

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Penzias
Forename:	Rolf
Interviewee Sex:	Male
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Interviewee POB:	Munich, Germany

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Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV268
NAME: Rolf Penzias
DATE: 14th June 2022
LOCATION: Essex
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00] Today's the 14th of June 2022 and we're conducting the interview with Mr. Rolf Penzias. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in Essex. What is your name, please? And where and when were you born?

My name is Rolf Penzias. I was born in Munich, Germany, on the 31st of October 1922. That was in South Munich, actually it was, near the Tiergarten.

Rolf, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for AJR Refugee Voices. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

Well, my father and mother got married in Munich, after my father chasing after her and not giving up. And we – they got married in the Orthodox synagogue in Munich. I was born, as I've already said, in '22 in South London. My brother, who is two years younger, we had moved by then to Bogenhausen. That is in North Munich. It was quite a posh part, actually, that was, where we – where they had a flat.

[00:02:03] And do you know how – tell us a little bit about your parents' background and how they met and...

I don't know how my dad met my mother. All I know is that my mother didn't really want to know him. So, she went to Italy and my father followed her, and they came back. And she did really want to marry him, because he was Jewish. But in the end, he succeeded and she

converted in the Orthodox manner in Munich, and quite happily brought us up as a Jewish family.

And what were they – did they work? Did your father – what was his profession? And your mother?

My father was in the textile trade, but he also worked additionally, bit of extra money, he worked as a labourer in – making cast iron parts in Munich. My mother didn't work, because she worked until she had children.

What did she do?

She worked in a – making the money in Munich in a mint. She worked for the local government there.

[00:04:03] *And she was trained as what? You said she had training in...*

She was actually trained as an emailer [sic], as they used to call it.

[Lucy] Enamel worker.

[Rolf] She used to put gold plating onto enamel and stuff like that in Pforzheim.

She came from Pforzheim?

Yeah.

Yeah. And Rolf, tell us a little bit about grandparents. Did you meet your grandparents?

I knew both my – I knew my father's grandparents, yes. He was a typical sort of very Orthodox Jew. He was born in Lemberg [present-day Lviv, Ukraine] and his – my grandmother, she was born near there, somewhere in another town near there. My mother's

side, her father was already dead. And the grandmother, yes, I knew her well, she lived in Pforzheim, yes.

And did the grandparents, did they approve of your parents' match or...?

Well, I think my grandparents on my father's side didn't have much choice, because my father was actually supporting them. And on my mother's side, well, she always accepted us. She was very happy with us. But some of the relations on my mother's side did not approve in the beginning.

[00:06:08] *Yeah, and that changed or not?*

It did change later on. As time went by, they – when were the youngsters, I used to go up to my grandmother, to visit my grandmother. And Mum used to say, “I mustn't see that uncle”, because she was very cross with him because he didn't give my father a job. He could have done, he was quite wealthy. He had a factory making watches in Pforzheim, but he certainly wanted to see us when we came along.

And what are your first memories? What can you remember of Munich in the '20s?

I can remember back that when I was living in Bogenhausen, I must have been about three, four years old, I used to run down and meet my father coming home from work by the tram. The tram stopped there and turned around. And one day, I ran down and I said to Dad, “Dad”, and he didn't know me, because my mum had cut off all my long hair. I had hair down to my neck. She just used a machine to cut it all off, because I had lice from – brought lice home from school. That, I can remember. That's about the earliest I can remember.

[00:08:05] *What was the name of that tram stop? Where was it?*

Oh, Bogenhausen.

And what was the address? Do you remember the address where you lived?

Now, it was by the *Friedensengel*. I don't remember the actual address. I have got it in my notes, but I don't – because Walter would have been born there. So, would have it on his birth certificate.

And what was it, a flat? Or describe a little bit where you lived.

It was a part of a flat, a split up flat, because- it was very expensive and very difficult to get. But when my parents had my brother as well in – then in 1926, we moved to the place where I left from, [inaudible]. [00:09:07] It was a completely new block of flats and he had to take in people who needed accommodation. And I remember moving there and I remember the main staircase coming into the flat was very, very modern actually. Because we had a modern bath, so there was a bath and everything in it. And we got a flat there.

And where was that? What was that address?

That was Falkenstraße fünfzehn B, in der Au, yes.

So that was further from the centre of Munich?

[00:10:00] Yeah, it was in southeast, where the other one was in north, near the *Friedensengel*. That was in southeast Munich now.

And why did your parents move or...?

Because they got a flat and he got a garage as well around the corner, because he needed a car for his business. We were the only people in that block of flats who had a car and we had a telephone as well, which not many people had a telephone in 1926. But he only needed it for his business really.

And what was his business at the time?

He was a textile wholesaler.

Yeah. And where was his office or...?

His office was his flat and his garage. He had sort of a big room there. This was all stacked full of stuff. He dealt as a wholesaler for the whole area, below the Danube. So, in Upper Bavaria, you call that, really. That was – that's where he had these – well, from the factories, they allocate areas to wholesaler to cover.

And did he travel a lot?

Yes, he used to travel in his car quite a bit. And we used to go with him in the holidays and those times as well.

Where did you go on holidays? Do you remember any of your holidays?

Well, he never really took a holiday. Just Saturday or Sunday, we'd go out to the forest or to the lakes below Munich. [00:12:07] That's – but going away on an extended holiday... Oh, yes, we went – we were sent away with the school, with the Jewish school. That's the only holiday I remember.

Where did you go with the school?

To a place called Krombach. It was by – the Jewish Gemeinde in Munich, they had that place. It was literally – I don't know what you call it. It could accommodate about sixty children, thirty boys and thirty girls. They were all Jewish and they sent us there in the summer, taught us Judaism and how to be good pupils, and stuff like that.

Which year? When did you go there? When...?

It would have been – '28, I started school. It would have been '29 or '31, 1931.

So, before Hitler came to power?

Yes, just before Hitler came to power. After Hitler came to power, that wasn't there anymore. That wasn't – I don't know where it went, actually.

So, tell us a little bit about your schooling. You went to Jewish primary school?

Yes, Jewish, yes. As I said, it was an Orthodox school. It was a very good school. We had teachers who – the Kissingers. [00:14:03] We had two Kissingers. Ferdinand und [Julius] Kissinger. They were the uncles of Heinrich Kissinger, the Foreign Secretary of America, they were. I remember my school days and I knew that my school were going to be the happiest days of my life, and they were. We had a very good teacher called Berlinger. He died in New York in the end, but he was such a *mensch*, [inaudible] they called him. Because I remember, as I said, at home we weren't that *frum* any more really, not my – like my grandmother. And it was, I think, when she was – I went to school and when I tried to open the door to go in, and it was open. And along came my teacher of my first and second year, called Berlinger, and he said, "Rolf, what are you doing?" I said, "I want to go to school." "No, Rolf, there's no school today. It's Shavuot." "Oh." "You tell your mum, go home and tell your mum, it's Shavuot." And you know, he never mentioned it or told it to anybody else. He was very good. He was very religious, but a very good teacher. [00:16:02] I could say that all my teachers really, I've only had – we had teachers for two years. And I remember my teachers with affection. They were all very good and I loved school.

And where was the school? Where was it?

In the Herzog-Rudolf-Straße in Munich, next door to the Orthodox synagogue.

And where was the Orthodox synagogue?

In the Herzog-Rudolf-Straße, next door to it. And next door to that, there was a sort of a – what do you call it? Where children are.

Orphanage? Orphanage?

No, not an orphanage. The kids are brought when their parents go to work.

Like a nursery or...?

A sort of elderly nursery for a word. And there, we used to get lunch because we used to have a long way to go to school. And in the later years, I know – especially when the Nazis were in power, we got – used to get lunch there, so we didn't have to go home.

And is that where the synagogue – where there's a little monument today in Munich? Is that where it was? In the centre of Munich or...?

No, I don't think there is a monument there. Where's the monument in Munich?

There's a very small monument near the Stachus. Was it that synagogue?

Near the Stachus? Yeah, I know where that is, yes. No, that's – it's not far away from there.

Okay.

It's the – what's that road called...? Maximilianstraße.

Yes, yeah.

Where Hitler used to drive up or down. And I remember him driving up and down that street with his Mercedes, before 1933 already.

[00:18:07] *You saw that?*

Oh, yes. Yeah.

Did you know at that point who Hitler was?

Well, we did know, yes, because the Nazis were already active before 1933. In those sort of – they were active for what...? Well, I remember '31 already.

We'll come back to that, Rolf. What I was going to ask you, so your parents made a conscious decision to send you to the Jewish school?

Oh, yeah.

Because they could have sent you to a local school?

Yes.

Why did they do that?

Well, we were on an outing somewhere on the Isar [river in Munich]. There were sort of – you know, for Sunday picnic. And my dad got talking to a Jewish man, they must have recognised themselves. And it was a teacher, which I actually never had as a teacher, but from the Jewish school. And he said to my father, “Why don't you send your boy to the Jewish school when they start school?” He said, “Well, it's long way away.” “Well,” he said, “You know, it will be – it's a good school.” And Dad made enquiries and he did send us to that school in the end. And I remember the first day I went to school, I was already six-and-a-half, I think, because it was the following Easter when I was six. I was six in October, the following Easter I went school. And my dad showed me the way before, which way I had to go. [00:20:05] And I had to go and change twice on the trams. And he showed me, went with me. And then, on the first school day he sent me to school, and I know that I went on a second tram. I was hesitating and someone lifted me up and put me on the tram. It was my dad, he was following me to see that I was going the right way, yeah.

But you went there by yourself?

Yeah.

To that school on the tram?

Yeah. I had to change twice.

And were you – was it a bit scary?

There weren't – oh, no, we were quite adventurous as kids. We were quite, I would say, up to our age, we could do things already. We were quite independent and there was no problem.

And then your brother joined?

Well, when my brother joined, he had me to take him, so there was no problem at all.

And tell us about other children. So, were they from all over Munich, the children in the school?

Yes, they were. From rich parents and from poor parents. We had some very rich people who were at the school and some very poor people, who went to the same school. Yes, yes, I still remember the – I've still got a picture of one of my first days in school somewhere. And I've got that Berlinger teacher on it and we sit there with our hands on the desk. [00:22:00] German schools were completely different to what English schools were. It certainly – well, here now, it is completely – it was very strict. You could hear a pin drop. When the teacher came in, you'd stand up next to the desk and say, "Good morning." And we'd stand there without speaking, until the teacher looked around and said, "Sit down" and we sat down. Everyone was extremely proper, sort of German in a way. We had to be to order and strict.

But it was a mixed school, yes? Mixed?

Yes, boys and girls. Yes.

And Rolf, tell us when did things change for you? Or when did you think – notice anything political going on or...?

A think I must have noticed it – when did I start? In around about '31, I would say, it started already. Because I know then, that I and my brother, we picked up two – a boy and a girl, who Ruth Goldmann and Erwin Goldmann. And we also picked up Bertha Leverton. And we walked, the rest of us, to the school together in a crowd, because we were being harassed by the kids as being Jews. Yeah, they just used to yell at us, “*Juden, Juden, Juden raus!*” You know, it was like “Jews, Jews, Jews!” and that sort of thing. [00:24:04] And at the beginning, they only used to yell at us and at a later date, they actually you know, attacked us. And my brother was on one side and I was on the end. And when they attacked us, my brother and I, we were fairly good with our fists. We gave them a good hiding. We never had any trouble anymore. They just shouted at us but kept away from us, to do anything physical.

