

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	196

Interviewee Surname:	Barnett
Forename:	Ruth
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	23 January 1935
Interviewee POB:	Berlin, Germany

Date of Interview:	28 November 2016
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	2 hours 27 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV196
NAME: Ruth Barnett
DATE: 28th November 2016
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 28th of November 2016, and we are conducting an interview with Mrs. Ruth Barnett. And my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.

Can you please tell me your name?

I'm Ruth Barnett.

And when were you born?

I was born in 1935, in Berlin.

Thank you, Ruth. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the Refugee Voices Project. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background please?

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here. My family were in Berlin. Both my parents were born in Berlin. My father was Jewish. My mother was not, but it was a very modern Berlin which was I think ahead of everyone else in Europe. It saddens me that both my grandmothers didn't go to their wedding, but I knew my two grandmothers very well. They didn't make any trouble about it after- once they were married. My two grandfathers who probably would have made a lot of trouble, had died long before I was born. Long before my parents married.

My father was a judge at twenty-six, in the court, Landgericht in Berlin. And my mother ran a cinema advertising business. So, they were very well off, and they had a brilliant future in front of them, as did my brother and I. My brother was born in 1932, and I was born in 1935. But... there were three miscarriages altogether. One after I was born, which I've always thought was due to the stress of the time. So that was my little family. We lived in a block of flats in Charlottenburg. At least I think it was in Charlottenburg. I get a bit mixed up. The flat was actually in Cicerostraße in Berlin, which I've visited many times. And where Cicerostraße joins Kurfürstendamm, there's a big round building which was 'Proverb', the business that my mother ran.

[0:03:16]

So that's not where you lived?

We lived in Cicerostraße and the business was just where Cicerostraße joined Kurfürstendamm. So, we lived very nearby it. Of course, that's nowhere near the court. My father would have had to travel to work every day.

And tell us how- do you know how your parents met?

I'm not sure. I'm not sure whether... whether my mother was his secretary... at one time. I'm not sure about that. Whether she developed the business after she met him or already, I don't know.

And the grandparents. What were their professions? Let's say, start with your father.

All I know about my grandfather is that he was in the book binding business. Now I don't know my mother's father. I really don't know anything about him at all. But his father... was a horse dealer. Not in Berlin... somewhere else. Because my mother always said my interest in horses and ability to draw horses was to do with my great-grandfather. That was just a family story.

And you were very little. Do you have any memories from Berlin from growing up, or...?

Well, if you go through eight years of psychoanalysis you get in touch with a lot of memories early on that most people aren't interested enough to get in touch with. So, I can- I have quite a lot of snatches of memory in those first four years.

Can you share them with us?

[0:05:24]

Yes, one very vivid memory is of a toy dog, a stuffed dog that was bigger than I was. And I can remember my aunt - my mother's sister - taking me to the zoo. I loved the zoo. I particularly loved the monkeys in the zoo, because they would clap their hands for you to throw peanuts to them. And... not so nice memories. I remember throwing a tantrum at the station when we were setting off to go to England on the Kindertransport. And I connected that in my mind with being a very, very naughty girl and that's why I was sent away. And if only I could be good, my parents would have me back home. And I never succeeded in being good, because I could never understand what adults wanted of me. I was always getting into trouble, particularly in the first foster family. The rec-tor and his wife. He wanted to do something to rescue children, but I don't think he consulted his wife. She clearly didn't want to have to look after refugee children, which is difficult because they're not sweet and nice. They're homesick and bewildered and... I don't think she knew anything about how to look after children. She was very cruel to us. But the Quakers who sponsored us, realised we were very unhappy and sent us to a lovely Quaker boarding school which really saved our sanity.

[0:07:34]

Just a little bit before we come to England, I just want to stay a little bit more Berlin. You said that the flat- do you remember anything about the physical aspect of where you lived or...?

Very, very little.

And you said your father was a judge. What did he- again, probably not from that time, but then later you must have found out, what did he...?

He- he was particularly interested in patents. He was an authority on patents, and... people went to him for advice. He was very well known and highly thought of. That's why it was so

awful that the Nazis just sacked him simply because he was Jewish. They sacked all the professionals who happened to be Jewish.

And very early on.

In 1933 already. That's how they took over the infrastructure. And perverted it to Nazi ideology. Because they completely override – over-rid - the justice in the legal system. They completely took over teaching. They overrode the Hippocratic Oath in the medical profession.

Yeah... So, he was chucked out in 1933.

Yes, yeah.

But you said he converted, at some point?

At some point he converted to Christianity, because I think he thought that would protect the family, which of course it didn't. And that's why we came to a Christian family. Our parents wanted us to go to a Christian family, because they thought that would protect us from anti-Semitism in England. Which of course it did.

So that was- they were worried about anti-Semitism?

Mnn. It was very strong in England.

But do you think it was- as a judge, do you think your father experienced anti-Semitism pre-1933?

[0:10:07]

Oh, undoubtedly.

Yeah.

Because it was building up. I don't have facts, because it was so difficult for our family to talk with each other once we were reunited after the war.

Yes, so all you have from that time is your own...snippets...?

Largely from what I've learnt from other people, research - that sort of thing.

And your brother? He was a bit older...

He was three years older than me. He was seven when we came to England. Whereas I was four.

Yes, so did he have some other memories, or... from Berlin?

He had a lot of memories of Berlin. But after the war. During the war we didn't talk about it together, even privately, because I thought our mother was dead because she wasn't with us. Whereas Martin knew she was in Berlin, in Germany. But we never talked. We never checked out. And we were very, very close together. But there was a taboo on talking about our pre-war experience, partly because for me any rate I tried to be 101 percent English. I thought if I was really English, I would be accepted ...and... my parents would then realise I was good and take me back.

A burden- a big burden for a child.

Yes, but many of the Kindertransport children felt responsible for rescuing their parents; we were too young for that.

Yes. You couldn't do that. So, let's get to the departure, and how- what- you said you threw a tantrum.

Mnn. Because I recognised that we weren't Zoo station, and I wanted to go to the zoo. I didn't want to go to England.

Bahnhof Zoo, yeah?

Yeah... yeah.

And how- what did they tell you? But your mother came with you... ...actually?

[0:12:26]

Yes – yes. So, I experienced the journey as a family outing. And I've cut out all the background. I only remember my mother, my brother and me. There was a companion who

came with... a companion for my mother, who disappeared as soon as we got to England. And I remember asking, like every child does, "Are we nearly there? Are we nearly there?" And then I remember being woken up, because we'd reached the coast. I remember my brother dragging me along - the platform it must've been. And then I remember this giant boat that was absolutely awesome. And people piling on up the stairway - gangway with suitcases. And I was terrified to go on it, because I was sure it would sink. And I remember my brother saying to me, "Don't be silly. Real boats don't sink." Implying that boats in your bath you could play with and sink them.

So, your tantrum was not because of a separation, because you were with your mother.

No...

But because of the zoo...

Yes. I went regularly to the zoo with my Aunt Ella, my mother's sister, which I enjoyed very much. I spent a lot of time with my Christian granny and Aunt, because I think it was terribly difficult for my parents. ...Martin was quite a precocious child. They could talk and reason with him. But I was too small, and I imagine my granny would look after one but not two children. I know from my own experience; one, you can keep quiet, two - you can't.

And you know it was there, because I know some mixed couples, they were thinking of contemplating divorce, or many other things just... to... for political purposes.

My parents never did. They never divorced. I don't have any evidence, but... Well, a relative - an in-law relative of my mother's - when I went to visit my cousin, his mother- he was the son of my mother's brother. His mother remembered my mother taking part in the Rosenstraße protest march. Now that's hearsay evidence, and we never talked about it.

But at that point your father was not there anymore.

[0:15:56]

That would have been well after he left.

Right.

He left in '39 and that was I think in... '42? [in March 1943]

Yes. And what- tell us what she did. Some people might not know.

A lot of spouses of Jews - particularly Jewish men - formed a protest march when the Nazis arrested their Jewish partners. And- they actually got them released.

Yeah- yeah. ...So, your parents' plan was first to send the two of you on the Kindertransport.

Mnn. I never heard my parents say it. My brother said they did. That the intention was that our mother would come to England, pick us up and join him in Shanghai. It never happened. My aunt, her sister, Aunt Ella, said that my mother would never leave German soil. My mother herself, all I ever heard her say was that she was intending to get out through Switzerland. Because she did end up, at the end of the war, right down on the Swiss-Austrian border. Whether she really intended to get out through Switzerland, I don't know.

But when she came with you, there was no question of her staying here. It was...

No. She was on a presumab- presumably a limited visa. And our father was still in Berlin and she wanted to make sure he got out.

So, when- on what date did you travel?

In February 1939. I- I'm not sure when.

And were you - because you were also with your mother - were you with other children as well?

I don't remember... because I blocked everything out. The memory of a very young child is very tunnel vision. I learnt that. And all my early memories are very tunnel-visioned. Just me and whoever I was with. With no background.

