I remember when I heard that – it was in the morning – I said, "Thank God, now it's the light at the end of the tunnel", you see, which was of course quite wrong. And the most remarkable thing, there was a man we were very friendly with, the editor of the Vossische Zeitung, if you know that, something like The Guardian, a man called Georg Bernhard, and my father played with Furtwängler in a concert, and we were friendly with the Bernhards, we went to a restaurant and had supper, and at that moment the news came through that the Reichstag was on fire. And Bernhard, who was an M.P., editor of the Vossische Zeitung and so on… knew everything, you see, made the greatest misjudgement I've ever heard. He said, "This is the end of the Nazis." It was, course, the beginning, you see. Everyone was very pleased, but it shows you how little we Jews really knew what was going to happen.

AG: I think that's a very appropriate moment for a break, because the tape's coming to an end.

TAPE 2

AG: Carl Flesch Tape 2. Could you tell us what happened to you after you were removed from your job in April 1933.

CF: Well, I was first … did nothing actually. I was hoping, of course, to get the job back, which proved … after a few days, you knew, that wouldn't be the case. And I read an advertisement in a paper, 'Gentleman with akquisitorische Begabung' …

AG: Acquisitive gifts?

CF: … and I didn't know what 'akquisitorisch' was at the time, so I wrote and it was insurance. And I went there and became an agent for the Allianz, quite unsuccessfully. And I did this for some time, and I went to Baden-Baden, where my parents were, and my father said, "Look, there's absolutely no point in your staying in Germany". I was not

convinced of that, but he was right, of course, and I emigrated to Holland, which was quite easy because my mother was Dutch. So I went to Holland, and having, sort of, been in insurance I found an unpaid place in a small brokerage in Holland. It was quite difficult because unemployment was very, very rife in Holland at that time and I had several relations who were bankers, but they just had absolutely no room for me. And I stayed there for about six months, unpaid, and learned quite a lot. And I remember that at Christmas they gave me ten guilders, which was the first money I'd earned, I was very, very pleased, enormous amount of money. But then I decided that I wanted to really go to, if I did insurance, I might as well go to England, which of course was quite wrong because I had very good connections in Holland through my family and so the reasonable thing would have been to stay. I knew nobody in England at all. And, of course, the wrong thing turned out to be the right one. Had I stayed in Holland I would probably have ended up in an extermination camp. So I then went to England, which I got into very easily because my father had an engagement for a recital with the BBC, with a man called Frederick Lamont, who was well-known for being a Beethoven look-alike, and so he took me as a secretary. And in fact at the function they were very interested, my father playing for the BBC and so on. It was absolutely no trouble, I got a six months permit and that one was renewed, I mean, automatically whenever I applied for it.

AG: Did you have any sort of function, job, technically, that enabled you to get in?

CF: No, no, nothing at all, I was …

AG: … as a visitor?

CF: … trying to … I had had one or two recommendations to people including a recommendation to a firm of Lloyd's brokers called Benny S. Cohen - you can't be much more Jewish than that – who refused to even see me, interestingly enough. They later on changed their name to Lumley. And eventually through some people I found a large firm of […] brokers […] their name was, and they prepared to ask for a permit for me.

AG: When did you – sorry to interrupt – when did you actually arrive in this country?

CF: It was 1st February 1934. Then, as I say, I couldn't do anything for several months. And it was quite funny, because the first time I wanted to apply for a labour permit, there weren't many refugees there at that time, and so they attached to me a man from Scotland Yard in mufti to really look at everything which I … bank account, I don't know why, anyway, and I got on very well with him. I took two days. And then some friends said to me, "You have got to bribe this man". I couldn't bribe a fly, I mean, I didn't think it was necessary in England, and so on. But they were absolutely convinced, so I didn't really know what to do, so at the end of it I said to this chap, it was quite a young man, I said, "Look, you've been so very nice to me, I'd like to give you something to remember me by, but I don't know what, if it were not a … if you didn't think it was bribery, I would give you money." And do you know what he said, he said "Chance it." And so I gave him three guineas, which was a lot of money, more than a week's … and I didn't get the labour permit.

AG: Oh!

CF: Then I tried again. And it always had to be something which did not take a job away from an Englishman, but I said I had specialized in insurances for musicians - musicians have special insurance requirements - and on that, and without bribery I got the permit. That was actually after I'd left [...], I got the permit for a trainee, but then this was somewhat later, anyway I got the permit to insurances for musicians which, of course, would have meant starvation because what musicians want insurance? And I just carried on, it was OK

Tape 2: 6 minutes 37 seconds

AG: But did you carry on by yourself, did you set up your own …?

CF: It was C.F. Flesch Insurance Broker, which you could do at the time. There were of course professional organizations for it, prestigious ones, the Corporation of Insurance Brokers, and it was not difficult to become an associate, so I did become one … but many years later … taking us, looking ahead … and I decided I wanted to become a Fellow, and I rang up the secretary of the association and said, "What have I got to do to become a Fellow?" And I expected, you've got to take this course and that course, and this and that, and he said, "Send 3 guineas". So I sent 3 guineas and became a Fellow. I think it was something to do with the fact that I'd gone to Salem, and that was connected with Gordonstoun, because I then recommended to all my friends, colleagues, who were refugee insurance brokers, that they should become Fellows, and none of them succeeded, they were all very annoyed with me. But the way in which I lost my job as a trainee was quite interesting, because I had been there for about six months, I was doing no harm to anybody, reading files or doing some translations from time to time, and then I was summoned the office of the Managing Director, who said, "You've got to go." "I've got to go? Why?" "You have been spying." I said, "Spying?" "You have been reading files." "Of course I've been reading files. That's what I'm here for." Anyway, I was helpless, I mean, a boy of 23, you see, or 24 I was. And "You can stay till Christmas, then you've got to go." And I then put two and two together afterwards, there had been another trainee, who had been the son of a German shipowner, also a client of that firm, he must have written home that he … [I think that this young lady wants to get through. Can you just switch off the phone for a moment] … and anyway this man …

AG: Just continuing after the break. Yes, go ahead.