And how did they know that you were Jewish kids? How did they know?

People used to know, because you register. Everything is registered in Germany. You know, sort of what your religion is, if you're a Catholic or Protestant or Jewish. It's all – it's – you had identity cards and stuff like that.

Yeah, but then they left you alone after...?

Oh, yes. They left us alone until they left school. It got worse and worse all the time. Then you see, in '35 for example, we couldn't go swimming any more. They Jews were forbidden to go to public baths. So – but Mum just used to take us somewhere else, you know, in another quarter of town. And I remember once, she took us swimming and my brother said, “*Mum, Juden sind nicht erlaubt da drinnen* [Jews aren't allowed in there]”, he used to say to her. [00:26:01] He didn't know what it was about. But he'd say – but once we got out of our district, they couldn't tell I was Jewish, because I didn't really look Jewish. Nor did my brother, he was even fairer than I. I had long, blonde hair. Now it's white.

That was in '35 when you couldn't go swimming? And then, any other things which impacted on your life?

Yeah, well, you couldn't go swimming, you couldn't go to cinemas or anything like that. Not that we ever did. Some *Gasthaus*, you know, where you had a beer and a meal, we weren't allowed to go to anymore. Some shops had notices up, "Jews will not be served in this shop." Well, 'til the end, after Kristallnacht, we couldn't even go shopping anymore. That's a long jump ahead, but there you are. But then, the people in the house used to knock on the door. Even the Nazis in the house used to knock on the door, "Frau Penzias, what do you need?" And they would shop for us and get it. We never had hostilities from the people in the block where we lived. They knew we were Jews, we knew they were Nazis. But they would still help us. They didn't agree with the Jewish policy, most likely, or whatever. [00:28:00] I don't know. But anyhow, they helped us to the day I left. They were always helpful, we'd never go short with anything.

That's so interesting, isn't it? That on a human level, despite the politics sometimes...

Yeah, well, they didn't – they said, "We are Nazis, we believe in Hitler. We want Hitler", but they didn't agree with his Jewish policy. But you had to be careful, because if they get seen by certain Nazis and reported, they'd be in even more trouble than the Jews were.

And Rolf, you were, in 1933, you were eleven years old when Hitler came to power.

Yeah.

Do you remember that at all?

Oh, yes, I remember when he got in power. I remember before, he used to travel up and down the Maximilianstraße, after that. He had his escort of Stormtroopers that were sort of –if you can imagine a bus which just had seats either side, with safety belts, but they could jump off those. There were eight people each side, with – they would go into a crowd and disperse them. Oh yes, that was already 1934.

But that was an open – a sort of open bus?

It was an open –

Car?

Like a bus, the size of a bus, with seats that go either side. The SA or the SS strapped in there, going to action in the crowd. [00:30:12] Oh, yeah. And there was no way you could demonstrate anymore against Hitler.

And what did your – do you remember- your parents saying things, worried? Would they be worried in '33?

'33, you mean?

Yeah, at the beginning. Like –

They always used to say, “Oh, it won’t last that long, it won’t last that long.” And he did last. And when they wanted to come – when they could have got out, they didn't go out. Well, who wants to leave all their home and everything? I remember the person lived above us, that couple. They went to America in 1934 and they took all their stuff with them. A big box came, they put – like they have today. That – they still could get out. But after '35, no way. They – it was very difficult to get out. Difficult, because the other countries didn’t want them anymore. And the Nazis made – they had to leave everything behind to get out.

And Rolf, after the Nuremberg laws came into place, how did it affect your parents? In effect – I mean, was a pressure for your mother to divorce your father?

Yes, I remember that guy who came to telephone me to come home, he tried – he was trying to get my mother to leave my dad. [00:32:13] And he said to her, “I’ll take you on and I’ll

take your children.” Yeah. Funny you say that. Yes, I often remember that. Mum never told me for a long time.

But later?

Yeah, he propositioned her. I don't know if he would have got away with it. But in those days, things were still fairly fluid.

Your mother wouldn't go to...?

No way.

Yeah.

She was more Jewish than my father was, in a way.

Yes, at that point she – did she believe in Judaism? I mean, she took to it?

Oh, yes. She brought us up and, yes. And I think she was the instigator to send us to Jewish school as well. Yeah. So, then we realised that later, you know, but there you are.

Because I know that there was pressure on mixed couples to divorce, wasn't there?

Oh, yes, there was. They could actually – I don't think they – many did. But I know there was a demonstration in Berlin by the non-Jewish wives of couples, demonstrating about their husbands. And that wasn't put down actually. I remember that. [00:34:01] How and when it happened, I don't quite know any more.

For the husband's to be released, wasn't it? Yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

That's quite interesting. And apparently, they were released.

Yeah, yeah.

Following those demonstrations, which is incredible.

They were released and told, "Get out of Germany." That's how Kitchener Camp came into place.

Yeah, yeah.

Yes.

And Rolf, tell us, so you say you saw Hitler driving by and did you ever meet him, Hitler? I mean, Munich a small.

Yes, there was a festival, was – it was called, in 1935, Haus der Deutschen Kunst. They started up a new sort of museum with all pictures and statues inside. And for the inauguration, they had a big procession coming along the road, showing them off to people. And people lined the streets to see that. Now, my parents and I were there as well, but we were at the back. And here, there were SA and SS keeping the crowd back, sort of from the procession. And one of the SS men said to my father, "Why didn't you let your children- we let the children sit in the front? Let them sit in the front." And my father didn't want to say anything, so we sat in the front with other kids and with our Nazi flag in our hand, watching the thing go by. [00:36:01] In the very end of the procession, there was a little sort of a haywagon and on that haywagon was Hitler, cheering to the crowd and sort of – and as he got towards us, the crowd just burst through and pushed us all down on top of him. And there was Hitler in front of me, shaking hands with all the kids who sort of were pushing in front of him. Well, we didn't shake hands with him, naturally. We tried to get – you know, tried to get back but we were pushed right on top of him. Yeah, that's how close I was to that fella. Well, I saw him many times up and down the Maximilianstraße. I saw him again when the Germans went into Sudetenland and occupied the Sudetenland first of all. The tanks came

through Munich then and got in up the roads, you know, sort of to all the [inaudible]. And I remember somebody saying, was it in England or Germany? “Oh, those German tanks are all just wooden models”, you know. They weren't bloody models, I can tell you. They were the real thing already then. Yeah.

Yeah. And Rolf, when – what were you feeling, let's say, in 1935 when you came so close?

Yeah, you see –

What were you feeling at the time?

I was a boy, I got away with murder. You know, sort of I didn't look Jewish and I could fight back. It's only the places where I had to be careful, was near my home, when I started getting there. Then they knew I was Jewish.

[00:38:06] *So otherwise you were quite free?*

I shouldn't have been free, but I didn't take a notice of it. You know, much of it. I even joined the Hitler Youth movement, because it was like the Boy Scouts here. We had fun, but in the end, they said to me, “Look, you can't be in here. You're a Jew.”

Did you go to some meetings?

Pardon?

Did you go to some Hitler Youth meetings?

Yeah, I joined the Hitler Youth movement. Yeah, that was sort of one in the area where I lived, in the sort of block of flats. The kids round in the block, they weren't against us. Herbert Laster, you don't know him, do you?

No.

There was a Jewish family there. There lived – how many Jewish families? I’m still in touch with one boy in our block of flats, who was three or four years younger than I. I’m in touch with him still, from Munich.

And he still lives in Munich?

Yeah, yeah. He still lives in Munich. He’s ninety-odd now and we found each other somehow, I don’t know how.

So, in that block, were there any other Jewish families apart from you?

Yeah, the Lasters were Jewish. Above us, who emigrated to America in ’35, were Jewish. No, I don’t think anymore, no.

So, for you, you didn’t think that was a problem to go to the Hitler Youth at the time? Everyone was doing it?

No, it was fun. You went swimming, you – you know, it was like the Boy Scouts.

[00:40:02] *So after how long did they tell you, “You can’t come here”? Or how...?*

About a month after, I suppose, yeah. And – but those Hitler Youth boys in the block, they never were against the two of us. Because if anybody messed with us, we – I remember my brother had to come in, because he was naughty out there playing with the other kids. And he was sitting on the windowsill and I saw them coming into a fight with some of the others. So, he just shot down there, come and joined the fight to make sure that I’m all right.

So, you were quite tough? You...?

I was quite tough as a youngster, yeah.

Which was helpful in this situation.

Oh, yes. Very helpful in many occasions, I can tell you that. Oh, yes. And in later life as well, now and again. Anyhow.

Anyway, and in the school, in your Jewish school, so what happened once you then finished the primary school?

Yes. When we – so we went to the old *Gymnasium*. Now, that wasn't Jewish, you see, and they wouldn't have us. They said, "No, we don't want Jews." And so, we had nowhere else to go. There was no fifth class anywhere, because the Jewish school in those days had only four years, you see. So very quickly, they made a fifth class, but we didn't have any room in the Jewish school. [00:42:07] So another school in North London, Gabelsberger Schule-

[Lucy] North London? Not London.

[Rolf] And had to give up an area for us to have a class there. That was a fifth, and the sixth came along. They had to make a sixth. We were the first class of children who went right through a Jewish school. And the other children who were in the normal schools had to come in, if they wanted to or not. They were chucked out of the *Gymnasium*. They were chucked out of the non-Jewish schools and they had to come to the Jewish school.

So, it was growing, that school?

Yeah. So, we had – the last year, we had the eighth year. We had eight years of schooling and Germany in those days. And the eighth year, we had a teacher, oh, I don't know how – he was a teacher. He actually was an officer in the German army, but he was Jewish. In the First World War, he won the Iron Cross 1st class. He was – well, he was a typical German, in a way, but he was a good teacher

And then, was it a very full class? Were lots of people there at that point?

Oh, yes. The last year, we had four rows. Now, why...? Oh, yes. [00:44:00] The girls were sitting in one row and the girls came up sitting in the second row, halfway up. And the other half, I was sitting there. And then, we had another boys' row. I remember their names, even.

Come on then.

Bertha Leverton was in my class. Yes.

Yes, who else?

Bea Green wasn't. There was Ruth Goldmann and Edi Goldfarb. There was – anyhow, there was quite a – Carmen Eskenasi, there was Paul Ramper. There Nessian Tuchmann, there was Heinz and Oskar Abeles. There was the Müllers, who went to America and started a bakery, which they had in Germany. They started it in Denver, Colorado. They started a big bakery there. Yeah, anyhow. Right.

Amazing. What was the bakery called in Denver?

Pardon?

What was it called, the bakery they started?

They were called Müller. Müller, they were called.

Müller?

Müller, yeah. There were two brothers as well, one was in my class and one was in Walter's class.

So, and some people were starting to emigrate? I mean, were emigrating then or...?

Well, now, when did they pick them up and put them all into the concentration camp? After Kristallnacht, yes, that's right.

Yeah, later.

Yeah. So, in Kristallnacht, all German Jews were arrested. [00:46:04] They were sent either to Dachau or there was a concentration camp in Berlin. There was another one, I don't know. But the Polish Jews were not arrested. I don't know why not, I don't really get that.

And was your father – did your father have German citizenship or not?

No, he had Polish, you see.