Yeah. But you know that you were sponsored by the Quakers.

The Quakers, yes.

Did you find out later or- you knew what- you came to a...?

[0:18:35]

Well, they'd sent us to a Quaker boarding school when we were so unhappy in the first placement. Martin said that he got- a doctor came to give us vaccinations. And Martin told the doctor he must look at his sister's back, because I had been beaten regularly with a leather strap, and my back was just welts. I remember having to sleep on my tummy. And I think that got out- reported. The doctor would have found out who our sponsor was, and then we were rescued.

So, do you remember first arriving with- to that family?

I do remember arriving. I remember very posh tea-time, sitting around with- I actually remember the cucumber sandwiches! ...Which were so 'old English'.

Certainly, you wouldn't have had that in Berlin. [both laugh]

I doubt it! ...And I thought this was just a grown-up party. I suppose I was used to that in Berlin, being taken to relatives' parties. And the strange thing is, neither Martin who was seven, nor I, remember our mother saying goodbye. So, we don't actually know whether she said goodbye, or whether she slipped out when we were put to bed.

And then you were sent from there to... the boarding school?

We went to the boarding school from there, yes. I also remember our dad visiting us, on his way to Shanghai. He... The- the novel and the film have him going from Hamburg, via England to Shanghai. I don't know whether he set out from Hamburg. I never heard that. [The main character of Ursula Krechel's novel „Landgericht“ (2012), Richard Kornitzer, is based on the life of Robert Michaelis and his family. It was adapted for television “Landgericht - Geschichte einer Familie [DVD]]

[0:21:05]

Where do you think he set off from?

I don't know. But he certainly visited us in England. And that was a very painful experience for me because he took my brother to London for a day. And nobody told me. I didn't see him go. I suddenly found he wasn't there, and I was desperate! Because he was so important.

He was the last link with a sane world. And being in England felt like being in a mad world. And the one pillar I could hang on to had disappeared. I remember being absolutely distraught, and Mrs. Stead and her companion were very angry with me. I didn't get any comfort... And a- a pity, there were no animals. There actually was a dog, but the dog always was in the study with the vicar. Hardly ever saw the dog, except when he took us for walks.

So, it wasn't a children-friendly atmosphere.

It was not a children- a child-friendly place at all. There were three or four other children who came regularly for lessons with us. So, the- Mrs. Stead's companion, Miss Wright, must have been a tutor. She must have tutored... probably several other Kindertransport children in the region, a crash course in English.

But you said you were severely punished for- what were you punished for?

I never understood. The beatings were for wetting my bed. And I tried ever so hard. I remember dreaming... that I went along the corridor to the toilet. This was down in the... air raid shelter. We slept in the air raid shelter at one point. ...And I dreamt I went along the cold corridor on my little bare feet. I sat down on the toilet. I could feel the rim of the toilet, cold on my bottom, and then I woke up in a warm, wet bed. And- I mean, it is so obvious that an unhappy, stressed child, regresses.

Sure.

It stopped, just like that, when we went to the Friends' school, because when I was taken to see the dormitory, I burst out crying. And the matron who was showing me around, took me on her lap and comforted me, and got me to tell her what I was worried about. And she said, "That's nothing. Everybody wets the bed here." And she showed me how every bed in the dormitory had a rubber sheet. And I don't remember - possibly I did - but I- it just disappeared.

[0:24:42]

And what about English? How did you manage to speak English? And did you speak German to your brother, or how did that...?

We were forbidden to speak German. And I remember asking Martin, "Why? It's stupid." And he said, "Well, look around. We're in England and there are English soldiers all around." Which there were, because there were on manoeuvres in Kent. And he said, "If a soldier hears you speaking German, they'll shoot you. Because England is at war with Germany." I believed him; I believed everything my brother said. So that's how you learn a language very quickly, if you speak nothing but... So, by the time we went to the boarding school I was absolutely amazed, because I was the youngest in the reception class, and- and I was the only one who could read and write English! And the teachers knew just what to do with me. They asked me if I liked stories, and I said, "Yes." "What kind of stories?" "Animals." So, they got me from the senior school, a pile of animal story books, and sat me in the corner and I was mousy-quiet and happy.

And that was in the- in the Quaker boarding school. And when you moved to the Quaker boarding school you stayed mostly in the school or where did you...?

Oh, we... we... It was a residential...

Yeah...

... school.

[0:26:22]

So, you were not attached to a family at that point?

We went back to the rectory for the school holidays. But that was just about bearable, because we knew we were going to go back to the lovely school. And I think the Quakers must have given Mrs. Stead a reprimand... because after that, she was not as fierce anymore. Mind you, I had learned English, so I understood what she was saying. Half the trouble was... that you can't understand.

And were you- was there anyone in charge of you? Was there a refugee committee or did you meet anyone who was in charge of your brother and yourself? Or was it the Quaker...?

Only later. ...When we went to the Hoskings, the third family, I remember going with Mrs. Hosking up to London to the refugee - what was the house called? The Refugee Committee

was in Bloomsbury- Bloomsbury House. I remember visiting Bloomsbury House. ...No that must have been earlier... because they gave me- I must have visited several times to Bloomsbury House in between. Because in Bloomsbury House they gave me a lovely blue knitted jacket, which I was very, very fond of. I think it was the first gift I'd had. I don't know.

What- we didn't talk about clothes. What did you bring in your luggage to...?

I don't really remember. ...I mean clothes didn't figure...

No...

... as important. Strangely, clothes have never figured with me. [laughs] I just don't do ...

Any toys, or anything? Any...?

To start with we had loads of toys, and then they were all taken away!

So, in total, how long did you stay with the- with the reverend and his...?

[0:28:46]

I think it must have been about four years. Two years of which we were at the... boarding school.

So, quite a long time.

Quite a long time, yes.

And they had no children?

They had no children; that was half the trouble, because... he was lovely. He was very kindly, gentle and much older than her. But she had no children. So, she really didn't know what she was in for.

Yeah... yeah.

Martin went to visit her, years later. He couldn't- he couldn't persuade me to go. And he came back and said she'd apologise to him. But, no way, was I going to go back there. That was too... too terrifying.

Yeah...

I can fully understand how some people will never go back to Germany. You know, the focal point of terror... just remains... that you don't want to go back there.

Mnn... But the amazing thing is that- that you always together with your brother.

That was tremendously important.

So, you were not separated.

We were never separated. The third foster family... In the second one - which was a lovely family with five children who treated us just the same as their children - we were very happy there, until the doodlebugs came over. And Martin couldn't deal with the doodlebugs, because he knew where Germany was - which I didn't. And he had a map in his mind. And he also knew our mother was there, which I didn't. So, whereas I thought the doodlebugs were exciting, he experienced them as if his mother was throwing bombs at him. And he went really berserk... and had to be moved. And that's why we came to a third family, who- they only wanted to move Martin. But the Hoskings said they wouldn't take one without the other. So, I had to go along as well, which I didn't understand. I had to be separated from my buddy Joan, who was the same age as me in the family.

[0:31:21]

What were they called – sorry - the second foster family?

The Goodricks.

And, where were they?

Also, in Kent, in Horsmonden. And Joan and I were like twins, so I was upset at having to leave her. But of course, we could write, and telephone. And I don't think Martin and I realised, at that time even, how important it was to be together.

So, you didn't really want to go to the third family.

I didn't want to go, but I settled down when I realised it was a farm. And the animals on the farm, I really- I was in seventh heaven with the animals.

Which animals? What did they have, or what did you...?

Oh, they had just about everything. My favourite of course was the horses. The big Suffolk Punch work horses and ponies to go up on the Downs to round up the sheep. There were, there was a dairy herd, and calves and pigs. I had my own Tamworth pigs. And of course, I wanted to be a farmer and raise animals. That was going to be my life!

So, you got very involved; the animals helped you.

Oh, enormously. I felt safe with animals, because animals don't make any demands on you. They accept you, just as you are. And why can't people do that?

And you were- you went to school as well?

Oh yes. That's when I went to Petersfield High School.

How did you manage that in the school? At that point, did you sound English?

Oh yes. I had no accent and I was familiar with everything that went on.

So did you experience any anti-German or anti-Jewish...?

[0:33:29]

Yes... sadly I did. Some of the younger kids - not in my year group. Some of the younger kids found out I'd come from Germany. I don't know how, but they started doing 'Heil Hitler' salutes to me in the playground and calling me a Nazi. And I defended myself by telling them that I couldn't possibly be a Nazi, because I wasn't even German, I was Jewish. I had no idea what Jewish was. But from that moment on, I developed a Jewish identity.

From that moment?

From that moment in the playground. It only happened once; the teachers were hot on it and put a stop to it. But the damage was done. But it... fixed my Jewish identity. But I think it was more than that. Seeing the film of Krechel's novel [see note above] about our family, I realise how alike my father I am. How he... put justice above everything. To the point of being counterproductive, as the film actually shows. And I've got that sense of justice from him. And I think it was to do with... demanding my Jewish identity. Which had been taken away from me. I don't know. I'm...still thinking about it.