CF: And, yes, this man must have written home that there was a Jewish refugee in the firm which had all his parents' firm's secrets. And there's no doubt the Director got an ultimatum, "Either this man goes, this Jew goes, or we go." So, I can understand that they threw me out, but it was done in a very bad way, I mean, because I was, in fact, afraid I would be sent back to Germany. At which point, in order to do something, I enrolled as a student in an advertising course, which was no use at all. And meanwhile, I then applied for my labour permit when this happened, this bribery business, and I got permission, and

I just started as an insurance broker attached to the Jewish National Fund insurance department, whose manager I happened to know very well, a friend of mine. And at that time, of course, you still worked on Saturdays, you see, but of course the Jewish National Fund did not work on Saturdays. So, on my letterhead I had C.F. Flesch, my address, and Saturdays and I gave my telephone number, my private number. Now the idea that someone works on Saturdays, of course, is absolutely impossible. Even Lloyd's worked on Saturdays, with a reduced staff perhaps, but they were open.

AG: Where did you live, where were you living in London at this time?

CF: I started off, funnily enough, in Brunswick Square in a basement flat. It cost me, I believe, seventeen [shillings] and sixpence a week, or £1.17.6, I can't remember, bed and breakfast. And that was so damp that I got pneumonia or something. A friend of mine sent a doctor, and he said, "Get out of this flat. It's killing you." And then I moved to Greencroft Gardens for refugees …

AG: …oh, near Finchley Road tube station, yes.

CF: … and I think I paid £2.12.6 for partial board. And then I moved …

AG: Was this a boarding house or a …?

CF: It was a sort of a boarding house. And then I moved to another place. And actually next to where the Cleve Road offices are now of the AJR. And then I married and had my own flat, you see. But as a boarding house, I mean, there was a … I don't know if you know the boarding house of Mrs. Adam, you must have interviewed Ken Adam, I suppose.

AG: We did.

Tape 2: 12 minutes 6 seconds

CF: His mother ran a boarding house, and my wife, my future wife, was staying there. I was trying to, I wanted to live there too, but it cost £3.10.0 a week and I couldn't manage that, you see. So I think I ate there quite often for a shilling a time, or something like that.

AG: How did you come to meet your future wife?

CF: Well, actually that was a banker's wife, a lady – I forget her name now – who had receptions for refugees, it was very much in the beginning, you see, there were only very few refugees. That's where I met her, with a friend. I preferred the friend, in fact to start with, but I mean it changed.

AG: Could you tell me your wife's name, please.

CF: Her name was Ruth, née Seligsohn.

AG: And where was she from?

CF: Well, she was born in Berlin. And so we married. The reason why we got engaged, well, it wasn't … we were sort of an item already … and Heifetz came to London and some friends arranged some chamber music evening with Heifetz, my father and Max Rostal and his wife, and these were always occasions which were completely en famille, no strangers were admitted at all. So I said to my mother, "Well, can I have Miss, Fräulein Seligsohn". My mother said, "No, sorry, only family". So we got engaged. So she got engaged really for the sake of one evening of chamber music. I hope she didn't regret it, I don't know.

AG: When did you get married?

CF: 1937.

AG: And where was this?

CF: It was a registry office wedding in the Haverstock Hill registry office.

AG: Hampstead Town Hall.

CF: Ja, and I remember that we had the lunch, but then my parents gave a reception for me in the afternoon, I mean at home, you see, and I found the bill some time ago – Lyons catered that – it was 50 guineas. So if you think today of these tens of thousands people spend for wedding receptions, mine was very … Of course, nobody had any money, you see, I mean, it was very good.

AG: And when you got married, where did you and your wife live?

CF: We took a flat in, where was it, Clifton Hill, for £10 a month.

AG: That's in St. John's Wood, isn't it, Clifton Hill?

CF: Ja, ja. It was £10 a month, I think, which was much too expensive, because I was earning £300 a year at the time and my wife was also earning something as a secretary. And my father-in-law said, "One third for rent is all right". It wasn't, I mean. It turned out that I got into terrible trouble, my father helped me, I am very glad to say. It was the only time so far that I got into real financial difficulties. I went to moneylenders at the time, who charged 50 per cent interest or whatever. I was thinking of suicide, all for a few hundred pounds. It was a terrific lot of money at the time.

AG: Where were your parents living?

CF: My parents were … they came later. My father then, when he came, had a flat in Canfield Gardens.

AG: Also West Hampstead.

CF: Oh, yes. Ja, ja. Gave lessons there, and courses, and all the rest of it. There he stayed until the beginning of the war.

AG: How did you find England and the English when you came here?

CF: Oh, we were terribly impressed. I mean, I always say, I've written it in my book about it, the country was completely and utterly different from what it is today, you wouldn't really recognize it. It was polite, and the Speakers Corner in Hyde Park, and polite bobbies, everything was different. We were very impressed and, of course, we were very, very anxious to get connections with genuine English people, which was very difficult, I mean, they were very reserved. But, interestingly enough, we also did not really become friendly with English Jews, because English Jews, what they did for us financially was indescribably marvellous, but they didn't like us. It was a cultural gap or whatever it was. And they said, of course, we were born assimilators. And they said, 'If you hadn't assimilated, Hitler wouldn't have happened', which, of course, is an idiotic thing to say, you see. But they were slightly hostile towards us, I mean, it was quite funny, very unexpected.

Tape 2: 17 minutes 41 seconds

AG: Did you experience this personally?

CF: Not in a very marked way, no. Not that people were openly hostile towards me, but I mean they didn't want to know us. But, of course, you were very, very anxious to become as British as possible as early as possible, you see. But interestingly enough, I had one friend, in fact it was the son of Karl Abraham, whom I mentioned before, who decided he wanted to become completely English and cut himself off from all intercourse with fellow refugees. And we thought this was very wrong at the time, although it was fully understandable, he wanted to and he succeeded in becoming very English. I've lost track of him, but I mean he really married an English wife and had no connections with refugees at all.

AG: And did you find the British, apart from their reserve, friendly or hostile?