Because he was born in –

Yeah. But it was born in Munich. Yeah, but, you know, on the continent it's mostly – it still is different. You took the nationality of your parents. You see, my grandfather was Austrian. That was before the First World War, there was no Poland.

And born in Lviv?

Pardon?

And born in Lemberg?

Yeah, he was born in Lemberg. They had a furniture factory there. But he was Austrian, but in 1921 Poland was created. So, my grandfather became Polish. My father became Polish and I was born a Polish. I've still got my Polish passport, which I had. It's sort of a funny way. It's not understandable to English people at all. Like if you're born in England, you get a British passport. No. And now, I don't think it's the same in England. They gave you – if you're born of – anyhow.

[00:48:04] *So that was important for after Kristallnacht.*

Yeah.

Tell me a little bit then, what are your memories of Kristallnacht, please?

Yes. What I remember? Not very much really. All I remember, that the – before Kristallnacht, that was already in August '38, the biggest synagogue in Munich, was a beautiful building. And Hitler- it was right behind the very famous place in Munich where all the sort of government places were. And Hitler saw it and he said, "I want that down." And it gave us time. Now, I was in that school then, being taught for emigrating. And it gave us time to go over the synagogue, take all the schools out, take all the books out, and take some of the beautiful things inside out. Because the synagogue was very beautiful. It was a beautiful building. It was like those synagogues in Budapest and in Berlin. And we had actually – could dismantle as much as possible. But it didn't really matter, because later on it was just – but anyhow.

[00:50:00] *So you went into the synagogue and managed to get some things out?*

Yeah, we –

And then, which synagogue? That synagogue on –

In the Herzog-Max-Straße, am Stachus.

Yeah. That's where that little memorial is today.

Pardon?

There is a little memorial. There's a little stone.

Yeah, there is a memorial. Yeah, there –

A very small memorial.

Pardon?

A very small memorial.

Memorial, yes. A sort of plaque of remembrance, yeah. That's still –

Yeah, that's where it was?

Yes, that's still there. We went to see that this week. Yes, that's right. Yeah, I helped to pull the stuff out, because we've got all the boys crawl over the place and –

For the...?

For that *Berufsschule* was for emigrating.

So, tell us, because we didn't say that yet. So, when you finished school, you finished school, you then went to a vocational...

Yeah, no. I went first of all, an apprenticeship for a year and three weeks. Now those three weeks helped me to get a good German pension. Because say gave me all the years which I could have had and it also, allowed me – I was just made redundant here, to pay something in for extra years. [Phone rings].

You were telling us about this your apprenticeship. So, what was the apprenticeship?

I've told you already before.

No...

It was – oh, yes. The apprenticeship was for a year and three weeks. Now, the first year, you don't put any stamps on in Germany for the apprenticeship. [00:52:00] But for those three weeks, which ultimately, let me go into the German pension system. And I actually went back to Germany, to my mother's hometown, where I still had relations here. Now she had to go up to the pension office for herself and I went with her. And she said to me, “Oh, you might be able to get a pension yourself.” So, I got up there, but I didn't know where to go to. As I'm walking up and down outside, some big, hefty German comes up to me. He says, “What are you looking for?” “*Ich weiß nicht, ob ich eine Pension bekommen kann*” [I don't know if I qualify for a pension] I spoke to him in German, you know. So, he looked at me, he says, “Well, you've come to the right department, come in with me.” Now he happened to be in charge of the whole lot. Very lucky for me. And I showed him my thing what I had, probably German, and it looked at it. He said, “*ja, Sie können-*” “I'll tell you in English. “You can become a – you could get a pension.” I said, “Are you sure?” He said, “What?” And these lawyers in here in England said to me, “Well, no, no, no.” He said, “Yes, yes, you can.” Anyhow, to cut the long story short, he liked me. He must have been a proper Nazi in his time, but whatever he was, he helped me. [00:54:00] He helped me to get a German pension. Then I went back to thank him, I went up to see him and they said to me, “You can't see him.” “Just tell him I'm here.” And to their surprise, he came down the stairs to meet me and take me into his office. And he said, “What are you doing?” He says, “What the hell are you doing? What are these people doing for you? Don't do that. Do this and that.” And I came back to the English lawyers who were haggling down in Kilburn. And I said, “You can't do that.” I said, “Just do it what he said.” To their surprise, it all came through and I'm, well, very lucky. I got a very German pension, because I paid in quite a bit on top of it, which I was able to do. Because of that, in my opinion he was good ex-Nazi.

And what was it, the apprenticeship? What were you working as?

I was a motorcar mechanic.

Motorcar mechanic?

Mechanic, yeah.

Uh huh, in a garage?

In a garage, yeah.

Yeah, and what was the name of the garage?

Wilde Brothers. *Museumsgarage*, it was called, but the owners were the Wilde Brothers. You know, the ones where they in the end, said they won't work with me because I'm Jewish.

So, it was a Jewish business?

Was a Jewish business, but the – it was sort of the Nazi shop steward, the Nazi shop steward, for a better word. All I know is they said they won't work with me anymore. [00:56:00] So I had to leave.

But you said they couldn't get rid of you because of your contract?

They couldn't really get rid of my contract. But I wasn't going to shut the business down, so I left.

And from there, you went to this vocational school?

Yes, that's right.

And where was the vocational school?

In North London somewhere.

Okay, in Munich?

Well, that location. Soon we went to take the synagogue down.

Yeah, and how did you know – tell us again because I – sorry, I didn't quite understand. How did you know that the synagogue was in danger?

No, they told us they were going to – that was before Kristallnacht. They were going to take it away, because Hitler didn't like it. He even said – they said, "I don't want that there. Take it away." That was in about June or July '38, before Kristallnacht.

So, you knew and maybe was it because it was in such a central part of Munich?

Yeah.

But at that point, you didn't think it would concern all synagogues, just this specific synagogue?

Yeah, only that synagogue. Yeah.

That's interesting. So, you cleared out, what, the Sefer Torah, the...?

Yeah. The Sefer Torahs were all taken out.

And put where? What did you do with them?

We just took them out and then they stored them somewhere, I don't know. They may have been destroyed, most likely, in the end. But at that stage, we took them out. So, when they set the – on the Kristallnacht, they set the *Yekkes* synagogue on fire. But the Polish, the *ostjüdische* [Eastern European Jewish] synagogue, they couldn't set on fire because it was within a building of flats, so they just ransacked it.

[00:58:10] But this synagogue was burned, wasn't it?

Yeah. No, the first synagogue?

Yeah.

No, that wasn't burned. We took it down.

You took the content down but the...

They dismantled it, they didn't burn it.

That synagogue was not burned?

They just put bulldozers in it and took it away. That was before Kristallnacht, they dismantled that synagogue, because Hitler wanted it as a parking place.

I understand. So that's why the things – maybe some things survived from that synagogue.

Yeah.

Could have been, yes.

And you remember going in with the other people from this vocational school?

School, we took out as much as we could take out.

Yeah. And then, on actual Kristallnacht, where were you, Rolf?

Oh, yes. Where was I? You're right, I was in the basement of the Polish Consulate, with my father and his brothers. All males, over sixteen, were down there. We were in the cellar there. We must have had a tip off that it's going to happen.

And you went to look for safety at the Polish Consulate?

We were in the cellar of the Polish Consulate, I remember that, in Munich. Where it was in Munich, I don't remember.

Not your mother, not your mother?

No, not my mother.

And your brother?

Not my brother. But I and my father, my uncles, yes.

[01:00:00] *Because you were already eighteen then?*

I was over sixteen.

Sixteen?

No, I wasn't quite sixteen, was I?

'22...

'38, I would have been sixteen.

Sixteen, yeah.

In October. But my father took me, but he left Walter and Mum at home, yes. Yes.

For how long did you stay there? What...?

Only overnight, we came out the next day and then we saw – we must have seen – on the way home, we must have seen the burning places. The shops which were – the shops were a mess. There was a supermarket down in town, there was a – what's the fella's name? Eisenberg.

No, there was – he was a very rich man. I forget now. But I remember they all were in a mess. They just looted them.

Yeah. And you saw that the next day?

Yeah, I saw that. Yeah.

And the trams, the trams? You took the tram home? Or how did you get home from the Polish embassy?

You could walk everything in Munich. It might take you half or three-quarters-of-an-hour, but you could walk.

And what about your local – the area? What was there any...?

There was no- Jewish shops in our area. No, the nearest Jewish shops were over the – near the centre of the town. There were butchers and sort of where they sold food and stuff.

[01:02:06] But we had no Jewish shop in our area at all.

So, for you, was Kristallnacht, was it a turning point? Or was it – or did...?

Oh, yes. Then they realised, that's when the Kindertransport came up. My parents had no hesitation to send us, hoping that they could follow us, but... Also, the ones who were in the concentration camp, in the very least, if they could move, that they could leave Germany. That's how Kitchener Camp started.

Yes, Kitchener Camp.

We had thousands of men in there. Well, not thousands, but I don't know how many. But quite a few.

But in fact, in your case, there's another story to be told because of the deportation of the Polish Jews.

Now, that was just before, yeah.

Before, so we need to talk about that.

Yeah, well, that was –

So, what happened?

Yes, when he came in, that Gestapo bloke, and told my mum – he was prepositioning her before to even phone up and tell me to come home. And she said, “He won’t come.” He said, “Oh, he won’t come? He knows there’s something wrong. But I will tell him to come home.” And I came home and they took us to Stadelheim, which was the prison in Germany. And there were all Polish Jews and their kids, who they could find. [01:04:07] Now, my uncle was in there with his family. There were four of them. That was Karl and his wife, Arno and Günther. Arno is actually a Nobel – you know, won the Nobel Prize, Arno Penzias. But he was only a kid then.

What did he win it for?

For something in the Big Bang, which he found out there’s some residual morbs or still in the – I don’t even know what it is.

Anyway, he was with you?

He was with us, yes.

And your mother was there as well?

Yes.

So, did she...?

But the governor there, he was very humane. He left the doors open all night, that we put a gangway and people could bring things in for us. You know, additional food to the prison food. So, you know, that was really – it was stressful, most likely. But as far as physically concerned, no, it didn't affect us very much. Then they put on that train, I'd say, in the evening or in the middle of the night.

When was this?

From that Stadelheim.

Yes, was it...?

That was just before Kristallnacht.

So, October maybe? October '38?

Yeah, that was about the 28th of October '38. [01:06:01] They then put us on a train that took us right up through Germany. They wanted to get to that town on the Polish-German border where they –

Zbąszyń.

Zbąszyń, I forget.

I think so.

I don't really know. But we went – we travelled up. We could buy food when they had to stop at stations, we'd get some food in. And then all of a sudden, it stopped and it must have been about 11 o'clock at night, up somewhere in northern Germany. And the Gestapo came

through the train and said, "You can go." We said, "Go where?" "Where you like." So, the train had stopped in a sort of small station. We didn't move first of all, we were so stunned. And then he came through and said, "Ah, but if you pay the fare, we'll take you back to Munich." So, we collected and took the fare back to Munich.

And all the people on the train, everyone went back?

Yeah. Yeah, but some of them didn't have any money. You know, because we were – they were picked up anywhere. So, my dad and his father, who sort of were elected as spokesmen, they sort of went down and just asked the more well-off contribute something for the other ones. [01:08:09] So they took us back to Munich. When we got back to Munich, our families were there to take us home.

Did you find out why the train never went to Zbąszyń, then?