And did you know anything about Judaism in Berlin, at all?

Nothing at all. I knew nothing about Judaism... until that happened in the playground. I must have been about nine or ten... but from that point on, my mind was focused on picking up anything Jewish.

It's amazing that you- you said that, so it must have come from somewhere.

Yes. I knew we were kicked out of Germany for being Jewish. That I knew. I must have got that from my brother. But it's always amazed me how the human mind sees what it's focused on. A lot of people don't realise that they actually see what they're looking for.

And... maybe you could just tell us a little bit- your father went to Shanghai. Why did he go? What was his plan, or... did he have any alternatives?

[0:36:30]

Well... Well, there were alternatives, if you left earlier. But... my father was an only child - absolutely devoted to his mother. And she was ill in hospital and dying. I remember visiting her just before we came to England. I have a vivid memory of visiting her in her hospital bed. And on the way there my father bought me a little teddy bear. A little bright, shiny orangey coloured teddy bear that I was absolutely *begeistert* [delighted] with. And she wanted to see the teddy bear, and my dad made me give it to her. And I didn't think she was going to give it back, because I wasn't going to give it back! So that's a very vivid memory.

Did she give it back?

Of course. And...

He didn't want to leave his mother behind.

Yeah, I found out after the war that she didn't die until the end of May '39. So, he'd left it to the last minute, by which time there was absolutely nowhere in Europe. America was too difficult to get to. There were very few places in the world other than Shanghai which actually took about 20,000 refugees. He just escaped the war in Europe. It must have broken out when he was on the boat. He wouldn't have known whether the boat would be turned back, because of a lot of trains and boats were turned back. He got to Shanghai; it was straight into the war between Japan and China... which made Shanghai a pretty nasty place to be in. And then of course when the Japanese occupied it, the Jewish refugees were all put in a ghetto. Not a barbed wire fenced ghetto, just a slummy...

Yeah...

... part of Shanghai. And then of course the Allies bombed. So, he had a pretty rough time in Shanghai.

[0:38:59]

Did he work? I mean, he couldn't work...?

He taught himself British law. And then he could get a job, because it was a British mandate. So, he had to have English... knowledge of English law. And he learnt Cantonese, because most of his clients were Chinese. He would tell stories about his practice. There's a lovely story about a couple - I don't know whether they were Chinese or what - who came to him for a divorce. And because they couldn't produce a marriage certificate, he had to marry them, in order to give them a divorce!

And what did he do? So, he had quite a long time without work... I mean, from '33 to '39 - in Germany.

Yes. Yes. And my mother lost the business, because it was a Jewish business. And she wouldn't divorce. If she'd divorced, they might have let her continue the business. I think she got a job as a secretary somewhere, after she was kicked out. But he couldn't get a job.

[0:40:31]

No, so quite a long time. Six years without...

Yeah. And he was on the run a lot of the time. Because they knew when things were going to happen. They knew- they knew about Kristallnacht before it happened. And my father took my brother, aged- aged six. And they walked on the edge of the crowd, that night. Which was the safest place to be. Nobody would imagine you were Jewish... if you were actually out in the rioting crowd. My brother never mentioned a word about it, until... a researcher Iris Gusner – contacted me. I don't know how and why, but I was one of her subjects for a book she wrote on the Kindertransport. And I got to know her very well. She's a lovely person. And she wanted to talk with Martin. And I said, "You'll be dead lucky. I have great difficulty getting him to talk to me about anything in the past." But he agreed, and she went to visit him in Germany. And he told her about this... Kristallnacht and how his father took him out in it. I was tucked away with my Christian granny. And... I asked him, "Why on earth didn't you ever tell me about it?" He said, "Oh, I forgot about it." And that- that was my brother's way of dealing with our... experience. He always argued: forget about the past. You need your energy for the present and the future. And I would argue, it takes on a lot of energy to keep the past repressed; and then you haven't got it for the present and the future. But we had to agree to differ. He never appreciated my point of view and... having studied psychology I couldn't appreciate his point of view.

Yes – yes. Yes. So, at Kristallnacht- do you remember Kristallnacht actually, or...?

No, because I was- I was with my Christian granny and aunt and knew nothing about it. I only learnt about it later. I don't know when.

Yeah.... So, let's go back to your foster family – the third one. That was the farm. What else is there to say? So that was- you were there still during the war?

[0:43:29]

Yes. The war ended very soon after we went there. I remember we had celebration parties. As everyone did all over the country. And then nothing changed, except we took down our blacked- our black-out curtains. Although restrictions, rationing, food coupons, clothes coupons - everything went on just as before. And... I remember thinking that my dad would come back from Shanghai, now the war's ended. I was still hoping he would. But then

communication with him broke off. I don't know why. But we didn't hear from him for a long time. And I just presumed that he wasn't gonna come back. He'd been killed or something. And then I started really digging in, and deciding I was going to be a farmer and my life was going to be on the farm. And I really thought - at fourteen I really thought - that that was as good as life could possibly get. That I would leave school- you could leave school at fourteen then. And I planned to leave school at the end of that year and stay on the farm and raise animals. I would have been so happy doing that. And then my mother appeared out of nowhere. Which was how I experienced it, because the grown-ups made arrangements and then I was told. I think the Hoskings- who were very fond of me- more than Martin. Martin was more independent and argumentative. He was very argumentative, always was, but I wasn't at that time. I am now. And I think they wanted to keep me. I think they had plans to adopt me. And I think they were rather off-putting too. And they took the view that four years after the war how could my parents want me, if they'd left it four years. They didn't understand that... Europe was absolute chaos. I mean, England was pretty chaotic, because it was so badly bombed, but all the structures were still in place in England. It was not the sort of chaos in Europe where... waves of displaced people were on the move in Europe. All the Germans who'd settled in other conquered countries were kicked out and on the move. And... It was a long time before I understood the chaos that prevented my parents making contact earlier. But another four years after the end of the Europe- after the war, made it absolutely impossible for me. As a ten-year-old, I probably would have... settled down after a while. But at fourteen, there was absolutely no way I could go back to Germany.

[0:47:08]

Were there- were there other children at the farm?

Oh, yes.

Did they have children?

Yes - yes. I got on very well with them. And there were loads of children in the village. There were always lots of children around.

So, do you remember your mother coming, or...?

Yes, vividly. Because Martin and I had to go and meet her at the station. I can't remember which station but... I remember... just not knowing what to do. And Martin telling me that – that... she was our mother, and we should be happy to go and see her. And then I remember that he couldn't face her either. But he looked away and... He was ill at ease once she arrived off the train. And- it was an impossible situation.

Which language did you speak to each other?

She didn't speak any English, and I didn't know any German. Martin, I think, had retained some German. But it was an absolutely impossible situation. Very, very painful for everyone. And of course, Martin being very argumentative, I don't know how it happened, but there were furious arguments between... Martin I suppose was trying to support our mother, to some extent, but there were tremendous arguments with Mrs. Hosking. And... she went back to Germany without me. Which must have been terrible for her, particularly as she didn't know any English. And as soon as she got back to Germany, my father served a court order on my foster parents. And my foster mother, who'd said I was one of the family, had to take me to Germany and leave me there. And that was the final betrayal. That the one person I thought was really there for me... had to leave me. I mean, up here [motioning to her head] I knew that she had to. I- I- at fourteen I knew what a court order was. But in my guts, it was the final betrayal. And I decided trying to be good and please people had never worked, and I turned very nasty. I gave my parents a hell of a time, which I'm not proud of. But having studied child psychology, I know that teenagers cannot other than react that way, if they find themselves in an unbearable situation. They tried to make me go to school. They fixed up art lessons for me. They fixed up a horse for me to ride. I mean, they did everything they possibly could, but... it had no chance of work- of working.

[0:50:41]

When did your father return from Shanghai... after the war? Did he come in '45 or did he-it must have been difficult to get back.

No - no. No. There was very little transport left.

Yes – Exactly.

It had been smashed up. And what little there was, was reserved to get the forces home; everybody else had to wait.

Yes. So, when did he- do you know when he got home?

I don't know exactly when. I only know that... in 1949, when I was subpoenaed back to Germany, he had got a job in the court of Mainz. And he was fighting to get his proper level as a judge. They tried to block him and stop him getting a... a position of power, as a judge. First, they tried to keep him in the denazification courts. I'm not sure whether that was in Lindau or in Mainz. But he fought tooth and nail to get his proper status as a judge, which he eventually got. And he should have got promotion. Thinking back- but at twenty-six, he was already a judge. By 1949/50, he should have been a President of the Court... which they finally gave him on condition he retired on ill health. I mean his health was broken... and he did take a retirement on ill health, but it was totally unfair. Because... How long was he working in the court of Mainz? ... About seven or eight years. And they were always against him. They were always blocking him, because they all had so much to hide.

Yeah.

Which they knew, because of his... fierce attitude of 'Justice First' it turned his colleagues against him, because they had so much to hide. And were determined to get him out. I compare it with Fritz Bauer. Do you know the story of Fritz Bauer?