CF: Friendly, friendly. They didn't understand the position, you see. I mean, I remember that when I was a trainee somebody came to me … "I hope we and the Germans will soon march against France", he said to me [laughs]. They didn't really realize it. But to some extent refugees were still a novelty in England, you see, and they were looked at as an object of curiosity. And I knew nothing of England. I remember that in that firm I was shown round by one of the employees, who showed me the various people and he pointed to an office boy and said, "And this is the son of Hobbs", and I said, "Who is Hobbs?" And that finished me in my opinion in that firm. I had no idea.

AG: Did you move a lot in refugee circles once more refugees started arriving?

CF: Yes, I mean, it's interesting that. Even today, how refugees stick together, I mean, I don't regard myself as a refugee any more, I regard myself not as English but as completely British, but most of my friends, as far as they are alive, are still former refugees, and also some English Jews, but mainly, mainly former refugees. It's quite interesting, I can't understand why this should be, but the fact is that we stuck together. But basically the first time in England was the nicest time because everybody was on the ground floor, the basement, we were all the same and there was no difference between any of us, never mind what they'd been in Germany, and that of course changed when people started to get [work] permits. The interesting thing was that in most cases – I mean, there are some notable exceptions – but in most cases, people became precisely what they had been in Germany. You see, if they'd been a lawyer, you were a lawyer, if they'd been a lowly employee, they stayed a lowly employee, and so on. There were exceptions, as I say, a cousin of mine was very friendly with the parents, with the Weidenfelds, who came from Vienna, he was some quite penniless Jewish scholar, and they always complained about their son, that he had such wild ideas beyond his station, of course he then became Lord Weidenfeld. But these were the exceptions, I mean, there's no doubt about it. It's interesting that people stick to their own class. And there were of course people who could not adapt. And during the war, I was on war work, but there was in our office somebody asked my partner "Would you employ an old man – probably an old man of 50, I suppose - who doesn't know what to do, employ him as an office boy?" The man left after a few weeks, he just couldn't … it wasn't a very good job anyway – but he couldn't adapt himself. After the war he went back to Germany and became what he had been before, a Reichsgerichtsrat. So … But some people just couldn't manage adapting. They, of course, became objects of charity. I mean … Self Aid of Refugees, and so on.

Tape 2: 23 minutes 20 seconds

AG: Oh yes, I was going to ask you when you became aware of, or became involved with Self Aid of Refugees first.

CF: Well, I was never terribly involved, you see, because I was at the time, I was of Hungarian nationality. I'd lost my German nationality, of course, but to my surprise I'd kept my Hungarian one and so I was not interned. But apart from that I had absolutely no connection with Hungarians, I didn't speak Hungarian, or don't speak Hungarian. I know my wife went to the Hungarian Embassy for some passports to renew, and somebody started to talk to her and she got terribly embarrassed because she didn't understand a word. So I was a German-Jewish refugee, but by passport luckily I was a Hungarian. Which, however, did not qualify me for joining the army when war broke out. I applied for the army and stated I was Hungarian, but formerly German, and they refused me, I'm glad to say. And then some months later they wrote and said, "Now you can join". I had already started war work and my enthusiasm had somewhat waned, so I didn't.

AG: What sort of war work did you do?

CF: Very minor indeed. I went into a government training course, where you learned absolutely nothing.

AG: Where was this?

CF: It was, I forget where it was, somewhere in … no, I can't remember. But, I mean, they taught you engineering … but nothing …

AG: It wasn't in Park Royal, by any chance, was it?

CF: Park Royal, yes, Park Royal.

AG: … because I've come across people who were there, yes.

CF: And they were worth nothing. And then I got a job as an unskilled … it was in the 'goods in' department, checking goods. I was very conscientious, and you know, everybody who wanted could make a lot of money by becoming a sub-contractor to some manufacturer and making some parts and they were the most shoddy goods produced possible. My firm was – I forget their name even – they did tools, electric tools for tank crews and so on, for running repairs, and so they have to be very precise. And these parts arrived, and I had to measure them. And I threw out half of them because they just weren't up to standard, which the foreman noticed and accused me of being a third columnist and put them all back and passed them. So what these things were like when they were used, I don't know. Wolf Machine Tools, was the firm called.

AG: Do you remember where they were?

CF: Also down there, somewhere in … no, I can't remember.

AG: No, it doesn't matter. Was this in the early part of the war, in the phoney war?

CF: That was in the phoney war, yes.

AG: Can you describe when the war got serious, what were you doing when …?

CF: My wife expected our baby and we decided – probably also for egoistic reasons - that it wasn't safe to have this boy in London.

AG: You moved to … where did you say you moved to?

CF: Berkhamsted. So we were out of … well, it was still the phoney war. And eventually we … my son was born actually in London, you see - nothing happened, and so we went, my wife went to a London nursing home – and we decided to move back to London because nothing was happening …

AG: So this was 1940 or …?

CF: Yes, 1940.

AG: So, what – just for the tape – what's your son's name?

CF: … What?

AG: Your son's name.

CF: Oh, Michael.

AG: Right. Actually it was Charles Michael, but I wanted to have - in case he ever became a violinist - I wanted the same name as my father, Carl. So I called him Charles and my daughter Carol. But it didn't work. And anyway we moved back on precisely the day the Blitz started. And then I – you weren't born then, were you?

AG: No.

CF: So, it's a funny thing, one was afraid for the moment, but generally, I mean, one was living under the constant threat, but one wasn't afraid, it's very funny. If nobody is afraid, you aren't afraid, you see. But I was very worried about my son, who was a baby, and very good friends of ours, who were evacuated, offered to take him. And so, as I say, it was the happiest day of the war for me when I got this boy out of London. But we went to all the …

Tape 2: 29 minutes 0 second

AG: Where were you living then?

CF: We were in North London, in Chessington Court, that's near the Naked Lady.

AG: Oh yes, Temple Fortune, I know.