Yeah, because it couldn't get there in time. It couldn't get up there in time, it had to be there before midnight. If you got there, they would have just dumped us in no man's land with the dogs on one side and the other one not letting you in, in that mud. Some of the poor people were caught in there for a couple of nights, 'til the international people raised such havoc, that I think they took them into Poland, into sort of sort of camps already. You know, sort of places where there were other Jews who would look after them.

Yeah, the Polish government didn't want the Jews.

No, they didn't really want them, no.

No, yeah.

Yeah.

So, you arrived back in Munich and went back home?

Yeah, we – my other uncle was at the station, I remember him giving us a key and took us home. And then, Kristallnacht came along after that.

So that's interesting that you then went to the Polish embassy.

Yeah, for Kristallnacht, yeah. He must have been tipped off, because see, even in the Nazi population, there were people who had Jewish relatives, you know. [01:10:00] They were tipped off and that they would pass it on to as many people as they could.

What about your mother's family? Were there any Nazis in her family or...?

No, they were all Jehovah Witnesses and they couldn't get their mouths shut. That's another story. My uncle, one of my father's – mother's brothers, he was condemned to death by the German People's Court. And the governor wouldn't carry out the sentence, what did they do? He said to my uncle, “You keep your mouth shut. You come and work for me. You are sort of my handymen at home.” So, in prison, he took him to his quarter as his handymen. Anyhow, that's another story.

And they were all Jehovah's Witnesses?

Yes, yeah.

And of course, the Jehovah's Witness had – they were prosecuted as well, prosecuted.

Oh, yes, yeah. I had a cousin of mine, he was also a Jehovah's Witness, but he was staffed in the U-boats. Now, he was a wireless operator in a U-boat and his father was condemned to death in a German People's Court.

Explain – I know what the Germans People's Court is, maybe just explain what that is.

Well, to circumvent the normal justice, they set up these courts and they had the same power as a normal court. They could sentence people to death and transportation, whatever it is.

Yeah, there were parallel courts, weren't they?

Yeah, yeah.

And you could – even a son or daughter, you could go there and say your parents said something.

[01:12:05] Oh, yes.

Yeah.

That's another thing, kids gave their parents away. Kids...

And that was dealt with in these People's Courts, was it?

Yeah, oh, yeah. Very much so.

So interesting. So, he survived, the brother, the Jehovah's Witness?

The cousin of mine? Even my – the one who was sentenced to death, he survived as well. Yes. He survived the war. Yeah, amazing really.

So interesting. And so, I was going to ask you, of course, so your mother was considered Polish because she – did she lose her citizenship by marrying your father, her German citizenship?

Yes, I suppose so, yeah.

Yeah. Which –

There was no such thing. I don't know, dual nationality, I don't know.

No, she must have lost it and hence she had, herself, Polish papers, I would assume. So back to Kristallnacht. So, at that point, things did change?

Oh, yes. Everybody tried to get out. So, as Kindertransport came along, my aunt was a PA to the Head of the German Jewish organisation in Munich. There's quite some central organisations for Jewish people. As she was the PA for him, so she put us on the list for the Kindertransport.

Your aunt did?

Yeah.

Ah ha, what was her name?

[01:14:01] Hella. She died in Auschwitz.

Hella Penzias?

Yeah.

So, your father's sister?

Yeah.

And she worked – was it, what? Zentralrat der Juden, or what this organisation? You said she was a PA for who?

For the Head of the Jewish organisation in Munich.

From the community?

Yeah, for the whole community. For the East German Juden and for the German, German – there were all sort of under one organisation. That was necessary by the Munich government, you see. They were – she had to make the list up of all the people who were sent to Auschwitz. In the end, her husband was being sent to Auschwitz and she went with him. She will go, she wouldn't – and she and her husband died in Auschwitz, actually. That's the only ones who died in Auschwitz in my family. My grandfather died in Theresienstadt or was murdered in Theresienstadt, I don't know.

Hella, what was her name? Not –

Hella Penzias. What was her...?

Her married name?

What was her married name? I don't remember.

So when, Rolf, was the first time you heard about the Kindertransport? Which wasn't even called Kindertransport then.

No, all I know is my dad said to me, “You're going – in a few days, you're going to England.” So, we were surprised, yeah. But as you do what your parents tell you, we got ready. [01:16:03] I've still got my little suitcase I came to England with.

And what did you take on that suitcase?

Oh, just some clothing, maybe one book. Not much. Not much we could take. The Nazis would have taken it out on the border and nicked it.

What book? Did you take a book?

Oh, I forget now, to be quite honest with you. I don't know what I took, that I don't remember. All I do remember, the Nazis going through our clothing and nicking the

candlesticks or the things that were meant to – the parents put in the suitcase. Watches and stuff like this.

Yeah. And what did your – and your brother? How did you feel about it when you were told, both of you?

Well, it was an adventure. I was sixteen, he was fourteen. You know, we thought we'd see our parents again in the few weeks' time. Not in ten years. Not ten years later. I was lucky I saw my parents again ten years later. I forgot what they looked like. When I saw them ten years later, God. Nevermind.

Okay, we'll get to that, Rolf. Yes, but so you were in a way, good- that was good you were a little bit older at the time, sixteen.

Yeah. Oh, yes. Yeah.

And tell us about the journey then. What...?

I do remember when the train came from Vienna for the Kindertransport, and it was full of crying *kinders*. [01:18:00] And there were a couple of two or three women, looking after. I know when I got off the train, the woman said to me, "You look after that boy until we get to England." It was a kid about four years old, crying his eyes out. He didn't know what was happening, or where we were going, or what he was doing. And she – I had to try to comfort him as much as I could. Yeah, we went from Munich to Frankfurt, where we stayed in a – we slept in a hall of a Jewish school. They just laid out some mattresses and we just stayed the night there. We were fed and I remember that, and we were quite comfortable. Then we got on the train again and at the border, just before the border, the Nazis came through and turfed all our luggage out. And nicked everything what is nickable, for themselves. And then, we got across the border and that's one thing that I'll never forget. There was these women there with their funny hats, with trays of cocoa, and sweets, and rolls, and everything that's nice you can imagine. There was these Dutch women and the Nazis, oh, they didn't half hate that. Because they had to come across the border with us, before they go back to themselves. But

that's one thing I shall never forget, how those women, on one side they were taking everything and they couldn't do enough for us. [01:20:01] They cuddled the children, they gave us sweets, whatever they could give us. It was a thing I'll never forget.

The contrast, the contrast from...?

The contrast between the two. Do you know? They tried to find out, when the Germans took over Holland, who these women were and nobody would spill the beans. And I don't know – we tried with Erich, to try to get a 'thank you' into that area, but we never got very far.

Were they just local women who lived on the border?

Yeah, they were local women from that little village, which was on the border.

Yes.

We tried to – Eric and I tried to get something going. I don't know, we never got very far. But I'll never forget those.

And Rolf, what station in Munich did you leave from? What was the station?

Hauptbahnhof.

Hauptbahnhof?

Yeah.

Ah ha. And how many children came from Munich with you, apart from you and your brother?

I think about twenty.

Because it was already quite full, you said?

Oh, yes. It was full of kids from Vienna. More kids came out of Vienna than anywhere else, I think. It might be Berlin might catch on, but I think more kids came out of Vienna.

Yeah. And the date? Which was the date you joined that train?

I left the Munich on the 4th of January 1939. Got up to Hook of Holland by the 5th of January '39. [01:22:03] And on the overnight boat from Hook of Holland to Harwich, where we landed. And it took us to Dovercourt.

Yeah. And you said you had to take care of this four-year-old boy. What was his name?

Oh, gosh, can't remember.

Did you ever see this boy again?

No. Although I remember – I don't even remember much on the journey with him. But I remember that woman giving me that crying kid. Yeah, we all came on that – Bertha Leverton came on that first transport. A guy called [01:22:55] Nissan Tuchmann came. He changed his name.

And Bea Green? Bea?

I don't know if Bea was on that first one. I think only two of them came out in Kindertransport from Munich. I don't know if Bea was on that one.

Was that the first one? You went on the first one from Munich?

Yeah, yeah. Yes, I remember that.

And your brother during the trip, what was he doing? Do you remember?

The same, he was with me.

He was with you, you were together?

Yeah, we were together, helping each other and I'm looking after him as well.

And your parents, did they come to the station with you? Do you remember that?

Yes, but they had to – couldn't come on the platform. They had to stay back, because I know some woman, or parent, took her child again off the train. [01:24:03] I do remember that. She just couldn't –

Off your train?

She just couldn't bear parting with her child, I think. I remember one child going off there.

Once you were already in the compartment, sitting there?

Yeah, yeah.

One child?

Yeah. She came up, running up, and to her girl to come off. Funny how you remember that sort of... Anyhow, right.

Yeah. Okay, anything else from the trip you remember?

No, all I know is that, yeah, the Hook of Holland, I remember going off the boat and walking along. And then, boarding the ship and I remember arriving in Harwich. And on the boat itself- some doctor examined us, I remember. I remember a doctor with his stethoscope.

Examining the children?

Yeah. And what I do remember, coming off the boat and going on a double-decker bus. And I'd never seen a double-decker bus before in my life. That was quite intriguing. Then we came to Kitchener Camp. Not Kitchener Camp, to the Warner Holiday Centre in the middle of winter. It was January '39 and it was a cold winter, I remember. And we slept in these little huts, which were fairly open, with the icicles down – yeah, yeah. Yes, but we were free. They did everything they could for us there. [01:26:08] They even arranged classes to teach the children. Goodness knows what they taught us, I forget. We were allowed to go into town and go for a walk outside. But it was cold. It was a cold winter, that winter. You look up the records, it was very a cold winter.

Yes, I heard that quite a few times. People say it was very cold.

Oh, yes.

And Rolf, were you – in Harwich, did you stay at all in Harwich? Or was it straight to Dovercourt when you arrived? Were there a few days Harwich?

No, no, we went straight from the boat to the camp. But we stayed in that camp for about two months. But you see, most of the children, some of the children were sort of shipped straightaway, because they knew where they were going. And you know, some had made arrangements with family and friends in England, who went there before. But other people came and took the children into their homes. But they didn't want two boys, sixteen and fourteen. They wanted you know, six, seven-year-old, ten-year-old ones. They didn't want like myself. And the only reason we got taken was, we were out walking in town along the sort of the – along – not in town, but there along the cliff path, and a dog had fallen down onto a ledge. [01:28:04] And all the people were looking down and before anybody could say anything, my brother had scrambled down, picked up the dog, and was trying to make his way up again. And some reporter must have been there, because he was mentioned in the local newspaper. And so, one day a vicar came to pick up two children, because the lady from his parish, she was called Lady Roydon, had instructed him to come down to Dovercourt, to

the camp and pick up two children to bring back. And she would – he would have to keep them in his vicarage, while she would support them pay for them. So, that vicar came and he must have seen the paper, or heard about, and he asked for my brother. And he said to him – he asked for Walter and Walter saw him. He said to him, “Would you like to come back with me?” So, he said, “Yes. But I've got a brother, sixteen-years-old. I won't go without him.” So, he said, “No, I don't really want a sixteen-year-old one, I just want you.” [01:30:04] And my brother said, “No, I'm not going.” So, but in the end, he changed his mind. So, we came back with the vicar to the vicarage.

After how many months in Dovercourt?

Oh, it must have been nearly a couple of months, I would say.