A little bit.

Because he- I mean he was in Hessen not in Rheinland-Pfalz. And I think Hessen was a little bit better Rheinland-Pfalz. And he did- he did a lot better than my father. But he met the same... people who were very wary of him. But he didn't challenge them like my father did. But he distrusted his colleagues so much, that when he got information about... Oh, what's his name? The- he- he gave the information to Israel and they... Can't think of his name at the moment.

Eichmann?

Eichmann. He was the first to get the information. But he knew that if he... allowed his colleagues to know and set up a trial in Germany, they would- they would protect him. So, he gave the information straight to Israel.

Who? Fritz Bauer?

Fritz Bauer. I've got a book about that story.

[0:54:37]

That's interesting. So, when you came, did you come to Mainz, or where did your parents live?

I came to Mainz, where my father had a tiny room. Mainz was block-busted with incendiary bombs. It was an awful story, the- the carpet bombing of Mainz. It was so destroyed. There was hardly any accommodation. And there wasn't a room big enough for my mother even, let alone the family. But she was living- she was billeted with a farmer on the Swiss-Austrian border, in a little village called Unterreitnau. And there was room there for the whole family. So, I stayed- I went down there with my mother. And my father came at weekends.

And you didn't tell us- what did your mother do during the war? Where did she stay, or what do you know?

Well, I- I don't have actual hard evidence, but I think she took part in the Rosenstraße protest march. They were all arrested of course. And when- when they were released, because they were proper German citizens, she left Berlin. Now whether she left Berlin under Nazi orders, or whether she decided to go, she must have done some sort of war work. Because everybody did. When I went there, she had a job in Lindau on the Lake of Constance, but she would never tell me what the job was. So, I was very suspicious of it. And she never talked about her war experience. She never talked about the Rosenstraße protest march. I think she was the most severely traumatised of the four of us.

In which way?

Partly because she wouldn't talk. Which meant that it was too frightening for her to talk. Which made sense, because Nazism was very strong after the war. You can imagine; you

can't just change a whole country overnight at the end of the war. And very few of even the top Nazis were ever brought to justice. Most of the middle ordinary Nazis never were brought to justice. I mean it's really amazing in retrospect that there was any justice. There was precious little.

[0:57:41]

Especially I think in the legal field, that's...

Absolutely.

...known.

Teachers the same! I mean, the teachers who taught Nazi ideology were still there.

So, for your father, it must have been quite something to get into that system.

Absolutely! Very difficult.

But he was- did he not contemplate emigrating elsewhere, for him or...?

I, I thought he should have gone to America. And as a fourteen-year-old, America was cowboys and Indians for me, and very exciting. I might have been tempted to go to America. But he said he had had to start all over again in Shanghai, and his health was broken. He wouldn't have been able to practice law, without starting all over again.

Yeah, and he was by that time- how old was he? He was... In his fifties...?

Yes, well, he was in his late forties when he got back to Germany.

Yeah...

And of course, he was... totally immersed in his legal profession. Most of the- most of the refugees who went on to America were business people. He- he was not that way inclined at all.

And how did your parents manage to, sort of, pick up after...? Because they were also separated for... five years.

[0:59:16]

No, more! I think they were separated for eight or nine years - between eight and nine years. I don't know, because I – I wasn't very aware of- I mean they seemed to have rows all the time. And I thought it was my fault, because I was being such a nasty beast, which I was. And what do parents have to talk about other than you - as a teenager? So, I think it was much more than that. I, I don't think they ever... I actually never, ever saw them completely relaxed and happy after the war, together. I don't think they were capable of it. I think there was just so much tension and fear that they'd experienced.

Yeah...

I think there's- there's a sort of alertness... when you're in danger. And I don't think that alertness ever left them.

Mnn. And you said- so, you were angry and difficult. How did that manifest itself? So, you refused to go to school, you said?

I refused to do anything... that I was asked to do. If they mentioned the word 'school' I was out of the door... and didn't come back till the... early hours of the morning. It must have been terrible for me.

And you must have had to re-learn German somehow?

Well, I wanted to listen in on what they were talking about, so I learnt German very, very quickly. But I had to express my absolute contempt for everything German, by deliberately muddling the grammar up. And I've never been able to undo that. [both laugh] I speak German as quickly as I speak English. But it's all incorrect.

Because you taught yourself, or you...?

I never had any lessons.

Yeah.

I taught myself German in my way, and it was... Well, you- you can't really change. I, I don't have lin-linguistic skills. And...

And what happened to your brother? Did he come to Germany, or did he...?

[1:01:40]

No, because he was almost eighteen, and he was doing a scholarship to Cambridge which they didn't want to interfere with, because my parents really valued education. So, he first came to Germany... already eighteen, with a... with British nationality, which we could have at eighteen. And a British passport, and a return ticket in his pocket. He came for a holiday. And that was very, very painful for me. It was lovely to see my brother. Except he didn't support me. He told me I was being a silly little girl. He didn't understand how it felt for me. He knew he was going back to England. And when he got on the train to go back to England and I couldn't, that really was... I thought about smuggling onto that train. But I didn't. I think they kept their eyes glued on me. I think they were 'one ahead'.

Right- but you were also- I mean, I was thinking you were separated from the family but also from the life of the farm, in a way.

Yes... yes.

So...

Well, I was on a farm.

Yes.

My mother was billeted on the farm...

Oh, I see, that was also a farm.

Yes. And I was supposed to like it. I was suppose- it was very, very, very different. The farming system in that area right at the south in Bavaria was very different - very much behind. Everything was done by hand. All the grass was cut with a scythe and fed to the... the animals weren't allowed out. They were in the stable all the time. And...

So, for how many- how long did- did this situation go on?

[1:03:56]

It took- the- my parents realised that it was impossible and a big mistake, very quickly. And they said I could go back to England if I promised to stay at school and come out for the holidays. And I was desperate to get back to England so of course I promised. But it took a year... to get the necessary documents, because I had no passport. Without a nationality, you can't get a passport. I had to travel when my foster mother took me to Germany on the subpoena. She couldn't enter me in her passport because I wasn't legally her child. I was a foster child. I had to have a document with "Person of no Nationality", in big letters, across the top. That's why I've called my autobiography "*Person of no Nationality*".

So even once your parents decided that you can go, you couldn't...

No. It took another- I think they decided within a month or two, that it wasn't gonna work.

But could you then come back to your foster family, or...?

Yes, but it took a year. And I had felt so betrayed that they had taken me to Germany... that I couldn't trust anyone. But I could trust the animals. And I got the emotional support and the comforting from animals that I couldn't- I couldn't accept from people. They'd let me down too many times.

[1:05:35]

But you went back to the family?

I went back to the family, back to my school. And my parents insisted I had to go to university. By that time, at seventeen, I was a bit more sensible and mature. And they were absolutely right. I had a wonderful time at university... meeting all sorts of people. I opened out at that point. We had parties, clubs, I won cups rowing on the river. And that is where I met my future husband.

And what did you study?

I wanted to study agriculture. The whole point of going to Reading University was that it had *the* name in agriculture. But I wasn't allowed on the agriculture course. They only took young men! They wouldn't get away with that now. But I argued. I was a bit argumentative already by then. And at my interview the Dean or whoever it was said to me, "Do your parents have

enough money to buy you a farm?" And of course, they didn't. And he said, "Well that's the only way that you'll do any farming, because no farmer is going to employ a woman as a manager. You'll be mucking out pigsties. That's all the farming you'll ever do, and you don't need a degree for it. But ...dairy technology."

Dairy technology?

So, I did dairy technology.

Was it for management- or managing...?

Well, the two basic jobs that that trained me for, one was to manage a dairy depot laboratory, which had very unsociable hours. You had to do it mostly very early in the morning. And I couldn't stand the smell of the chemicals that you had to use. Chemistry was not my... forte. And the other job was to be fitted out with a little van, which I would have loved, to go 'round farmers whose milk was not up to standard and inspect their farm and tell them what they were doing wrong. Now having grown up on the farm, I knew that would not go down well.

[1:08:20]

So, did you ever practice that?

No- no, but it got me a job- the degree got me a job in food technology. I worked for two biscuit companies, but I was deeply depressed. I couldn't stand the ethos of industry. I, I got very depressed, and my husband persuaded me to chuck it in, and apply for a job teaching. Which I did, because they were so short of teachers, they would take anybody with a degree in anything. And I got a job in charge of biology for the whole school at a small grammar school in London. I've never worked so hard in my life, but I enjoyed it. I never looked back.

And by that time, you've moved to London?

Oh, that was in London. We lived in London from- well I went to London when I- after I graduated, because that was where my husband's family were. And... I did two years teaching before I stayed at home with the- when we had the children. I left when I was pregnant with our first child. And we both agreed that I wanted to stay home with the children. It was very,

very difficult. We were on the breadline. I earned a bit of money marking exam papers at home. I had a sewing machine and a knitting machine, and I made most of the clothes for the whole family. Saved a fortune on that. We got by. And I went back to teaching when our youngest started school.