CF: Of course, comparatively little happened up there. I always suggested that we should have a lighted sign on top saying "London ten miles South", but the suggestion wasn't accepted. And we were on the ground floor and people came to us, I mean, to be on the ground floor if possible, they didn't want to go to the shelter any more. And we slept in a little hall, from about here to there, you got ten people in, if you didn't fall asleep, you fainted, because there was no window or anything. And nothing much happened. And then we … my son was outside London. Of course, we visited him as often as we could. And I remember we came back by bus through South London, and there was a terrific thing going on, fires … bombs exploding near and whatever, and the air raid wardens were so calm. So I said to my wife, "They must have that every day." But, in fact, we heard afterwards that was the first real fire raid on London. They behaved wonderfully, I

mean, the civilian population was terrific. And, as I say, if one panics, they all panic, if the majority anyway don't show any fear, you don't show any fear, do you?

Tape 2: 30 minutes 50 seconds

AG: How did you manage travelling into work though?

CF: Well, in the beginning I was in Berkhamsted, it was still possible to use a car, there were no restrictions - in fact, it was a petrol restriction, but they were not very serious - and we went to work, my partner and I, who lived also in Berkhamsted, every morning and went back in the evening. I once applied – I mean, we had of course the curfew, you see, at 9 o'clock I think you had to be in – and I once applied and said, "Can I stay the night in my office in London to work", which was refused, and at 12 o'clock at night a policeman appeared to check whether I had complied with it.

AG: Goodness.

CF: Ja, they were quite strict.

AG: Where was your office?

CF: In Baker Street originally. We then were bombed out, or not bombed out, but there was opposite a bomb and so it was full of glass and you couldn't stay there any more, and we went actually to Finchley Road round the corner, we found a … No, we first went into my flat, as a matter of fact. We were only about three or four people, we were a very small firm, but we had a three-room flat, transferring the whole office there, I mean, my wife and I lived in one room and it was terrible. But you did all these things automatically, everybody did them, so you did them, you see, and then we found a flat in that block on the top floor and put the office there. And then they gave us notice, they didn't want us any more, it was a very Jewish flat. There it was the only time I had some hostility from English Jews was in Chessington Court, which was a very Jewish [block], and they wanted us out …

AG: Because you were Continentals?

CF: Well, they could probably get much more for that flat, you see. And then we moved very near here, Finchley Road, I forget what the Mansions were. There we stayed until the war finished.

AG: But what was it like during the Blitz, I mean travelling into Baker Street or …?

CF: Well, the Blitz was mainly at night, you see, I mean there weren't many bombs really during the day.

AG: No, but did the transport function, I mean the Underground?

CF: Well, we went by car most of the time.

AG: Oh, I see. Yes.

CF: Yes, but I forget whether there was petrol rationing or not, but if so, we had enough. And I remember, it's quite interesting, the English psyche – we of course often gave lifts to people when … - we picked somebody up on the day France surrendered, which was a terrible day obviously, the war in Europe was lost and all the rest of it, and we talked about that obviously, and he said, "Well, that's very good, now we know where we stand." Well, I don't want to know where we stand. They had a … I mean the English didn't think that they would lose the war. That wasn't shared by refugees, I must admit.

AG: Did you fear that Hitler might invade?

CF: Ja, I did. And I went to my doctor and said, "Could I please have some poison, so I could poison myself and my family?" [Medical brand name] of all things … very old-fashioned, and he said, "Well, wait for it." Yes, I certainly … well, there was really nothing … I would say the Allies didn't really win the war, Hitler lost it by going against Russia. I'm quite sure if he hadn't done that, he wouldn't have lost it. But that was very funny, we learned at school the most dangerous thing is the two-front war. Why someone should do that voluntarily, I honestly don't know.

Tape 2: 35 minutes 19 seconds

AG: Do you remember the Battle of Britain?

CF: Of course, I mean you saw that. It was mainly outside London, I mean, but you went about and all the windows obviously were protected by – I don't know what they put on there …

AG: Tape.

CF: … and unless something happened in your immediate neighbourhood, you did not get afraid. If something was overhead, yes, of course. Then later the buzz bombs, I mean, they were coming and you dived under some table or something, and then the question was, when will they cut out? You see, because when they cut out, that was the moment when they would fall down. So that was a very tense ten seconds, you see, till you heard the explosion somewhere else … good! And then when they had the V2s, which of course were not officially recognized, the first we heard one, they said "A gas station has exploded". It was an interesting time. It showed the British people in a better way than it has ever, ever been before or since. They were marvellous, the people, they were really marvellous. There was no question of … there was crime, no doubt, but nothing really … you could go out in the evening, you weren't afraid, I mean, you could do everything. There was a spirit of something which has not been reproduced ever since. I mean, it shouldn't have taken a war to do this, I know, but it was in itself as the war was, it was a marvellous experience in a way.

AG: One thing I haven't asked you is what all this time was happening to your sister, your elder sister.

CF: My sister was in … she actually already emigrated before Hitler and was first in Strasbourg and then she moved to Paris and then of course when the Nazis came in they moved to unoccupied France. And then they went illegally over the frontier into Switzerland and were interned there. And my parents got them out, of course. And after the war – I think it was after the war – she went to America and stayed there. And complained terribly to me in a letter – there was still some rationing or something in America – how bad the food was, whereas in Switzerland you could have everything, you see, and she even thought America was terrible. Because we were sitting there really with no coal, no food … well, food, we never starved, I mean. I think that they handled the situation wonderfully, for the simple reason that they never said, "We are going to get this or the other", they only said, "We are going to get a load of" whatever it was, when it had already arrived. And so you trusted them absolutely and we never felt any deprivation or hunger or anything. They handled that marvellously well.

AG: You talked about your partner. Who was he?

CF: He was a man called Leroy.

AG: Was he also a refugee?

CF: He was a refugee. Yes, he was at that time … he was older than I and had much more business than I, and suggested that we should go together and we went together, and …

AG: What was the firm called?

CF: Leroy, Flesch and Company.

AG: Right.