So just before coming on to the vicarage, so your daily life in Dovercourt, you said there were some classes. What do you remember of...?

They were very good. Look, it was very difficult for the people but the Jewish people, they organised everything what they possibly could. There was a big hall there, they used it for breakfast and right through the day, we stayed in that big hall, where they put some stoves in. And we had heat in there, we had food in there. We were – couldn't have been treated any better, under the circumstances. But we must remember that most of the kids were picked up as – taken away fairly soon. The younger kids to families, and some kids were straight away taken. Didn't even go into the camp. They came off the boat and went straight to Liverpool Street station, where they already knew they were coming.

So, it was mostly, probably, older boys who stayed? And girls?

Well, no, there was all – but the younger children were picked up by people who took them into their homes. But these older ones, like my brother and I, well, it was a bit more difficult.

[01:32:06] *Yeah. What about English, Rolf? Did you have any English when you came?*

Very little. And I actually was taught English in Germany a bit, and so was my brother. But he was far more gifted than I was. He'd pick up a language just like this. He did so in later life when it came to Arabic, for example, but that's another story. But actually, we took him with us to act as an interpreter when we used to go for a walk and we used to try to chat to the local girls. So, he had to do the interpreting for us, because he could speak a little. I – we had very little English, you know.

And did you meet some local girls?

Well, we just sort of, you know, sort of like some – yes, we did actually. Yes.

So how far, Rolf, was the Dovercourt, that holiday camp, from Harwich? Was it...?

It was – I think it's quite a few miles. But we went – all the coast along there is a sort of holiday area, you know.

Where did you go out? You could leave Dover – you could leave there?

We could leave the camp, yes. But we just would go to the sea wall there and walk along there, you see. There were – it was all built up there. Harwich was a port, remember. Dovercourt was a seaside resort, you see. It was –

Did you ever go to Harwich to the cinema or to things like...?

No, no, no. We had we had cinemas, I think we had cinemas there. No, we didn't have any cinemas there, I don't remember any, no.

So, you went out to the seaside?

Yeah, we went – I remember it was winter, it wasn't that nice. [01:34:01] But we did go for walks, yeah.

Were – so were the English lessons there in Dovercourt? Did you get...?

Yeah, I think they did try to do something like that. But we were picked up by that vicar in the end, we got there. It was quite funny, that was. And Walter was young enough to go to local school, but I was already too old to go to a school. I would have to go to – I was sixteen, nearly – yeah, I was just over sixteen. So, his butler was teaching me English at home, that vicar. And on a Sunday, like good boys, we went to the church with him and we put the bits he gave us to put on the plate. And that was it and we were invited to tea by Lady Roydon, who was the landowner, a big landowner in the area.

What was the name again? Sorry, I –

Roydon. Roydon.

Roydon.

R-o-y-d-o-n.

Roydon.

Roydon. But when we were with the vicar, for Pesach, he sent us to a Jewish family called Schwartz, in Birkenhead. And when he found out that we were going to church and the plate on it, he created a hell with the local Jewish community and ultimately, with Woburn House here in London, that we were pulled out from there. [01:36:03] And we were taken to Liverpool to – in Linnet Lane, to a boarding school, which had emigrated from Cologne to Liverpool and Leeds. They sent to different classes, one to Liverpool and one to Leeds. And they sent us there. Now that was – we must have been about thirty boys.

What was the name of that boarding school?

I don't know. It's quite a famous building, it's – it was a Realgymnasium from Cologne, which –

But not the Jawne School? Not Jawne?

Yeah, yeah, Jawne, I think.

This was the Jawne School?

Yeah, that's right, yeah. Yeah, that's right. You're right.

Ah ha.

Yeah. And –

So that was the group of the Jawne and they – because they came first to London and some then went to Liverpool, you said, and...?

The Jawne School, they went to Liverpool and Leeds, I think. Yeah.

Yeah. So, you joined them?

We – Walter and I joined them. Now, Walter went to the local school and I was taught in there.

And Rolf, how did you feel when you – when they pulled you out of this? Do you think it was correct? I mean, how did you feel about going to church and these things?

It didn't –

It wasn't a problem for you?

It didn't actually worry me. But we met some very nice English friends, who invited us back and that sort of thing. We had a good time there.

[01:38:00] *But do you think it was the right decision by the committee of Woburn House to take you away from there?*

Well, looking back, yes. We couldn't really sort of make decisions ourselves on that side. But I was quite happy to go to sort of – to the boarding school. It was funny, we went in that boarding school, instead of teaching us English they taught – tried to teach us Spanish. You know, that's another thing, but anyhow.

And Rolf, were you in touch at all with your parents then in that time?

Now, wait a minute.

So, you arrived in January '39.

Yes. Oh, yes. We were still in touch with my parents. I was in touch with my parents for a long time, because we could be in touch with my parents until war was declared. But before war was declared, a day before, two days before, Gestapo told my parents, "Get out or you'll go to – be taken to Dachau." Now, the only way they could get out was go on a visitor's visa to Italy. So, they went to Milan. And they already – one of my aunts has already been in Milan for a long time. So, my parents and my uncle and his wife – my aunt only, and another aunt of mine. They went to Milan. [01:40:00] And there, they stayed. How they supported themselves, I don't know. Were they were supported by the American Jewish community in Milan, I don't know. But all I know is they lived in Milan 'til war was declared, 'til Italy came into the war a year later. And then they went down – right down in Calabria, interned. So, I did have letters from them, right up 'til they were interned. Must have –

Because they could write from Italy?

Yeah, they could write. I know we – I received an affidavit for – to go to America for my brother and myself, from an uncle of my mother, who sent us an affidavit. So, we could have gone to America, why we didn't go, God only knows.

Yeah. So up until then you could speak to them. Did you speak on the phone at all?

No, we – one didn't phone like that. You had to book a call to the next town here, in those days. You don't pick up the phone and – you had to book a call. You didn't live in that age.

No, no. So, you joined the Jawne, the school.

Oh yes. It was quite happy there and –

[01:42:00] *But you couldn't go – you didn't go to school then? Or you –*

No.

No.

They taught us in that school. They taught us English, they taught us Spanish, they taught us maths. Remember, I had a German education and that was a good education. I could – I came here – now, when did I sit for my matric to go to university? I could sit for my English matric, because I had a second language, which you had to have, which was German. And I passed English matric without any problems. That's how good an education I had in Germany

When did you – when was that, Rolf?

Oh, I forget now. I must have been – sorry, I forget.

That's okay. So, were you – where did you actually live? In that school that you were...?

Yes, you lived, you learned in that school. And I know that just before Christmas that year, which would've been – I remember Chamberlain declaring war in there, in that school. We were listening to him on the radio.

And what was the address of that school? Do you remember that? Where was it exactly?

In Linnet Lane in Liverpool.

Linnet Lane.

Linnet.

Linnet.

L-i, double n, e-t.

Thank you. Linnet Lane.

Yeah, Linnet Lane, it was called. I've got a photograph of that.

[01:44:01] *And how long did you stay there?*

I was just coming to that. I became ill. It was around about December '39, yeah, and I became very ill. I had a very high temperature and the doctor they called in couldn't make out what it was. And they called in a specialist from – I used to know his name. Silversmith, it was, his name, at Birkenhead General Hospital. And he came to see me and he take one look at me and he knew immediately what it was. I had osteomyelitis in my right femur. It's a bone disease which you now cure with penicillin. In those days, they didn't have penicillin. So, he looked at me he could tell immediately what it was. He gave that doctor such a dressing down, I've never heard one doctor talk to another doctor like he did. But I do remember him, he was a lovely man. Doctor... He said, "Rolf, I'm going to hurt you, but I can't help that." He wrapped me in a blanket, took me in his arms, carried me down. He put me in the back of his car. He – in the meantime, he had phoned up the hospital to get the operating theatre ready. **[01:46:08]** He took me in his arms, in his car. He drove me through the Mersey Tunnel to the Birkenhead General Hospital. Straight in and he told them, "Straight up into the theatre." And he said to me, "I'm going to operate on you, Rolf. You

won't feel anything, but you will feel better after." And he operated that time, straightaway on me. He put a pick – I've got all these gashes, where they operated on that. But he was a lovely man, Dr Silversmith.

So, what did they have to do for you? What did they have to do?

In those days, they only cut it open, scraped the bone to take the dead – they scraped – it's a disease. It's the marrow of the bone goes bad and they keep it open, the wound. This Vaseline gauze to drain it. And they put you in a Thomas splint and I was in that hospital for nine months. Nobody came to see me, my brother was in – by that time, evacuated to Chester. He didn't have enough money to come and see me. But I didn't go short. [01:48:00] That specialist and the ward sister took me on like if I was their own child. I was never – my fruit, my bowl was always full of fruit and stuff, like the other patients. She came for them too.

So, did you have to stay still? Could you walk at all?

No, no. I was, for nine months, in that hospital. Yeah, I was treated well.

And nobody from any refugee committee came to see you or anyone?

No.

From Woburn House or...?

No, nobody came to see me. Can't remember anybody coming to see me. I must have gone off the radar screen, I don't know. But when I came out, I – my leg, I couldn't move my leg from here to here. It was really stiff. And I was boarding with a Viennese family and they couldn't get on with me, I didn't like them.

Where was that, Rolf?

That was in Liverpool and then, I ended up with an *Yiddishe* family. Polish, a proper Mama and Papa. And they took me in and were ever so good to me. She fed – I was skin and bones, she fed me and she was very good to me, that woman. [01:50:04] Treated me like her own sons. Her sons were older than I. And the old man made the lotions for hairdressers. And they made these lotions, he bought some in from the chemist and he mixed it up. It cost a couple of pennies and he sold it for a shilling, or two and six. You know, about fifteen times what it cost to make. I remember, he was a good guy.

What were they called?

Oh, dear. I know where I lived, in Granby Street. I don't know their names anymore.

How did they find you? Or who – through the Jewish community?

Yeah, it was the Jewish community would have done it.

Locally?

Yeah.

And the Viennese family, you said you didn't get on.

No.

Why?

I just didn't. You know, they just wanted the money and what they would get from me. And they didn't help me much. I forget now really, you know, sort of bit of a haze. But come things stick out in your mind. Yes, they were very good to me, in 93 Granby Street, that was, in Liverpool.

Because you had to – you still had to recuperate or...?

Yeah, yeah.

You couldn't just walk around?

Well, I could walk, yes. I sort of – but I could hardly bend my leg, you know, that sort of thing. Yeah.

And how long did you stay with them?

[01:52:00] It becomes a bit hazy now. I remember it was war then already. Oh, another incident I remember there, in the hospital, that was just around about Christmas and New Year. New Year '39, my uncle came to see me. He was actually emigrating to America. He was a father of Arno Penzias, the Nobel Prize winner. He came to see me in the hospital there before he went on board. And that ship went out, it had to come back again, some reason or other. And he came to see me again, that I do remember.

So, you had one visitor.

Yeah.

That was your father's brother?

Yeah. I don't think anybody else ever came. Not even the people who got me to that boarding school, because they didn't know. I wasn't in touch with them.

So, he saved your life, this doctor, you think?

Yeah. They kept – I was in there nine months, 'til I was well enough again. Oh, that – we've already gone on there, gone to Liverpool Street. I'm staying with these people who make the [inaudible] and the lotions for hairdressers. Ah, then I went to the government training centre there and they sent me onto a job which was just outside Blackpool, as a machine operator.