And how was your contact then with your parents? Were they- did they accept that you were staying in England?

Oh yes. They accepted that... both Martin and I were independent. And I- I visited regularly. I went to Germany two or three times a year from 1949 - I've never stopped. I always go two or three times a year. And of course, I gradually came to terms with Germany. I was no longer so frightened. I was more sensible, but I could never settle there. I, I was- my home was England.

[1:11:14]

Ruth, I think we should just take a little break.

Yeah sure.

So, we got towards the end of the war. You're here in London, settled, and you had children, you said. And you went back to work when they were in primary school.

I- when our youngest started school, I went back to teaching. I couldn't get a part time job, as I wanted to, to sort of ease back. I wanted to... have all the children home for lunch in the middle of the day. But I did manage it for a term- my daughter when she started school. But my husband was horrified; I lost so much weight in one term that he rushed out and bought me a car. A little Triumph Herald banger, because I was walking a mile to school and back four times a day, to come home at lunchtime to take Tanya home to dinner. And then my Head made an arrangement that she should stay at school for lunch, and things gradually got better. But I had to go back full time.

And what were you teaching?

Well... I, I started teaching as, as responsible for biology for the whole of the little grammar school. I went to Wembley High as a science teacher. So, I taught general science. That was a

two-year transit camp... when Brent decided to split up in-into three tiers: Primary School, Junior School and Senior High, which was a dismal failure, because it was a two-year transit camp - not a real school at all. And then I... I wanted to train as a school counsellor. And... I got into a course, and my Head refused to back me... because I had started a... a pastoral system in vertical groups, not year groups. And it was highly successful. And he didn't want me to take a year out. So ... yeah. So, I said fair enough to establish the vertical groups which were doing so well. And then when he didn't support me a second time, I was really angry, so I looked for another job. I moved up the ladder to a senior teacher post, in charge of exams, which wasn't really me at all. But... And then I moved again and got a Deputy Headship in Ealing. And that school, they had falling rolls at that time, and they merged four schools into one, because of falling roles. And I- I fought the system, because they wanted to make political appointments which I knew would be disaster. Because they wanted to keep all the senior posts of the four schools. And they didn't- And they made political appointments by- They had to be fitted into the new school, and they didn't. They appointed- they appointed a very good Time-tabler, a very good Head, but the pastoral post they... No, they wanted me. I... I can't remember, but I felt that their system was totally unjust.

[1:16:17]

Yes.

So, I refused to- to fit in their way, which meant I was out and into another school. And Ealing really had problems at that time. They had rampant racism - really 'in your face' racism. The parents would be fighting in the evenings in the pubs. We had the BNP of Northolt one side, and the Black Mafia in Southall. And the parents' fights would be brought in by the kids next day in school. At times they were quite unteachable. And I knew that I had to get out of teaching, because the stress was so enormous. That's when I retrained as a psychotherapist. It- I actually overlapped. The only thing that made my day-time job bearable, was that in the evenings I was studying with like-minded people on the psychotherapy course. And then... I took early retirement redundancy. I got a fairly reasonable package. Which meant that I didn't have to worry about building up a practice fast, which you can't do. It's about the worst position for a therapist to have to earn. I always advise people, you must have a source of money when you're developing a practice, so that you don't depend on your clients. So, what I did was... home tuition for a couple of years whilst I built up a practice. That was interesting. Kids who were excluded from school

usually four, five, six times. No school would have them. But the law said they had to have a minimum of so many hours' education. I had four boys, individually, who were virtually unteachable. But I had a delightful fifteen-year-old girl who'd just had a baby and couldn't face going back to school. And she needed to be seen through her GCSEs. I set her homework, but I didn't teach her; she didn't need it did. What she needed was help in understanding her baby. I virtually taught her how to play with her baby. I don't think anyone had played with her as a baby. She had a lovely baby. So, I just boosted her as a mum and got her over that difficult period. She was a success. The four boys were abysmal failure. How they had got into that state. They were only ten, eleven! And yet they were unteachable because of... the failures, which I think were more- were certainly not them. I- I don't think you can have a ten-, eleven-year-old who's a failure.

No...

We had failed them. Sorry, I'm going off track, aren't I?

[1:20:10]

No, but did you- you managed to combine your family life and your work life?

Oh yes - yes.

And do you feel that your own experiences shaped the way you raised your children, for example?

Oh absolutely... Absolutely. My own childhood experiences... were tremendously important, to the extent that I was overprotective. I don't think too badly so. But I was overprotective. But... I think the second generation of Holocaust survivors – and I wouldn't be here if I hadn't been rescued by the Kindertransport - I think the second generation are inevitably deeply affected. But if the first and the second generation can begin to process the experience, the third generation, it's different. Our two grandchildren are becoming interested now they're in their twenties. They didn't really- it didn't figure until now. My grandson was doing a module on the Holocaust at university. And he came to us, was very interested to explore what we knew about it. And he came with me to Warsaw to a conference. I just wanted someone to accompany me, because travelling abroad is now too much for me. I can't do queues and queuing. So, I like to have somebody who'll [with laughter] queue and look after me a bit.

And I said to him, “You don't have to come to the conference. I'll get you in the nice parts- the dinner and the visit to museums. But you don't have to come to the boring seminars.” But he was curious, and he stayed to all the seminars and took part in the conference, which is an amazing project of bringing the three most persecuted diaspora - the Armenians, the Roma and the Jews – together, to work together. And both my grandson and I are carrying on with local projects. He's in with a group doing some film clips. And I'm going to develop *Limmud* [British-Jewish educational charity which, in the UK] for diaspora... which is rather exciting. I've gone off the track again.

[1:23:10]

Limmud for diaspora?

Yeah.

That's interesting. So, whose conference was that?

That was an EU- backed conference, financed by organisations of the three groups... and various other backers.

So, do you think that the third generation is more interested than the second generation?

That there is a different...?

Oh... I don't know about more interested. They come from a very different place. They look at it in a very different way. Because- but ...I say this only, when the first generation are able to begin processing it, then the second generation can take over processing it a bit more. And the third generation come- they'll see it differently. Whereas if the first and second generation haven't been able to, then the third generation will be traumatised.

And in your opinion, do you think that most of the first generation or second generation have... processed it?

I don't honestly know. I know some who have, and some who patently haven't. I just don't have enough... knowledge across. You would have more than me from your interviews.

No, because it's interesting- you said you were in psychoanalysis...

Yeah. Yeah.

So, you had the opportunity...

Yes.

...in a way, to deal with your experience.

Yeah.

But with- many people didn't...have the opportunity. Or didn't look for it.

[1:25:01]

Didn't look- didn't even look for it. Exactly. But psychoanalysis is not the be all and end all. There are different ways of processing it. Some people are able to process it, through getting involved in art or music... or something like that. Something... where they could express their feelings, their experience, and bear to look at it. Certainly, psychoanalysis is not for everyone.

No, but for you, what helped you to process your experiences?

Well, my husband decided to train as an analyst. And I supported him... with teaching, with working, so that he could do it. And we took in lodgers. I did work at home. And he wanted me to- he wanted to support me to do it too. Which I agreed with, because I obviously wanted to, and wanted an excuse to make it all right to do so. Because there was a very strong... feeling that is much less so now, that counselling and psychotherapy are for damaged people. Real people don't need it. Real people manage without it. That's largely gone now; it's much more acceptable. You don't have to justify why you do it. But you did at that time, more or less.

And did it personally help you? Do you think it... or?

It- it- I'm, I'm quite critical of my analysis. But the training in all, I think is to do with what you make of it. It's there to take out of it what you can and want. And I think I made good use of the whole training.

And what was the relation between your children and your parents? Did they have a relationship?

Hardly... Hardly. I did take all three of them over to Germany, because I wanted my parents to see their grandchildren. My brother also had three. And one famous summer, we had the six of them together at... my parents' house. And that was after- I can't remember whether my mother was in hospital or had died by that year. ...I can't remember. But I regularly took them to Germany to see their cousins, to see my brother. One time I took all three of them, when Tanya was a baby. I had a toy carry cot- I had her in a toy carry cot that I could carry in one hand. And I had the middle one by the hand. And the eldest one was reliable just to be with us. But that was quite a- quite an effort.

[1:28:35]

And what sort of identity did you want to give to your children?

I wanted them to develop their own identity, which they have done. Yeah. Identity is so important. Having had my identity... ascribed to me first by the Nazis, and then by various experiences I went through, and finally deciding for myself that I was not going to go back to German. That I was going to be Jewish against enormous pressure - from everywhere. I've realised the importance of identity, and that's something that I always focus on in the talks I give. We haven't learnt not to identify people, but to respect their right to their own identity.

So, what identity did you choose for yourself?