Tape 2: 40 minutes 0 second

CF: The telegraphic address, Fleroy, which we had difficulty in getting because it sounded a bit like Fleurop, the, you know … Anyway, we were in Baker Street, we … our gross income when we got together was £1900 a year. Out of which we - as I say, I didn't really make ends meet – had to pay ourselves and three or four employees and rent and everything else, so … it's amazing how you can …. No, it wasn't nineteen hundred, it was £2900, I'm sorry. Still, not very much. And then my partner's wife went to America and after the war she came back and hated it here and persuaded him to emigrate to America and I as a junior partner was suddenly landed with a firm on my own, you see, but at that time the economy went up and so on and it wasn't all that difficult. Although I must say, if I think of the mistakes I made. I wouldn't go into insurance to start with, or if I did, I would do everything differently.

AG: It doesn't seem to have turned out too badly.

CF: Sorry?

AG: It doesn't seem to have turned out too badly.

CF: It hasn't turned out too badly, but I worked very hard for it, you see, I must say. Insurance is a very difficult business to be in. But it is more difficult today because it's surrounded by red tape. Insurance is terrible. But in between I went to Lloyd's. Actually my business, in case you're interested … we were then asked by another firm to amalgamate with them and go public, and I was very keen on that, you know, public company, yes, yes, the Stock Exchange and all the rest of it. And we went public. What we didn't know was that this firm was already at that time some way in the decline and although we had our accounts scrutinized and all the rest of it, I think I could have sued, if one had thought of it at the time, our financial advisers for negligence, for not having noticed that. And that firm went from bad to worse. So eventually I decided that I couldn't stay and I said that unless we alter this, that and the other I resign, and I was quite convinced that they would accept what I suggested, but they didn't and I resigned. And unfortunately I had been instrumental, or had been the one who suggested we should have a non-competition agreement in case somebody left, so the result was that for two years I couldn't work, or not in my business, and I did all sorts of things.
Actually, I sold my shares and at that time, I was in my late 50s, I could have retired on a capital which wouldn't have been sufficient for an income today for a yearly income, but I could have retired, but I never thought of retiring, I must say, so I didn't have very good experiences with the rest of my career until I resigned again from some people I was with and at 70 took a job. It was very funny, I didn't want to end my career like that, I had enough money, I didn't want to sit at home and do nothing and I wrote to the twelve largest insurance brokers offering my services as a bilingual … everybody wanted to get into the Common Market that way, it wasn't very difficult. Of course, I couldn't say my age, I was 69 at the time, my job started at 70, I was 69, so I said, "I have decades of experience", and half the people fell for that and gave me an interview, and then of course it was the difficulty in having a very thick skin when they saw you totter in, you see. I remember one chap said, "Jesus!", when he saw me.
But I got two offers. I didn't want much money, I didn't need much money, and I got two offers, funnily enough, one with a firm who had thrown me out as a spy, and the office boy who had been shown to me as the son of Hobbs had just retired as their Managing Director. And anyway, there was another firm I preferred – I didn't want to go back to them anyway – and that was the most interesting time, I wouldn't say the most interesting time, but a very interesting time. I built up business with Germany for them, or rather - built up, I mean it was already there – I serviced it. And of course there was the great difficulty, should one or should one not deal with Germans? My view always has been that the present generation might have behaved, or probably would have behaved as badly as the Nazis, but they didn't, and you cannot blame them for it.
So I took that job and it was interesting … I dealt only with German insurance companies and brokers and normally I arrived at some business thing, I travelled a lot, and people

would say after five minutes, "You speak marvellous German, where did you learn it?", you see. And I said, "As a Jew in Germany until they kicked me out", and then I waited for the reaction, which never came. I mean, I've got good friends in Germany, I must say. And then, at a business lunch somebody said to me, "You like it here and you've got many friends", and I said "Yes". "Why don't you come back?" And I said, "I could never come back to a country which behaved as the Germans did to my race", and they swallowed that. It was very … after we had treated the Germans during the war, the end of the war, in the most terrible way, there were never any reproaches. It was quite funny. They never, never complained, they had quite a guilt complex about that.

Tape 2: 47 minutes 33 seconds

AG: When did you first go back to Germany after the war?

CF: Oh, quite early. I had a friend of mine [who] went, and I went, it must have been in the fifties, early fifties, I think. And I just went to … I went to Frankfurt, I think. And there was a funny thing, I was sitting there in a café waiting for my friend to come, so I watched the door and – I forget where it was – and somebody came, usually with a briefcase under his arm, you see, which the Germans always do, and I said "Oh, that's one of ours" and "That's one of ours!" I suddenly said, "They're all one [of ours]…" [laughs] So that brought home to me the basic difference which still existed between refugees and British-born people. You see, the first generation of refugees can never hundred per cent assimilate.

AG: But you still associated them very much with Germans in clothes and appearance.

CF: Yes, quite, I thought I was sitting at Cosmo.

AG: Oh, did you go to the Cosmo?

CF: Of course.

AG: Do you remember the people who used to go there and what was it like?

CF: Cosmo, it was a refugee restaurant, I mean, one of the waitresses was my client, I mean. I once, it was a very informal atmosphere, I always tell the story that there was a waitress called, Frau Liebeskind she was called, and I said, "What soups have you got?" and she said, "Tomato and minestrone". I said, "I'll have the minestrone". "Well, take the tomato, it's better," I said, "All right, I'll take the tomato". And then she came with the soup and it was minestrone. And I said, "I thought you promised me tomato". "Ich hab mich umentschlossen", she said, "I've changed my mind". And the funny thing was, the original owner there, his mother sat at the old cash desk, you see, and she always rang up the wrong thing. You paid there 2/6, 3/6, 4/6, so somebody came with a bill of 4/6, she would ring up 3/6, you see. Nobody said a word, and she got away with it for years, for tax reasons.

AG: Ah, I see, yes, yes.

CF: I know the widow of the last … I know the last owner, in fact …

AG: Who's that?

CF: Madeleine Manheimer, do you know her? Yes, you play bridge with her.

AG: Yes, I do.

CF: Well, she didn't make a success of it. Now I think it's either closed or something, I'm not sure.

AG: It is, yes.

CF: But it was quite… If you had the money, you went to the Cosmo.