[01:54:13] That was a special lathe I was operating for them, it was quite interesting work. And I stayed with a landlady in Blackpool. Very nice. Had my own room, I went to work. And at the weekend, that landlady had Polish soldiers coming in. And I went out with them, because the Poles were about the only ones who had any sort of flying experience, fighter experience. They came with their – well, survived. They flew with their planes to England and they were stationed just outside Blackpool. And at weekends, they came in on leave and I went out with them. And one day, they said, “Well, why don’t you come and join the Polish Air Force?” I said, “Well, that’s a good idea.” Got nothing else, you know, sort of quite monotonous, the other was. So, I went back with them and I joined the Polish Air Force. Well, I think – I thought I did. I was kitted out and I don’t know what I actually did, I can’t really remember much. But I was there about a week and then the Polish Commander – oh, it was funny, because I couldn’t speak Polish and we only could talk in English together.

[01:56:06] The Poles couldn’t speak the German. Anyhow, so the Polish CO came in, called me in his office and he said to me, “I don’t know what’s wrong, Rolf, but the big boss wants to see you.” There was an English Air Force officer was in charge of the aerodrome. So, he gave me – somebody came with me and we got into there. I got in there and saluted. And so, he said to me, “Are you Rolf Penzias?” I said, “Yes, Sir.” And he said to me, “There’s two gentlemen want to see you.” A couple of guys there in trench coats, they again asked me, “Are you Rolf Penzias?” “Yes.” “Do you work for [inaudible] Aircraft Factory on the Preston Road?” I said, “I was working for them, but I joined the Polish Air Force.” They said, “No, laddy. You can’t do that. You’ve got the Essential Work Order. You’ve got to go back where you come from.” So, they took me back to Blackpool again, to my work.

Because it was considered war work?

War work, yeah.

So, you absconded, so to speak, from the...?

Yeah, yeah. Absconded, yeah. Yeah, yeah. That was funny, that was.

Rolf, were you – what about internment? Were you ever tribunaled?

No, no. I was Polish.

You were Polish, ohh –

I was a friendly alien.

You were a friendly alien. Sorry, of course.

Not an enemy alien, what do you think? [01:58:01] So anyhow, so it was about – I don't know when it was. It was Christmas '40. So, my uncle and aunt, they're in London, southeast London, and they were going to give me a home, instead of having to live in digs. And they wrote to me and said – well, my father, his brother. And "Yes", he said, "Come down and we'll give you a home." And this time, I went to see the National Service Officer. And when I said to him, "Can I transfer to London?", he said, "What? You want to move to London?" There was the Blitz on, it was quite bad down here. So, I said, "Yes." "Yes, I'll give...", he gave me a transfer allowance to go to London. So, I paid off there, came to London. Had to register and I registered. And they found me a job immediately, there was no problem there.

Where did they live?

Pardon?

Where did they live?

They lived in southeast London. I had to think for a minute where we are now. Yeah, they lived in Breakspears Road, southeast London. That's in between New Cross and Lewisham. [02:00:00] Anyhow.

And how did they manage to come out? How did they manage to come to England?

He was in the Kitchener Camp and she came as a domestic.

And did they have children?

They had one boy, yes, later on, a lot later. In those days, they didn't have a child. She came as a domestic and she was imprisoned for not showing her change of address to the police. And as soon as she came out of prison, Fred married her. Yeah.

And did you know them as a child?

I went to school with her. When I was in school, she was two years older than I, because she married my uncle who is six years older than I was. He is my father's youngest brother, he was a good guy.

So, were you pleased that they went, that you could go there?

Oh, yes, yeah. Very pleased. I stayed with them, first of all down there. They found me digs in a house next door, a block of flats next door, with a landlady. I got a room up there where I could sleep and keep my luggage and wash. But I spent most of my time downstairs with them, because they only had a room, a sitting room, in a flat which they rented from somebody else. [02:02:05] Yeah, God, yeah.

And Rolf, what about your brother in that time?

My brother, all that time was – he was sent – when war broke out, he was evacuated to Chester, where he went to school. And from school after, he was very lucky. He was sent to Shell. They got a research lab up there on the Mersey, a lubrication lab, and he got a job in there. And seeing that he was quite clever, they sent him to Manchester University to study for a degree. So, he went to uni for a degree, he came back to them. And then he had jobs all over the world. He was one of – he was a clever thing, my brother.

What did he study?

Mechanical engineering.

What did he study? Mechanical Engineering?

Mechanical engineering. He specialised on – what did he specialise? I've got to think for a minute, on urban transportation.

[02:04:00] *Interesting.*

He was quite well known in that sort of game for doing underground systems and stuff like that.

But so, you didn't see much during that time?

No, we met for holidays. Yeah, we went on holidays together to Anglesey, I remember. What year? It's gone now. That's the first holiday I ever had. We went to Anglesey on a sort of holiday village, it was. Yeah, we went to a riding school there, to hire some horses, and they asked us, "Have you ridden before?" We said, "Oh, yes." Never been on a horse before in my life. [Laughs] Yeah, anyhow. Sorry.

Okay, so you were with your...?

Uncle and aunt.

Uncle and aunt.

And I went to work for a factory in Shoreditch Church and it's called – was called Howard Wall. Now, he was a guy, he wasn't Jewish himself, but he liked Jewish people. And I was said there as a sort of mechanic in their tool room as a turner, which I had experience in. And when I started work there, they – the manager of the tool room showed me around the place, what I had to do and what my work was. **[02:06:03]** It was all right, yeah. And I think on the second day, he came out to me and said to me, "Tom wants to see you." I said, "Who is

Tom?" "Well, he is the managing director." "What have I done now?" So, I went up there and apparently, he wasn't Jewish himself, but he knew about my background and he wanted to see me. And I went up to see him, he spoke to me and we had a good talk. And he said, "Do you like it?" and I said, "Yes, I like it but I don't want to just do what I'm doing now, on the lathe all the time. I want to be a tool maker like the other people, make tools complete." So, he said, "You go downstairs, I'll see to that." So, he instructed the manager down there to move me around and give me sort of an apprenticeship. And I did very well there and I became a very good tool maker. One of the best they had in there, they had about thirty in there. I was given the jobs nobody else could do and I wanted to go with the drawing office really, I wanted to be on design and development. [02:08:00] I wanted to not only just make them. So, I found myself another job somewhere and gave him notice. I remember the war was over then. We were quite experienced in that firm during the war. Fire watching and stuff like this. But anyhow, I gave in my notice to the manager, and he said to me, "You can't do this. I've got to say to Tom to give your notice." So, he said, "I'm not daft too. Look, I have to tell Tom I gave my notice in." So apparently, he told Tom and Tom told me to come upstairs to see him. He said, "What's the matter? Is the money not good enough?" So, I said, "No, it's not about the money, I want to go in design, in tool design. I don't want to just do that." So, he said, "Well, look, we can fix that." He just told the manager downstairs, "Send him upstairs to Mark Esner, who was the chief engineer of the firm. And he told Mark, who was Jewish by the way, to take me in. Mark took me in and he liked me, and I stayed there for a few years. Then I went up again, gave my notice in. And again, he didn't want me to go. As I found out later, he wanted me to marry his daughter really, but [laughs]. [02:10:01] So, anyhow I went up there and I said – he said to me, "What do you want to go for?" "To see how other people do these things, you know. Not like you only." "And where are you going to?" I said, "Plessey", he said, "Oh, God, what the hell are you going to that sort of place for?" It was a big engineering factory run by a Canadian, like it was his own little playground. He only employed about 5000 people. So anyhow, Tom said to me, "Look, go there. If you ever need a job, come back to me. We have a job for you anytime."

And what was the name of that company, the original?

The original company?

Yeah.

Howard Wall.

Harrod?

Howard Wall.

Howard Wall.

Wall.

And what were they producing?

They were producing anything that will make money. They made the Ronson lighter. They made cigarette cases, they made – we made shells. We made big gun magazine during the war. And by the way, I was sent to be Chief Inspector for being able to sign these things off. I had to sign them as being okay for the firm in that – in Howard Wall. Yeah, he was very good to me, Tom, I must admit. [02:12:00] I never realised it 'til later. You know, you sort of think back, little incidents.

[Lucy] Well, you started on Sundays.

[Rolf] Oh, that's more my own degree. I –

I tell you what, I think now we're – yes, Rolf, we were talking about your professional development. And tell us, so while you were working did you also study at the same time or...?

Yes, I – during the war, we worked about seventy-two – we worked from seven ‘til seven. And we worked from seven ‘til four on Saturday. And on Sunday, I used to go to a polytechnic to study.

What did you study?

I first of all studied – I did the nationals, the ordinary national, the higher national, the endorsement. I did the – what do you call the entrance examination in those days for university?

Matric?

That’s it, the matric, yeah. That was easy. I could cheat on that because I spoke fluent German, so I took German. And the others, I just took- no problem at all, with my basic education which was in Germany, which was very good. I must give the German – well, it wasn't the Germans, it was also Jewish Germans who gave it to me. They came from the *Seminare* in Frankfurt and Würzburg. [02:14:01] They were teachers from there, yes.

So, you managed to get a degree?

Yes, I got an external for London, at the –

[Lucy] Goldsmith’s.

Goldsmith’s College?

Goldsmith's College, that's right.

Ah ha. And what was the degree? What did you get?

Mechanical engineering. Yeah.

So, like your brother, you became an engineer?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, he had a better degree. He got it at Manchester and he took a PhD as well. He was – academically, he was cleverer than I. Well, he picked things up so much quicker than I did and once he got it... I remember I had a problem in our firm with whirling shafts, this mustn't mean much to you, but it's a problem which evolves when the shaft goes at very high speed. If it goes at the same vibration as the rest of the thing, it can blow up. Anyhow, I remember doing something for my examination, a problem. And it helped me at my firm and solved the problem. And I remember telling my brother about it. "Oh", he said, "Yes, you mean that and that?" And he sat down and he wrote out the complete sequence of the formula which you apply, just from memory like that. [02:16:00] And I thought I was being clever. Yeah, he was very clever academically.

So, you worked – just to stay at professionally, so you changed your company?

Yes.

Tell us briefly about your profession.

Yes, I went to Plessey at Ilford. Oh, dear. I caused a panic there once, because you had to get clearance to work at Plessey, because it did secret work and government work. Well, inside Plessey the MD, The Ministry of Defence, had an experimental place where nobody could go in except the people working in there, or the people who were cleared. And when I started at Plessey, the managing director took me, picked me up because I was on the applied machinery stuff, special purpose machinery. He said to me, "I want you to go in there. I've got a problem in there. One of my pet things." I thought, well, if the managing director tells you, you don't argue. So, I tagged along with him. We get to that secret place within Plessey and he walks through. "Morning, Sir", they said to him because they knew him. "Come on, Rolf", he said to me. "Well, he can't go in there." He says, "What do you mean? He's with me." "Look..." His name was Clark, his name was. What's his name, first name? I forget now. "You can't, I can't let him in. It's [inaudible] my life. He hasn't got clearance." [02:18:01] "Well, get clearance for him", he yelled at them. He was a very proper Canadian

and they gave him a look, those blokes, saying, “What the hell did you do that for?” I said, “I didn’t do anything.” Anyhow, he stormed off, said, “Get clearance, I want him in tomorrow.” “You can’t.” Anyhow, they had a go at me telling me off for putting him in that position. I said, “Well, I didn’t do anything. It’s him.” I told them to blame him. They said, “Well, we can’t blame him.” So, they rushed me up in a taxi, normally takes a fortnight to get that clearance. They rushed me up to get a taxi to London. They took me either to the Foreign Office or Ministry of Defence, I don’t know. And they gave me a grilling, they wanted to know the hair colour of my grandma, God know what. But I’ve already had clearance from during the war, because I had to sign off for the Bren gun and the Sten gun stuff. That wasn’t good enough. So, anyhow, they gave me a grilling, God knows what. And they sent me back, it took about three or four days and I got my clearance to go in there. Oh, dear. Yes, that was a funny episode, for a better word. Well, all he wanted in there was some pet idea, which he was trying out with them in there. It was all good experience, I can tell you that. Not only in work, but also in human nature, for a better word.