Kids often ask me that in school and I tell them I'm British, but I'll never be English because I wasn't born here. I'll only ever be nearly English with German roots, and I'm Jewish. I don't put religion first. I think- I think you need to identify with a homeland. And I don't identify with Israel like a lot of Jewish people do. I am very fond of Israel. It's a foreign country I love to visit, but I don't consider it home. My home is England. And though I'm British, I'll never be... fully English.

But you said that at some point you made a conscious decision to be Jewish.

Oh yes.

So, what did that entail for you, or what does it mean to you?

I think it's to do with... starting off in a Christian family that was a dismal failure. Not the family, but the placement was a dismal failure. Because I remember so vividly every Sunday our foster father took the service, so we were scrubbed clean and dressed beautifully and taken to church which was a wonderful place where people sang beautifully, and there was a children's corner with exciting picture books and things. Everybody smiled all the time. And then as soon as we got home, it was a nightmare again. So, I think I absorbed hypocrisy without knowing the word, of course. So, I think Christianity never sort of went deep. And it was more than just defending myself by claiming I was Jewish. It was something to do with my family was Jewish, and my family was... different to the families I was in. There was a sort of... stability there that I longed for. It wasn't really there, but it was represented- being Jewish represented a stability that I longed for.

And did it give you that stability, or...?

[1:32:26]

Well, when I found a nice Jewish boyfriend... I knew more about Judaism than he did. Because during the war in London there was no time for religious practice. His parents completely dropped it. So, he had no Jewish education. And we went to classes together. And we built up our own Jewish home, which was very important at the time. But now over the years I've got less and less interested in the ritual... side of religion. I think being a good helpful *Mensch* is much more important than religious practice.

And do you feel your experiences as a woman, as a girl refugee were different let's say, from your brother or...?

Well, yes, because all the families that I was in, and schools I was in it was accepted that there were certain things that girls didn't do, that only boys could do. I met a lot of... gender prejudice. Not in a nasty way, but just that it wasn't acceptable. The division of roles was much more firmly established in my childhood. But I- I kicked against it. I was a bit of a tomboy on the farm. I wanted to do everything the boys did, and I usually did. It was very unfair, because everybody had chores, and my chores were in the house. What I did with the animals on the farm was not chores, was not work. It was what I loved doing. So... I saw the

boys as not having to work at all. They had enjoyable stuff. But I don't think it really was, in retrospect; it was heavy work.

But this is gender stereotype in general. But I meant as a refugee. Do you think that it made a difference... in terms of one's own experience?

Not that I was aware of at the time. But I do know that in general... very young children were popular. And older girls were popular, 'cause they could be put to work as housemaids. Older boys really lost out.

Yes – more difficult to place.

[1:35:28]

Yeah. I don't think my brother lost out... because we were in families.

Interesting- you could say that all the boys who came, they stayed in hostels together and that had another advan- could be advantageous for them in some ways.

In some ways it could be an advantage; it depends on the personality of the- of the youngster themselves. Some of them loved the camaraderie of being in a large family in a hostel. Some of them were overwhelmed by it.

Right. And what happened to your brother? You didn't tell us - after the war? What did he decide to do?

After the war he went to Cambridge University. And whilst he was at Cambridge University, he met a very nice German au pair girl. They fell in love and decided to marry. And they chose to settle in Germany. I mean they chose with enormous pressure from both sides. Her family wanted her in Germany. My parents couldn't get me, so they wanted Martin in Germany. And they gave in to the pressure. Actually, my brother was offered a brilliant job by BT - British Telecom in Australia. And it would have been a brilliant job that financed three months' vacation and a free ticket to Europe annually. And we probably would have seen more of him, because he he'd have come for the three months. But he caved in to pressure from both families and stayed in Germany. He- I would argue with him, endlessly. He was very satisfied with his life. I saw what he was missing out on. It was really quite

outrageous, because with a Cambridge physics degree, he couldn't get a job with several firms who told him, "We only employ people with a German degree. Go and get a German degree." He tried the university, Mainz University, for a- to do a physics PhD. They said the same, "Go and get a German degree first." That was sheer spite. Which he didn't do. He saw through it; he didn't do it. He instead of doing a PhD, he went in by the backdoor. He was welcomed by research teams. He worked for them, but at the pay of a bottle washer. They weren't allowed to pay him, because he didn't have a German degree. And he did his own research as well. He could have got a PhD several times over. He did research on climate. All sorts of things. I mean he was very busy. He- he enjoyed his life that way, but family life suffered from it. He had to work tremendously hard to keep his family. He first of all made his living money, through photography. And then when photography became- became, I don't know, why did he lose touch with photography? He moved on to translation. Because very few professional translators have got the... scientific knowledge to translate booklets about equipment. I'm sure you've met booklets that are hopelessly mistranslated.

So, he settled where, in Mainz?

[1:39:54]

He settled in Mainz, yeah. And that's what he did for- that's how he made his money virtually the rest of his life. But he carried on his own personal research... at the expense of the family. He put ever such a lot of money into his laboratory. He took over a whole flat. The family had to move into another flat in the same block... as his- his laboratory took over a whole flat. And it must have cost him thousands and thousands, what he built into his flat.

But he didn't regret going to Germany, or...?

Well, he didn't regret it, but I think his family suffered. I think he suffered too, because he really lived the rest of his life, from the time he settled in Germany, in fear of being exposed as having Jewish roots. I mean in the first twenty years after the war, that really was realistic. Because people with Jewish roots were given a hard time.

So, he didn't say it to anyone that he...?

Particularly returning refugees... were given a very hard time, because they were experienced as a threat - a threat to expose people. My- my father really was a threat. He exposed a lot of

...former Nazis. My brother wasn't a threat. He wasn't interested. He- that was the past. Cut it off. But he suffered from the anxiety of- I mean, when I was visiting him, he was always saying to me, "You mustn't talk about anything to do with the past, or our being Jewish." He said, "Don't talk to my children." I said, "Martin you're not gonna put a plaster over my mouth. I won't initiate it, but if they ask me questions, I am not going to refuse to answer." They didn't ask questions. But boy, when my father died, they did. That unearthed such a lot; that was quite painful.

Why? What happened then? What came out, or what...?

[1:42:28]

All sorts of things came out, and of course they had to tidy up... all that... my brother had hoarded. Papers of my father's, my parents' papers. ...Yeah. And all sorts of things they wanted to know about things they'd never asked before, about the family. About- my father had a travelling companion. I don't know whether it was a real relationship; she was a lovely person. He wanted to marry her, and I fell into that one, because she... visited us sometimes. She was a lovely person and she asked me, she said, "Your father wants to marry me." And I said, "I have no objections. You're- it's up to you." But... I stupidly said about how badly he treated our mother. I, I mean not badly in the sense of being cruel or nasty, but just neglecting her and demanding so much. He was hugely demanding, my dad. He expected everybody to have his standards. His standards of justice, his standards of work ethic, and he really let my mother live. And didn't consider her needs, and that she was ill. And I inadvertently said something, I don't remember what. And my father accused me of preventing him marrying her, which I - no such thing. But I'm sure- I didn't say it, but I certainly thought she would be very unwise to marry him.

And they didn't marry?

They didn't marry, but they drifted apart because she wouldn't marry him. He- he dominated. He would have dominated her. And she was a free spirit. She would not have lasted under domination; she would have left him if they had married. I'm sure. They had a nice few years together going travelling.

And where is your father buried? Is he buried in the Jewish cemetery, or in the...?

No, in a Christian cemetery. In the same grave as my mother. In-I can't remember what it's called. Very nice. Huge cemetery with lots of woods and fields. My brother and his wife are married [buried] in a cemetery more in the centre of Mainz. Also, in the same grave.

So, your father... kept his Christianity, or how did he deal with...?

[1:45:46]

He kept it plain- he never- he never- he seemed very Jewish to me, because he devoted the rest of his working life to Jewish restitution and... exposing former Nazis in the legal system.

Right.

...To his own detriment. But he was very fixated on justice. And he took it very, very hard, the injustice of being sacked from a profession that he loved and was good at.

Yeah... yeah. And when did you yourself start writing your own autobiography and start going to schools and talking about your own experiences? What- what triggered that?

Well, it was Bertha Leverton's ...fiftieth anniversary conference – fifti-fiftieth anniversary of our coming to England. That was the first time I heard the word 'Kindertransport'. That was the first time I was aware of anybody but Martin and I coming to England from Germany. I was absolutely gobsmacked. And... About- about a thousand came to that conference. Mainly survivors, some spouses. And they were all telling their stories to each other on tables where we were sitting and eating. And then I realised, I didn't really know my story. I've never realised how I'd been avoiding it. I avoided books and films - anything to do with the war. I simply- if my husband put on a war film - he loved war films. World War One mainly - I had a pile of ironing to do or a pile of washing up. I didn't realise that I was avoiding it. And... I was ready to reclaim my roots. I'd been pretending I had nothing to do with Germany whilst I was in England. Even though I was visiting Germany every year. And I did a very quick catch-up reading, speaking to people, finding out. And then in- not long after, 1991, the government put Holocaust education in the national curriculum. Which was completely mad. The teachers had had no preparation, no formal teaching themselves about the Holocaust, no material available. They had to go out and find their own material. And the LJCC [London Jewish Cultural Centre] formed a group of people willing to go into schools. And that's- that's when I started. But I was working full time as a therapist, so I could only occasionally go to

schools that were near enough in London. That's how I started. And then I got so absorbed with it, that I wound down my practice.