AG: Did you go to other … were there other centres of refugee life around Finchley Road?

CF: Well, … just cabarets there, what's his name, I forget his name now, there were some very good cabarets there, German cabarets …

AG: There was the Blue Danube Club.

CF: Yes, quite right, The Blue Danube, quite right.

AG: Did you go there?

CF: Yes. Oh yes.

AG: Do you remember anything you saw?

CF: Well, there was … I forget the name now, my memory for names is terrible now at my age. There was one comic who was quite enormous, enormously witty, I saw quite a number of people … Otherwise one went to the theatre if one could and so on. There wasn't all that much refugee cultural life, I didn't go to the Club Forty [Club 43], I must say, that has bypassed me, I must say.

AG: What about your involvement with Self Aid and the Association of Jewish Refugees?

CF: Well, I became a member, of course, and I – it never amounted to anything really – I became, I think I became, I became a Board member. I'm still, I think I'm still Honorary Vice Chairman of the AJR, I believe, yes, because they chucked me out when I was 70, you see. And I said, "That's a big mistake in my opinion. You shouldn't chuck out people

who are a direct contact with the original refugees," But they did, and some other people who were in the same position as I – I think I'm Honorary Vice Chairman …

Tape 2: 52 minutes 47 seconds

AG: When did you come on to the AJR?

CF: I don't know. I can't remember. They asked me. I also was for some time on the Management Committee for the [Old Age] Homes …

AG: Oh, yes.

CF: … for some time. I went to all the difficulties of building the … not the Homes, what is this …?

AG: Otto Schiff House, or Leo Baeck [House]?

CF: No, no, the house where they had service flats.

AG: Oh, is that Eleanor Rathbone [House]?

CF: Yes, Eleanor Rathbone. And then of course I was in the Self Aid of Refugees. I eventually became Chairman. It didn't amount to much either. And I always said, "Let's amalgamate with the AJR". And there were the people who – very nice people, very dedicated people, who really were the money source for the Self Aid, said, "No, we don't want to have anything to do with these people!" Why, I don't know. They were very jealous of their function. I always think that charity is bad for the character.

AG: But Self Aid is actually older than the AJR, isn't it? It was founded …

CF: It's now been fully incorporated.

AG: It started earlier. Didn't it start before the war? I don't know much about Self Aid.

CF: I can't remember when. I got into it because for years I organized the annual concert.

AG: Ah, of course.

CF: That's why it was my function. They were very good concerts partly, some of them. Of course, they are all dead now, but at that time I still had a lot of friends or people who did it for nothing, including one year – of course it wasn't a friend – I had the idea of having Elisabeth Bergner read Fräulein Else, which is a short story by Schnitzler. And there was first music, and in the second part it was all Bergner. And she came, and immediately the microphone went [fell] into her bosom, it was irrecoverable. It was not good at all, although I mean I liked it because I adored Elisabeth Bergner. And after the performance I went into the Queen's (?) Room [the concerts were held in the Royal

Festival Hall], you see, and said how wonderful it was, “No, it was terrible”, she said. I said, “No, it was very good”, and I bent down and kissed her. And I said that if I had done this while she was still a young woman, I would have died on the spot, you see. To kiss a gorgeous … like Miss Bergner. She was quite a nice person actually … I had a lot of musicians as clients, I met quite a lot of musicians, and I insured really quite a number. I was mainly, or very much concerned with what’s called contingency insurance, which was mainly against the cancellation of performances, you see. When I was in a job, we even reinsured the World Cup. So we were quite successful then. In between … Is the tape finished?

AG: Go ahead.

CF: In between I was with all the concert agencies together, there was hardly an artist whom I didn’t insure at some time or other. I mean, I didn’t meet these agents personally, the artist came through the agent. Because if you had to cancel a concert it cost a hell of a lot of money, you see.

AG: We ought to stop there because the tape is coming to an end.

TAPE 3

AG: Carl Flesch, Tape 3. Carl, I’d like to ask you a little about your family life, please. We left this when your son, Michael, was still very small, when he was evacuated out of London during the war. Where did he go to school?

CF: Well, he first went to the King Alfred School …

AG: Oh yes, in Hampstead.

CF: Then we – both children went – and I then tried to get him into Highgate School and couldn’t, because as I say they had the numerus clauses. It wasn’t anti-Semitism, it was just – the headmaster explained it to me - they were a Christian foundation and they could only take that many Jews. I don’t think they would get away with it today, I should say. But that was the time when I then decided I would put him into Gordonstoun, which was very easy for me, and he did only moderately well, he didn’t really know what to do. We had no particular preferences and so – my business wasn’t all that good for a career really – and I stuck him into a solicitor’s office for a week, which he hated. Then he studied at some institute, economics or something. Then he came home one day and said, “I’ve enrolled in an Inn”. It was the wigs which attracted him, I think, and he then had dinners, and so on, and studied at the London University. And just to see what it was like, after six weeks, he took his first exam in criminal law and passed. And from that moment on he never looked back.
He was a very outstanding student, passed all his exams with honours. Then he went to America, there was something called the Bigelow award or something, where graduates taught first year undergraduates the rudiments of English law. He went there for about six months and then he came back and he then went into some chambers, which he didn’t

like at all – he was the best guilty pleader in London, because the A.A. and so on sent these boys out to plead guilty to traffic offences, you see, at 3 guineas a time, or 2 guineas. And he then said to me, "Look, I'm bored. Do you mind if I go on studying, I want to study tax law." I said, "Yes, all right, if you want." And he then was able to join a very good chambers, where he still is and is now one of the leading QCs in that field here really, I mean, a terrific career. And he's got two children.

AG: Oh yes, what do the two children do?

CF: Well, he's got one daughter, Dina, and she also studied, first Psychology, and interviewed me about old age for an essay – I said, "I'm the wrong person, I'm successful ageing" – anyway she did it and she was quite a young girl at the time, and she rang me up the next day, "Opa, I forgot to ask you something, what do you think about dying?" I said, "Not very much." And anyway, and then she didn't like Psychology and went over to Law, and also went to a solicitor's, and she married, and now she's got two children. At the moment she doesn't do anything. My daughter was also at King Alfred School …

AG: When was your daughter Carol born?