[02:20:00] *And Rolf, tell us now, about your parents and when you saw them again after the war.*

Yeah, that was a funny one, if ever there was a funny one. My father, being a chochem [wise and learned man], you know what a chochem is?

I know, but yeah.

He went to the Polish – the Soviet Polish government in Rome. There were two governments. A Polish government in England...

The exiled government?

Yeah, and the other one. He went to them, the other ones, and he got his passport renewed. Oh, he was happy now he had a proper passport. But it caused him no end of trouble. I found a family in Surrey, from the Beauwater people, the managing director, he wanted a domestic couple. I went to him with my story about my parents being in Rome and he said to me, “Yes,

I will help you to get your parents. Just let me – give me one promise, that they’ll stay with me for a year before they leave me.” I said, “All right”, back to my dad and he said, “Naturally, I will do that. Yeah.” So anyhow, he gave them all the papers. “And to go up to the Consulate in Rome, the British Consulate and get your visa.” It was straightforward. Ah, but when he got to the Polish – to the British Consulate and he had the Polish Communist stamp in his passport, “No way. We won’t take you to England with that, we’ve got our own Polish government in England.” [02:22:04] They wouldn't do it. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, because it's quite lengthy, I'd gone back and told him that. Now, he happened to have a good friend in the Home Office. He went to him and he said, “Let me have a look at it.” And he came back to him and said, “No way. Why shouldn't they give him a visa? His two boys are extremely useful to us here in England. They've got good records here. Yes, they should let him come to England. I don't see no reason why not.” Well, so anyhow, he said, “Leave it with me.” So, that friend of his in the Foreign Office here, wired Rome, the British Consulate, telling him to issue a visa to that man. So, I wrote to my dad saying, “Go, collect your visa from the consulate.” “Well, they won't give it to.” I said, “Look, just do what I tell you. Go there and they will give you a visa.” Anyhow, to cut the long story short, he got his visa, he came to England. The people didn't treat them like servants. For the heavy work, they got outside people in. My father never – he was handyman, gardener. He'd never been a gardener, he'd never seen a garden. My mother was the servant, for the heavy work she got a woman in to do the scrubbing. But she treated her like her mother, couldn't be better. So, when she had to go away on holiday, she said to my mother, “Will you feed my husband for me for a week?” She said, “Look, I only know my cooking. I don't know your cooking. Look, just feed him, he is easy to please.” Anyhow, she went away, she cooked for him and he said, “Oh, yes.” He loved that, he loved this continental cooking. So, when she came back, her husband said to her, “Why don't you cook like Mrs Penzias?” You know, but they were good. When they went away for a week, she said to them, she said to my mother and father, “Get your kids to come up and stay with you.” You know, that's the sort of people they were, I was very lucky.

And Rolf, when did they come? When did your parents come?

They came ten years after I last saw them. They came in 1948. Last time I saw them was '38, that was in '48. And when they first came, they looked haggard, down and old. In that year, they thrived, they got everything back. You know, it was very funny, that was, that year.

And how did they survive? You said they were in Italy, in Milan.

They were sent down to Calabria. There was a camp down there, the Ferramonti. Now, they actually boarded them out into villages up in the mountains. They gave them some money every week and they had to fend for themselves, and to live up there. [02:26:03] And it was enough to live on. If they wanted a bit more, they started selling some of their things off in the mountains there. They were treated by the locals very nicely, because the locals were very poor themselves up there. There were Albanese, there were ex-Albanians. And- but many Gestapo started coming down to Milan, and Venice, and Rome and Naples, and take them back to Auschwitz. My parents had moved into that camp by that time. And when they came to my camp, to take him to Auschwitz, the Italian army stopped them. They said, "They're our prisoners, not yours. You can't have them." That's how they got away with their lives. Now, Roosevelt, on his own bat, took the people who wanted to America in a ship. But he couldn't take them to America, so he just put them over the border into Canada first, and slowly bring them into America one-by-one like. Now, all my relatives who were with my parents went to America, except my parents. "We can't go to America our sons are in England." You know, again, a [inaudible]. If they'd gone, I could have easily followed there. But anyhow, he stayed down there. You know the story, what I've told you, what it happened to him in the end, yes?

Which was...?

Well, he stayed down there, he stayed in Rome. He dealt in watches and stuff, and he couldn't move anywhere, because he didn't have that sort of displaced refugee status anymore.

[02:28:20] Because he had a Polish passport from the Communists, 'til he got to England.

So, did they learn Italian, your parents? Did they...?

Oh, they were fluent in Italian. My mother was fluent in Italian, before but my father picked it up as well. My mother could speak it before, because when she tried to get away from my dad, she went to Italy and she worked for a Commander in the Navy. She was his PA or something. That was after the First World War.

So, what was it like? Just tell us, where did you meet and you pick up your parents? Or where did you meet and what did you feel?

When they came to England, I told you, I saw them again after ten years, they looked haggard and worn out. Yeah, but they got all their spirits back in that year. Because those people –

Where did...?

The Beauwater people, they were ever so nice.

And were you with your brother when you met them again or...?

No, I was by myself. My brother was up north, but he came down to see them.

And was it difficult to sort of pick up the relationship? I mean, ten years is a long time.

Oh, yes.

You were twenty-six.

Yeah, yeah.

From sixteen to twenty-six.

That was one time – my father was very auth –

[Lucy] Authoritarian.

[Rolf] Authoritarian. You know, he would hit before he would ask questions. I know when I met him and we had sort of some disagreement, he sort of lifted his hand up as to give me a whack. [02:30:07] So I just cupped his hand and said, “Dad, I’m not sixteen anymore.” [Laughs] And he just laughed as well.

Because I know for many families it was quite difficult to pick up -

No, no, no. My mother, she only lived for her husband and her children. She never wanted anything else. My Dad was more ambitious.

And did – so you said they were happy, they managed in this...?

Oh, I had no problem with my parents.

But also, your parents, in this domestic situation they managed?

Oh, yeah.

And how long did they stay there?

They stayed there just over a year. They gave them notice that they wanted to go and he said, “I’ll go ‘til you get a replacement. We wait.” And they were very grateful and my parents were very grateful. I must ever be grateful to that man. He was so nice. It must have cost him quite a bit of money to get all that going and – but he felt he was doing something good. And there's some good people about, if they get the opportunity to help.

And did your parents have contact to other refugees or any other...? Did they have contact to other refugees then when they – once they came to England?

Yes, they did. They met up with some of their own relatives here. There were other relatives here, who were here. And other refugees who used to go to synagogue, do their clubs.

Which synagogue. Where did they join?

They went in Catford. [02:32:00] That synagogue, they were there a long time. My mother learnt to drive here. My father got a car again, they drove.

And what did they do once they left the domestic situation?

He started his wholesale business. He sold socks and stockings all the time. And [inaudible], he was a specialist. He supplied those surplus store shops with the [inaudible]. They're those white socks what the labourers wear in American boots. He used to get them from Northern Ireland and just sell them as a wholesaler.

He was very established then.

Oh, yeah. He enjoyed himself doing it.

And what about going back to Munich? Did you – did they ever go back or did you go back?

Oh, yes. They went back. They went back in their car once or twice. They had a – he still had a brother there who was hidden all during the war. He was married to a non-Jewish girl who never converted. She had a brother, he was in the SS, but he kept him hiding. He kept him in hiding in outside Munich, in Wolfratshausen, which you might know.

And he survived there?

Oh, he survived. He could only go out at night down there, to walk.

What was his name?

Max.

Max Penzias?

Max Penzias, yeah, yeah. He's – I've got a cousin there in Munich still, his son. He's not Jewish, because he wasn't brought up Jewish. [02:34:00] And yeah.

And did your parents consider going back to Munich at all?

Oh, yes. Quite a few times, yes. My mum went back to her hometown to meet some of her relations. They drove there in their car.

But they didn't want to settle back in Munich?

No.

No.

I don't know, never came up really. They were established here, they would have felt strange trying to – like I think I would feel very strange trying to fend for myself in Munich.

It was also quite different after the war, wasn't it?

Mmm.

Because –

Oh, yes. It's a lovely town. Vibrant and nice. Opposite the *Rathaus* [city hall], lovely cafés and restaurants there, you know.

Yeah.

You've been there.

Yeah. Did you ever think of – you said you visited Munich?

Many times, but no way would I want to emigrate to Munich.

And what was it like for you to go back, the first time back to Munich? When did you...?

I was never very sentimental. I'd take things in my stride, like – not like [inaudible] Glasmann, who's always got – you know, they've got this – “Oh, they've got this. They've got the other.” No, to me, it's happened. I'm lucky, some were lucky. All I can say, I was extremely lucky, what I got away with.

It's not haunting you, the past?

No, no. Even now, you know, when I look at myself and look at some others, I'm extremely lucky at my age to be able to do what I can do.

[02:36:05] Yeah. But do you think it had an impact, your experiences? Do you think it impacted your later life?

I think I learnt from my experiences, but it didn't – I don't think it affected me. I don't think so. I'm too hard a nut, really, in a way, you know, sort of to – no, I don't think it affected me.

Do you think sometimes what would have happened if you hadn't been forced to emigrate, if Hitler hadn't come?

Yes. I often wonder that. If I was a German boy, I would have been dead in Russia, most likely, in the army. So, I'm extremely lucky. I know I'm very lucky. I have to say that again and again. What I can do, what – I've still got my mind, my eyes and my ears. Lucy says I mumble, but I think she's got a hearing problem. Do you think I mumble a lot?

I can understand you very well.

You have no difficulties at all.

No.

Yes, madam? [Laughs].

You were saying you consider yourself lucky.

Extremely lucky, yes. Yes, I know that.

Rolf, I was going to ask you, how about your identity? How would you define yourself in terms of your identity?

I'm British. I'll never be English, I'm British. **[02:38:01]** I'm not German anymore, not really. But the German *Yekke* instinct is still in me, as far as that. As far as tidiness, correctness and discipline. I think I've still got that stuck in me.

Yes. So that link to my next question. For you, what is the most important part of your German-Jewish heritage, for you?

Difficult to describe. Nothing sticks out, really. No, I can't really tell anything. I'm a very tidy person in my being and in my mind, which is typical German.

What about, Rolf, the Jewish element, which we haven't discussed a lot. Did it change, this religion? Is that important for you, your Jewish religion?

I don't really believe in religion, I'm afraid. I'm afraid when you're dead, you're dead. I'm sorry, that's it. Not very nice thing to say, but I've actually said that my body will go to medical research, I'm sorry to say.

Why are you sorry?