[1:49:26]

Because... we- we were well-off enough to not have to work hard at earning money. I was able to go gradually totally voluntary which I am now. I do earn a little bit with my writing. I still have a few supervisees, but I don't have to earn. So I don't have any pressure; I'm- I have the freedom to go when and where I like, which is very nice.

And do you enjoy going into schools?

I really enjoy going into schools. I love talking with the groups of youngsters. And I always arrange to have plenty of time with the teacher in charge, and encourage them to introduce me to their faculty, their staff group. I love talking with teachers as much as with the children. And having been a teacher myself I know how underappreciated teachers are. So, part of my brief, for a day out of London - which I love to get out of London for a day. [coughs] Anyway, part of my brief is to appreciate what the teachers are doing. I usually get them to show me round the school, and there's lots of things I can appreciate. And I love being able to genuinely tell them what a very good important job they're doing. And we usually get on to how awful Michael Gove was.

It's also part of your remit – or you see it as part of your remit?

Absolutely. Absolutely.

And what is it you would like to- or what is important for you to tell the children, based on your- on your story?

[1:51:31]

Well, I focus on- I always link my- my story... to what's happening today. Usually, I start as I'm going along, to link it with the problem we have with refugees today, and the awful things people say about refugees. And I tell them in no uncertain terms that refugees do not leave their home in large numbers, unless they absolutely have to because it's too dangerous. And they are coming over and they want to please. They want to work if we would let them.

They're not coming to scrounge. And they need our friendship. And I tell them, look, we've behaved so badly to a lot of refugees who have not gone away again. They don't go away. Most of them stay here. And if we treat them badly, we've got them with a grudge. And of course, the West African... people who came over were treated appallingly. And they knuckled down; they made good. But their children have never forgiven us for the way we treated their parents. And we've got a lot of trouble with West Indian, West Indian grudge against that. And do we really want to have... people bearing a grudge? The kids do get it, but I don't know whether they retain it. Depends on their parents' point of view. But I focus on two major lessons we haven't learned... from the Holocaust. One, is to treat all people as equal human beings. We don't have to particularly like them, but they deserve to be treated with dignity as human beings.

[1:53:43]

And the second major lesson we haven't learned, is to protest earlier. Now... When violence begins, you can stop it if you really want to. But if you turn a blind eye and pretend it's none of your business, it will escalate, and then it will get out of control. And self-styled ISIS, Al-Qaeda should never have been allowed to get out of control. They could easily have been nipped in the bud.

So those are the two...

Those are the two main things I focus on, but it depends on- I like to feel where the audience are. Where their interests are. And I let them side-track me onto whatever- whatever interests them.

And what was the most let's say, surprising- do you remember the most surprising question you ever got, or the most...?

I do get some surprising questions. ...I can't think- I've had some really lovely questions, that have made me think. I can't locate one at the moment. ...The... The audiences in schools have really changed over the years. I really noticed it in the last three or four years. Because more and more schools are focusing on facilitating them thinking for themselves. Facilitating on children developing an informed opinion. Giving them exercises, which of course the resource material has grown. Excellent resource material. Getting them to think and draw

conclusions. The Holocaust Education Trust has developed some brilliant exercises to get young people thinking. Looking at pictures, and what impression, what is the picture saying to you - and then discussing. And getting in touch with assumptions, and the danger of making assumptions.

[1:56:16]

So, you think the material has improved?

Oh, enormously.

Yeah. Yeah...

And... children really do rise to being treated in a more adult way. Of being expected to think for themselves.

Tell us a little bit about the... that- the book which has been published on your – in German - on your...on your father, but also about you.

Yes. Yes. Well, it was a- a bolt out of the blue. I was- I love talking in Germany to any group that invites me. I always have done. So, I always combined going to Germany with talking with groups. And I was due to talk to the Mainz Local History Association. And a week or two before I was due to go there, the organiser, Tillman Krach emailed me. We were arranging it, and he said, "By the way, I expect you know that a... book that's won the Frankfurt Book Prize turns out to be about your family." Which I knew nothing about, at all. So, I asked my contacts for more information and also the Ursula Krechel wrote a novel "Landgericht" – "County Court" - and won the prize with it. And the local paper in Mainz - because she didn't alter the... venue that- in her novel, her family, the Kornitzers settled in Mainz, and the local paper went to the same archives as she'd gone to, and very quickly brought out that it was my family, a big photograph of my family. Which I've got here somewhere... I'll show you.

Ok, we can look at it. Yeah.

[1:58:26]

...That it was my family. So of course, I got hold of the book, to read it - with great difficulty because it's in a style that I find difficult. It's not what I call 'reader-friendly'. I try to write reader-friendly books, because I'm aiming at the young people. At any rate, I was absolutely intrigued when I realised very quickly that she could not have got the information from anywhere but my... own book, "*Person of No Nationality*". My publisher, when I discussed it with him, wanted to sue her. And I said, "I don't want that in any case, but you can't, because it's a novel. It's not a biography." But I wanted to know why she hadn't contacted me. So, I managed to track her down through her publisher, and I managed to persuade her to meet me when I went to Mainz to talk to this... historical association. She actually came to it, but I met her beforehand. And I asked her why she hadn't told me anything about it. Even just before the publishing date! And she told me that she had contacted- tried to contact my brother. She'd written him several letters which he hadn't answered, and so she'd phoned, and he put the phone down on her. And that was very painful. And she had waited until he died before she brought the novel out. And she'd found my book in the meantime and used it. She did actually acknowledge my book. There was a single line at the back in acknowledgments. She acknowledged using my book. But I said to her, "Look..." No, she said that she feared that I would put the phone down on her like my brother and her health wouldn't be able to stand it. She's a rather frail person. And I said to her, "You must have read my book. You must have realised I'm a very different person to my brother." She didn't- she- she couldn't answer that. But I thanked her for bringing out this novel, because I really appreciate that she's given my father acknowledgement, which he never got in his lifetime. So, it's sort of literary justice.

[2:01:23]

Would you prefer it if she had used the real names?

...It would then be a biography. She couldn't claim it as a novel if she'd used our real names. I don't know. I'm thinking of what would my father have wanted? I think he would have appreciated the acknowledgment. The acknowledgment it gave to the pain he went through - to the resistance he met after the war. That was tremendously important.

But is it- does it say who's- who-who the real person is? Does it say actually...?

Not in the book, no.

No. So the reader actually doesn't know who it is?

Well, the reader will know, because it's been made into a film...

OK...

... called "*Landgericht*". And the film will be broadcast on *Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen* in January - January the 30th, and February the 6th. It will be broadcast in two parts, and after the first part there will be a documentary. And a journalist has been commissioned by the film company, I think, to make a documentary. And she came over to England to interview me for the documentary. She interviewed my brother's family. She interviewed the President of the Court in Berlin, who I contacted after I'd met her and read the book. I wanted to check... the court where she had Kornitzer as a judge before the war. I contacted the court in Mainz, and I just wanted to know whether my father really had been at that court. And they invited me. And I- they were very friendly, and I suggested they might have a trainee who would like to do a dissertation on the real story of my father. They decided to do it themselves. Three judges researched my father's real story, and they held an event in May of last year - not this year, the one before - in his honour. Now I think my father would really have appreciated that. An event in his honour in the court where he was thrown out by the Nazis.

So, in a way the book triggered... something.

[2:04:06]

The book triggered that. Yeah. And more than that, the judges of that court are going to research all the other Jewish lawyers who were kicked out by the Nazis.

Because I think it's a new phenomenon. It's interesting. I mean, there are a couple of other cases I think, where a novelist has taken something from an autobiography...

Yeah...

...and used it. And ... there are many questions.

Well, now there are questions about intellectual property.

Yeah.

But I'm not bothered. Because I- I really appreciate the spirit in which she wrote her novel.

And you said in the film your book is also acknowledged?

It wasn't.

It wasn't. Aha...

But I- I asked the... the representative of the film crew... Solveig Cornelisen. I said that I would like my book in the credits, and they've agreed to that.

And also, your book is now coming out in German?

Mnn! At last.

Yes, so do you think that's also connected in a way to this- to the novel, somehow?

No, but the- the coming out of the novel and the film means that they at last agreed to get it out in time... so that it will be available when the film is broadcast.

So, there will be a lot of exposure in Germany... which leads me to the next question. So how do you feel about Germany today?

[2:06:06]

I have a lot of family and friends there. I love going to Germany. But I would never settle there. It's... It's a home I was kicked out of that I will never go back to. But otherwise, I appreciate a visit to Germany enormously. And... the younger generations are ordinary Europeans. I get on very well with them.

For you personally, what are the most important things, based on your German- Jewish-Christian heritage?