CF: Carol, she died unfortunately.

AG: I know… When was she born?

Tape 3: 4 minutes 28 seconds

CF: She was born in 1946. She died at … she was 56. It was terrible. She became a … She was terribly lazy, passed every exam, and her headmistress at the King Alfred said, "I wish Carol would sometimes fail so that she knows how difficult it is", but she never did. And so she then became a social worker and ended up at the children's clinic, what is it called, St. Ormond Street, Great Ormond Street, and then unfortunately she suddenly died … of cancer. And my grandchildren, as I say, funnily enough my grandson is a very orthodox Jew, he is now in Israel as a matter of fact. He went to Israel as a young boy … in a Kibbutz and came back completely converted, how I don't know. I was once in hospital and he visited me on a shabbes, and first he walked from Marble Arch to Hampstead, where I was at Wellington [Hospital]. And Wellington has two swing doors, you had to wait till one person opened the swing door for him to go through, then he stood for half an hour between the two swing doors till somebody opened it again, I mean, I think it was crazy, I can't help it, but he is very happy about it.
The funny thing is he's with McKinsey, the … - he is a very brilliant boy – McKinsey, the management consultants, who … of course, their watchword is efficiency, you see, and religion is the most inefficient, in this respect, the most inefficient, Jewish religion, the most inefficient thing you can imagine, you see. And I always wonder how he combines these two attitudes, but he does. And he is now in Israel. And his sister became … actually she was a cub reporter at the Jewish Chronicle for some time and then she married and has got a child and is doing nothing. And Michael's son is at a dot com firm in gambling – I'm not very happy about it, but he seems to be doing quite well.

AG: Did both Michael and Carol marry Jews?

CF: Yes.

AG: British Jews.

CF: Yes, in fact it was quite funny, because Michael married first and his family is a very prominent Jewish family in South Africa, his wife's family, in South Africa. And somehow since … it was very difficult to prove our - to the satisfaction of the Jews – our … that Michael really was Jewish. It was very difficult to find a synagogue that would marry him, and eventually we did it at home. And the rabbi, who was – what was his name? It was a German rabbi, who had in fact been in the same regiment as my father-in-law in the First World War – was standing there holding the chuppah, and he then did a tremendous eulogy on the family of my daughter-in-law, about whom one could say very much, I mean, and then he turned to Michael and said, "And you, my son, are a lawyer". And that was all he said about him. There was nothing else Jewish you could say about him.

Tape 3: 8 minutes 44 seconds

AG: I wonder who the rabbi was. It was a refugee rabbi?

CF: A refugee rabbi. Salzberger

AG: Oh, it was Salzberger, who was at Belsize Square Synagogue, yes.

CF: Hm?

AG: He was at Belsize Square.

CF: At Belsize Square, quite right, yes. And then my daughter also married at home. And funnily enough, the family she married into … it was an orthodox Jewish, it was an English Jewish … and the family weren't happy about it. So I went to the Dayan Grünfeld, I don't know whether you knew him, whom I knew from Self Aid, not, not Self Aid, from charity work, and I asked him, "Is it all right to marry at home?" He said, "You can marry wherever you like, as long as you are registering it in a synagogue afterwards". So the family couldn't say anything after that.

AG: Just to pick up on one point, you said that you …

CF: Sorry?

AG: Just to pick up on one point, you said that your father and Rabbi Salzberger were in the same regiment …

CF: My father-in-law. My father-in-law …

AG: Oh, your father-in-law..

CF: Sorry, my father-in-law, yes

AG: Ah yes, because I assume your father was exempt …

CF: My father was terribly short-sighted and was several times, was gemustert [summoned for a medical] in Berlin, but he always was … never was accepted. In fact, he was so short-sighted that when he finished his studies at the Vienna Conservatoire, he was applying for a job in the orchestra there, the head of the orchestra … the opera orchestra … the head was a terrific anti-Semite and he didn't like short-sighted people and it was declined, and he noted it and said, "Jew, blind".

AG: Dear, dear.

CF: And so my poor father, luckily, because he probably would have got stuck in Vienna as an orchestra musician, who knows how far he would have got. I wouldn't be there, you see. It's very funny, I am really the product of some anti-Semitism.

AG: Do you know which regiment it was that your father-in-law …?

CF: I have no idea.

AG: Well, it's just out of interest. Anyway, we were actually talking about your family and children and grandchildren. While we're on that subject, I wondered if there was any particular message that you would like to pass on to any family members, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, who might watch the video of this interview?

CF: I must confess, I have no message, I mean. And, you know, I think the … I don't know what's the … in other families, in my family, the voice of the oldies doesn't weigh very much. It's probably, probably a reaction to the fact that in my family, my father's voice was so overwhelming. I really said, when I had children, there's one thing I'm going to do, I'm going to do everything different from what my parents did, and especially I'm going to show them from the outset that I'm a very ordinary fallible mortal. And that I did, and I would say that I succeeded beyond my greatest expectations, you see. So I don't know how seriously they take me, but it's a very informal attitude, and I don't think, I have no really wise words to say to the next generation, and if I did, they wouldn't listen to them.

Tape 3: 12 minutes 46 seconds

AG: One last question. You have been retired for some time, how do you pass the time, what sort of hobbies and pastimes do you have?

CF: When I retired from that job that I had, I was 78 and then I had nothing to do as such. I started writing, which was really on the basis of the fact that my mother had died meanwhile, I got a lot of letters to my father from famous contemporaries and I thought that there might be a book in it. And I wrote a book with the title “And do you also play the violin?”, which was the first question one was always asked by people, which was very successful as a matter of fact, with the critics, not, I am a very unsuccessful author, I’m afraid, but it had rave notices. And then I had nothing to do. And my next book was on insurance really, which of course for an unknown author to place a book was very, very difficult. I tried very hard and had written to all insurance firms without success and then I suddenly got a telephone call from one man and said, “I want to publish your book”, and I said “Have you read it?” and he said “No”. I said, “Shouldn’t you first read it?” And so anyway, he read it and published it. Then I wrote a book about refugees and then I wrote a book of essays, all as I say quite good, I think, but not successful, I mean as far as financial sales are concerned.