I think, humanity. Being a human being and being a human being with empathy for other human beings. That's what I write about. ...No, I haven't got it with me. I wrote a poem about for the... the introduction of the book that is just coming out, about this. I'm not sure that I can recite it from memory. *"We think we own everything, but really we own nothing. We come into this world with nothing. And we leave it again with nothing. But while we are in this*

world, we have infinite opportunities to love and enjoy each other.” Something like that. And that sums up what I really believe in. We- yeah- we have created a Western world of capitalism out of control. Of... greed dominating. Greed for power, greed for wealth, greed for more of everything. When really, we need very little. And I try to... tackle the unacceptable gap between the few richest and the struggling people at the other end. We need- I mean there is enough for everybody to live comfortably, if it was shared out.

And Ruth, I mean we've touched on it. But how do you think your- your experience of one, separation but of many separations in a way, and loss, have shaped your- your life?

[2:09:16]

Oh, it's hard- it's hard to give you an answer because- it's shaped- it's shaped my life completely. It's made me what I am... compared to what I might have been if... the Nazis had never come to power. I would have been the daughter of a pretty rich family. I don't know what direction I would have gone in. But I think my strong sense of justice... came from my father. Sticking to it, after the war... really was quite self-damaging. But I- I admire his sense of justice.

And do you sometimes think what- what would have happened to you if hadn't...

Well, I like- I like to think that I would have developed a strong sense of justice and followed in my father's footsteps. And... perhaps got involved in human rights and the development of international responsibility to protect all those things I'm interested in now. Rather than becoming a snooty, nasty, greedy, rich heiress. Who knows? You can't- you can't go back and rewrite history.

No. And Ruth, is there anything I haven't asked you, that you think you need to add or....

I don't think so: I'll probably think of it tomorrow. [laughs] That's always the way.

And, you talked about the message to the pupils. Do you have any message to anyone who might watch this- this interview?

[2:11:32]

Well, the message I usually leave an audience of youngsters with - because I talk a lot about war, and my firm belief that we can do without war. Lots of people, and I say to them – “You probably don't think we'll ever do without war, but I know we can. I don't know if we will, but I know we can.” And I challenge them: “Where does war begin?” And I usually manage to steer it a bit, to get to: “War begins when two people get into an argument and retaliate and retaliate and retaliate. That's what war is. And if every single person decided to do what the Quakers do, to try and live up to their principle of never retaliating, we could get control of war.” And I challenge them: “Next time somebody hurts you in some way – insults or hitting or hurts you, don't retaliate. Just say, “Cool it”, which damps down violence. If you retaliate you make them more violent and up goes violence. And if millions of people... determined not to retaliate, we would sway the rest of the people. That would become the norm, and we get on top of war. I know it's possible, but I don't know if it ever will be.” But that's the challenge I like to leave them with.

Thank you. Just maybe- just lastly, because you're somebody who has been involved in Holocaust education, how do you see the future of Holocaust education? How would you- Would you like it to develop?

[2:13:31]

I know that... this is against a lot of people, particularly Jewish people, but the Holocaust has to be put in the context of genocide. Education needs to go in the direction of embracing the whole of the issue of genocide. The Holocaust is unique, but that doesn't mean it'll remain unique. It is the worst example of the most industrialised, horrendous, genocide to wipe out whole peoples in the plural. The Roma as well as the Jews. And hopefully it will remain unique. But we have to see it in the context of the genocides that preceded it, and the genocides that have been allowed to happen since. And I firmly believe, and will always say this, that had the Ottoman genocide during World War One been brought to justice at the end of the war -which it wasn't - if it had been, the Holocaust could and probably would have been stopped.

OK...

That's my take on that. Lots of people will disagree with me, but...

Interesting thought.

Yeah.

OK. Thank you very much again for having agreed to be interviewed. And we're going to look now at your photographs and documents.

OK. I feel I ought to make you some lunch... a sandwich?

[End of interview]

[2:15:19]

[2:15:35]

[Start of photographs and documents]

Photo 1

That is my grandmother, my father's mother. Her name was Klara – Klara Michaelis. *And when was it taken, roughly?*

I don't know. Well before I was born. I should imagine in the 20s... 1920s.

Thank you.

Photo 2

That's my other grandmother, my mother's mother. *[And what was her name?]* Emma. *[And her surname?]* Ventzke - Emma Ventzke.

And when was it taken?

I don't know.

Photo 3

That's my father, as a little boy, on holiday with his mother at the seaside - North Sea.

Photo 4

That's my father, as a young man probably in his 20s in the 1920s.

Photo 5

That's my mother as a young woman probably in her 20s in the 1920s in Berlin, yes.

Photo 6

That's my parents' wedding photo. They had a Registry Office wedding. And my two grannies didn't go to it because they disapproved of a wedding between two religions. And my two grandfathers were of course long dead by then. 1931 - and my mother was wearing what was the height of fashion in 1931 in Berlin.

Photo 7

That's my brother and me. He is about four, and I'm about a year old. So that would be 1936... in Berlin.

Photo 8

That is me in Berlin, aged 2. So that would be 1937.

Photo 9

That's me playing with dolls- a doll in a pram in England in the garden of the rectory. Our first foster home. That would be 1939-40.

[2:18:40]

Photo 10

That's also in the garden of the rectory in England. In about 1940.

Photo 11

That's the farmhouse - our third foster home, in about 1944-45. We went there in '44. *[What was it called?]* East Harting Farm.

Photo 12

That's my father. In 1946 in Shanghai. Very soon after the end of the war. But he's still in Shanghai.

Photo 13

That's me on the farm – East Harting Farm, in 1948. I'm holding a wiggly puppy.

Photo 14

Oh, that's me, in 1950, on East Harting Farm. That is after I came back from a year in Germany.

Photo 15

That's a picture of the daily queue to get a permit to leave the ghetto in Shanghai, during the war. My father is second from the right, wearing a hat.

How did you get this photo, Ruth?

This was a photo I discovered in an exhibition in the Berlin Jewish Museum of exiled refugees in various parts of the world, including Shanghai.

Photo 16

That is my brother Martin in '52. He served in the Royal Air Force for his National Service - in England of course.

Photo 17

This is a summer holiday in 1952. Martin and I went to Germany to stay with our parents in Mombach [near Mainz]. That was just before I went to university. And after I graduated from Reading University, I went to Germany again. I intended to stay a year to try and get to know my parents, but ...I just couldn't stay. I...It was a bit of a disaster. We just didn't see eye to eye. And I came back earlier than I intended.

Photo 18

That is our engagement party. We had three engagement parties all together. We had a party at my in-laws. We had a party in Germany and we had a party for all our friends.

[Which year?] Well, we got married in '58, so this should be '57.

Photo 19

That is our wedding in 1958. One- of our wedding photos. I think that was taken in the hall where we had the celebration.

Photo 20

That is in 1962, when we had one child, Bruce, and I visited Germany. I visited my parents. That is my mother sitting down with my brother's first child on her lap. And my sister-in-law Maria, is holding my baby Bruce. And I'm holding her second baby, Markus. It's in the garden of Brunnenstube 11, the house that my parents had after the war, in the garden. It's rather a lovely photo.

In Mainz?

In Mainz- well, it's a suburb of Mainz, Mombach.

Photo 21

I don't know which year that is. That is our daughter's Bat Mitzvah. She was born in '35... That- I was born! I was born in '35. She was born in '65, so that would be...

1972.

1972. Thank you. And we're all gathered. I think that's outside the synagogue, in the synagogue yard. Our three children and ourselves all dressed up for the Bat Mitzvah.

[Re-take of Photo 21]

That is 1978. Our daughter's Bat Mitzvah just outside the synagogue in the synagogue yard. Our three children and ourselves all dressed up for the Bat Mitzvah.

Photo 22

That is my daughter's family. She is the only one who has children. The two sons don't have children. Those are- that's her husband Tom, and her daughter Adele and son Raphael. And that would be in the mid to late '90s. I think- no, I think it's in their garden, and they were living in Norwich at that time. And I think it was some party that they were going to.

Photo 23

That is my granddaughter and her husband, Rob. Adele and Rob. It's on their wedding day; they're just married and about to go off on their honeymoon in a camper van. And that would be ...two years ago. Just two years ago, so that's 2015.

Photo 24

My first book "*People Making People*" was published in 1985. And that was the first ever textbook in child development in England. And the other one, "*Person of No Nationality*" was published in 2010 and is my autobiography.

Photo 25

This is one of the articles published in newspapers in Germany. This is a Mainz local paper that I first found out, through receiving this from a friend in Mainz. I first found out that the novel written by Ursula Krechel that won the Frankfurt Book Prize, was actually about my family. I hadn't heard from her or her publisher before it was published. I didn't know anything about it till this came out in the newspapers, and my friends told me about it.

Ruth, thank you very much again for doing this interview and sharing your life story and your photographs with us. Thank you.

I'm delighted to have contributed to future research.

[End of photographs and documents]

[2:27:35]