AG: Yes, for the tape, what was the book about the refugees called?

CF: The book really was called “Where do you come from?” And it was actually Jewish Care that put it on tape, not very well, I mean, but it’s on tape there. Whether anybody listens to it, I don’t know …

AG: So, you’re the author of four books.

CF: I’m the author of four books. I think that’s the end, I mean, at 96. I’m writing sort of my memoirs, as it were. I find it very difficult to do nothing, I’m a workaholic, lazy as I was as a child and student, I must do something. Doing nothing sends me to sleep, whereas being active keeps me awake and fresh. So I do that and I play bridge a lot, as you know, and so I keep myself going that way.

AG: Yes, I know from personal experience that you’re a very enthusiastic bridge player, a better one than I am, so …

CF: Not at all, no.

AG: I think so. Anyway, we won’t argue about that. I think we’ve probably finished for the main part of the interview, so I’ll just say thank you very much indeed, Carl Flesch, for doing the interview. Thank you.

CF: A pleasure.

Tape 3: 16 minutes 0 second

AG: What are the buildings in this photograph?

CF: This is the Judengasse in Frankfurt am Main. And one of the house, I'm not absolutely certain which, they were all very narrow houses, is the Haus zur Flasche, where the Flesch family really originated, or where the name comes from.

AG: And how did you come by this photograph?

CF: Frankfurt sent it to me. I did not really think that there would be a photo of that at all, so I thought, is there any engraving of the Judengasse? And instead of which they sent me this photo, which was very nice, and even pointed out which house it was, but I must admit I've forgotten which one it is, they all look so very much alike.

AG: Thank you very much. Who is the person in this photograph?

CF: This is my father, and that was taken - he must have been around 50 - it was taken in Berlin by a professional photographer. I think it's a very good one, I mean, very imaginative, showing him playing, and I like it very much. There are of course numerous photographs, I mean artists always have lots of photographs which they give to admirers and also lots of sketches, paintings were made of him, but I think this is a very good example of how he looked and how he played.

AG: So that's early 1920s if he was 50.

CF: I think it was probably late 1920s, he was born in '73, so he must have been over 50, I think.

AG: Good, thank you. Who is the person in this photograph?

CF: This is my mother. That was I think taken, must have been taken at about the same time. And she was a very pretty young girl, I think you can still see that she would have been very good-looking. Also, I have lots of photographs, but I thought that this was a very representative one of her, where she was in middle age and still good-looking, and it was the right one for this collection.

AG: And this is also in Berlin?

CF: It was in Berlin, yes.

AG: What is the violin in this picture?

CF: This was my father's main violin, a Strad, Brancaccio. He had that for many decades, and I don't quite know when he bought it, but it was the one he played most of his concerts, well, practically all of his concerts on. He had to sell it unfortunately in 1929, when he lost all his money and more than he had at the New York Stock Exchange Crash and he sold it to a banker friend, Franz von Mendelssohn, who said that he could buy it back for the same price at any time, but it never came to it. But in fact Mendelssohn, the bank, did not sell it but kept it in their vaults and the violin was destroyed when during

the war in an air raid on Berlin that building of the bank was destroyed and the violin went with it, so it no longer exists.

AG: And how did you come by this photograph. Do you know where it's from?

CF: The photograph I found amongst my father's papers, I mean, it hasn't got a special history. No doubt he once had it taken, or it was one of the photos he saw when he bought the violin, I don't know, I'm afraid.

AG: Thank you very much. What is the medal here?

CF: It's the official Carl Flesch International Violin Competition medal, which was given to the victor, to the first prize winner. Actually it was done by the also refugee artist, Benno Elkan, the sculptor. And the interesting thing about it, that was during the war, and I just could not get hold of a profile picture of my father, so we sent a number of en face pictures to Elkan and when the result came I was absolutely amazed how very well he had reconstructed the profile of my father. Quite first-class.

AG: Thank you very much. Who are the people in this photograph, please?

CF: This is my late wife, Ruth, and my son, Michael, at probably three days old. It's a particularly nice photograph, I love it, and I call it Michael Flesch QC with his mother, because Michael then became a very well-known QC. But she was a lovely woman, and it really gave the way she looked and the way she was.

AG: When was it taken?

CF: Immediately after birth, so it was in 1940.

AG: And where was it taken?

CF: It must have been taken still at the nursing home. At that time women stayed in nursing homes a bit longer than today, so she was there for about a week, I think.

AG: Where was the nursing home?

CF: The nursing home was in Hampstead somewhere, I forget exactly where. It was in Hampstead.

AG: Thank you. Thanks very much. Who are the people in this photograph?

CF: That was really an old family photograph of my wife, my children and myself. The children were of course still quite young, so were we for that matter, but it shows the whole family together.

AG: Do you remember where it was taken?

CF: I think almost certainly it was taken at my house, we lived in Highgate at the time, and it was taken there, in the garden.

AG: Do you know roughly when it would have been taken?

CF: It must have been taken, I should say, in the mid-50s or the beginning of the 50s, or mid-50s.

AG: Thank you. Who is the person in this photograph?

CF: This is my late daughter, Carol, who unfortunately died in her fifties, but she was a young woman at that time and I think it's a very nice photograph to show how she looked.

AG: Do you remember where it was taken?

CF: Frankly, I think it was taken at their home, as far as I can remember, but I'm not sure. She gave it to me. I didn't take it myself or I wasn't present when it was taken.

AG: Where was their home?

CF: Their home was at that time also in Hampstead, and later in South London. That might have been in South London, as a matter of fact.

AG: Thank you very much. Who are the people in this photograph?

CF: This is my son, Michael, and his family on the day when he was made QC. So it's his wife, Gail, and his two children, Dina and Daniel. And it was taken in his office, in his chambers.

AG: And when was he, when about …

CF: It was in the early 1980s, as far as I recall.

AG: Thank you very much.