Well, a lot of people think that's terrible. But I don't think we're any different to any other living things, except that we can think and do a lot more than any other living thing can do. [02:40:20] But otherwise, we're no different. What created it, what started it, I don't know.

Yeah.

Rolf, tell us little bit – so about – we've learnt about your professional life. What about your private life? Did you get married? Tell us a little bit about...

Yes, I've been very lucky with my wife, which was not Jewish. But she was willing to become Jewish if I wanted her to, but I didn't want her to if she didn't feel like it. I'm lucky to have Lucy. That's the best thing what happened in my life. And I shall be grateful to the person who made that possible. She's not alive anymore, but she sort of pushed us together. She always made sure that I sit next to Lucy. I don't know why, but she must have guessed and eventually, I persuaded Lucy to become my friend and my woman, for a better word. [02:42:10] We had two homes. Mine was a Blackheath, it was our summer residence. Here was our winter residence, 'til one day developers wanted mine. And I said to Lucy, "Can I come and stay with you? I've got nowhere else to go." Well, she couldn't very well say no, so we go two homes in one, which we still have. And it's still causing a problem for poor Lucy, because we got another tiny room downstairs, hey? Some ottomans still around.

[Lucy] Junk shop.

[Rolf] [Laughs] Oh, dear. Right.

Rolf, I wanted to ask you, tell us a bit about the Kindertransport and how you were involved with the Kindertransport reunion. And Bertha Leverton, who you were in the same class with it came together. So, tell us about it.

Well, one day out of the blue, I got a telephone call and who was on the other end? Bertha Leverton, but I knew her as Bertha Engelhard, her maiden name. I knew her as well as I knew anybody else, because I used to take her to school during the Nazi period. She said, "Come

on down and see me, so I can see you again.” So, I went down there and she had that other girl with her, Ilse Durst. Her name was Rosenduft now, she married. And Bertha wasn’t Engelhard, she was Leverton. [02:44:03] Well, I hadn’t seen them, either of them, for fifty years but I could recognise them immediately. And she said to me, “Do you think it’s a good idea to have a reunion of the ones we came to England with and the others?” I said, “Yeah, it’d be a good idea.” That’s how she started her idea of a reunion. So, we worked on it. First of all, she had help of [inaudible] or somebody like that, who helped as well. And we set up the first reunion, the fiftieth reunion and it was such a success. From the start, the – everything sprung from that, it was amazing. It literally took off into a world organisation, the Kindertransport Reunion. We had the fiftieth, we had the sixtieth, the seventieth, seventy-five, eightieth. I promised Erich to help me, to promise me that he will keep it up. And he did promise me that he will keep it up after I’ve gone, because he’s the only one. He’s the youngest one, he will last the longest. He should do, anyhow. Mind you, he still – he has a stick now, the way he walks, and his eyes are not that good anymore either. You know, I’ve got glaucoma too, but not like he has.

So, you – basically, the two of you, because he was on the younger side and you are, in terms of Kindertransport, on the older side.

[02:46:04] Yeah.

And you are the only two, you said, in the – now in the Kindertransport committee of the AJR? The others are second generation?

Yeah. We’ve got Bea Green still. She’s still around and some others are still around, you tell me, but not that many.

No. But Rolf, why do you think was it so important, this fiftieth reunion? I mean, it was a very important event.

Yeah, because we have grown up now, we had families. And we wanted to look back at the others who came with us. It was amazing. I went to the Catskills in America, to one of their

dos. My Uncle with his insurance thing, they had a reunion up in the Catskills. And I met somebody up there who, you know, who knew somebody else. And it's amazing how we get around, you know, in Australia, India – all over the place we've people. And they're still in contact with each other, even the children of those people.

Yeah, are you surprised?

Have a bond. It's like we are family, in a way.

Yeah, I was going to say, are you surprised by that? That also –

In a way, yes. But I suppose we make the excuse we've got the same background. Some were – most of us were very lucky, when we came, to what we made of ourselves. [02:48:01] There's very few who fell by the wayside and some did. Some had a very hard time. They didn't know how to get in contact and what to do. They – most likely they're slightly mentally affected. For these people, I feel sorry. There were some, I know of some, but most of us made good over here.

And how do you see it going forward? I mean, we're now in a situation where there is going to be – there is already a Kindertransport Memorial at Liverpool Street Station. There are memorials all over Europe, there is going to be a new statue in Harwich, where you arrived. How do you feel about it? How do you think – where should the future be in terms...?

Well, I think we've got enough monuments up now after that, too. But as far as an organisation, they should keep together, why not? It's like a family, in a way. We've gone through the same experience. We had the same parents or grandparents, they will say, ultimately. And they have definitely got an affinity with each other.

And you feel – of course, your parents survived and many others didn't survive. Some people, one parent survived. Do you feel, obviously, that makes a big difference?

Well, I was one of the lucky ones. Not that many people of mine died in Auschwitz.

But you said your aunt –

[02:50:00] Aunt and uncle did, yes.

And your grandfather.

Grandfather, yes.

Your father's father.

Yes, but that's nothing compared to Lucy, for example, who lost loads of her relations. I might have lost more of some of the relations. I might have lost more of some of my relations I didn't even know. But because my father –my grandfather, my father were ten, one of ten. My grandfather was one of six. And we have dug up some people from that side who had a hard time.

Yeah. And Rolf, in terms of lessons for today from the Kindertransport, is there something – what do you think is very relevant for today? For today's refugees? What can we learn from the Kindertransport – from the experience of the Kinder?

Well, I must – I'm afraid I'm fairly hard on that.

Go on.

Because most of the refugees now are economic refugees. And why should we look after those people here in England when they don't look after their own. The Ukrainians again, have their families, their own religious families. Do they come forward like the Jewish people come forward for their...? [02:52:04] Israel goes to no end to look after us and our people. Does Riad people do anything about what's happening in East Africa? Yeah. The Jews take them in, but the Muslims don't look after Muslims. And the Christians don't look after the

Christians. So, why should England have to accept...? An already crowded system, we haven't got enough people to look after our own old people.

But I mean, in terms of, you know, Kinder or unaccompanied, let's say, migrants coming in, do you think we can learn there? For example, you know, there are some people who say the children, it was better for them if they'd stay together rather than go to private foster care. Do you have an opinion on that? I mean, you were – you in a way, came together. You went to that school, which was a sort of communal experience. Do you think that was easier than for some of the children to be, I guess, privately fostered and adopted?

It's very difficult. There's no solution really. Some kids will thrive in either one and some people will fall by the wayside. I'm afraid there's always some sort of, how shall I say? Situations with- you could cry all your life. [02:54:05] It would make no difference. There's always somebody who needs your help. You can't help them all, it's not possible. You can't even help your own.

And you said before, so you have – you still have family in Germany?

Yes.

Yeah. And you also said you spoke to your cousin and the questions, like how much did people know about what was going on? And what is your impression of that? You said, your cousin who was a wire operator...

Well, I would say the Germans themselves, were not as anti-Semitic as the belt which stretches across the Black Sea, right up into the Baltic. They're still very religious people and just endemic anti-Semites, as far as I'm concerned. Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine and down by the Black Sea.

You feel Germany was, in a way – your experience was...

Far less anti-Semitic than these people are. Their religion teaches them about the Christ killer and they're very religious people.

And how do you find Germany today? When you – and I'll ask you in a second, when you first started going – speaking to Germany, about how Germany dealt with its past?

Couldn't have dealt with any more than it did. [02:56:01] It dealt magnificently. Lucy and I got talking, we were bamboozled in to talk at a *Lyzeum* in Germany. They were girls of, I would say, sixteen to eighteen, lovely girls.

In Munich?

Yeah, in Munich. The headmistress twisted our arm, Bertha Leverton and mine, Lucy and Bertha's sister was still alive then. We gave them half-an-hour, we said. Well, each of us sort of told our stories, they asked questions. And they didn't ask many questions. But then we tried to get away. They collared me, Lucy, Bertha, her sister, asking – we never got away for another hour. They wanted to know. They were really sorry for what happened. I can't blame them for what their fathers might have done, or their grandfathers. One girl turned around to me and said, "After your experience, you must really hate Germany." What do you answer kid like that?

What did you answer?

I said to her, "I love Germany. I had a lovely childhood, couldn't have been any better. The only thing I hated, Hitler, what spoiled it." [02:58:00] And she was as happy as a sandboy, because she cared for Germany but she was appalled with what happened to us. You remember her?

[Lucy] Mmm, no, she was great.

[Rolf] It's –

[Lucy] “*Germany is my Heimat*”, you said to her. [Germany is my home country]

Heimat. Did she ask what...?

Heimat, yeah. Yeah, then we were also in the *Rathaus* once there. They had a tablet up there, in there, “In memory of those who were murdered.” Now, I have never seen that in a German tablet, put up by Germans, “Who were murdered by the Nazis.” And I remember we had a sort of commemorative *Versammlung* – what’s a *Versammlung* – a ...

Meeting?

Meeting with the German *Rathaus* people and the German – I don’t know who they were. But anyhow, we had – they were all together there, in the Bierkeller we were in Munich. And they put up a screen and projected up all the names of the children from Munich which were murdered and where they were murdered, by the Nazis. And that’s, I think, that was about the first time I broke down, it was horrible. Nearly broke down when I saw all my classmates appearing on that roll. [03:00:05] They didn’t mince their words. They sort of said, “Murdered”, which I was very surprised at.

How many, Rolf, of your classmates, let's say – how many...?

I don't really know, but –

Emigrated?

That was half of them perished.

Yeah.

Yeah. And they had – one-by-one they came up and lit a candle or whatever they did. I remember that time. I remember, yeah.

And do you see it in black and white? Do you see it like this?

Yeah, the Germans put it up for us in commemoration of those people.

So, when was the first time, Rolf, you were invited by the city? Or were you...?

Well, by the –

When was it?

The first time was with my wife, when they gave us such a lovely hotel and unlimited funds literally, to go anywhere. God knows when that was, it must have been in the '60, because my wife died in '75. That's when I talked to the *Rathaus*, the *Oberbürgermeister* [Lord Mayor], who became actually a Minister in the Bavarian government. I forget his name, but a lovely guy. Really lovely guy, he was. I talked to those people.

But you said you were also invited now, when they opened the new synagogue?

Yes, I was invited to that. Yes, that must have been a later one. [03:02:00] I forget what year it was, you most likely know the year.

I don't know offhand, but I would think fifteen –

Yeah, I would have to look it up. But –

About fifteen years ago, maybe? Like something like that.

No, more than that. Thirty years ago, I would say. We got –

Okay, we can find out.

We've got 2022, we're talking about 1980, '90.

'90s, I think it's the 90s. I don't know, we can check it.

Yeah. Well, yeah. No problem.

Yeah, but that's lovely. And you were – you came to be there?

Yeah, I was invited there.

And did you think that was possible, that basically it was the first time...?

I am amazed. I was amazed what the German – look, they never can make good what they did. But my God, did they pay in – were generous in what they pay and they're still paying, you know, out. They never – all right, there was a percentage of them who were willing killers, some of them were forced killers. But the Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, they were willing killers of Jews.

Yeah, and Rolf, what do you think of the...? I think Munich is one of the few cities which doesn't have Stolpersteine.

Yeah.

Do you know about it?

Yes, I know. Well –

What do you think about that?

Well, I don't have anything against it. They don't want it. Okay, but they remember their obligation to Jews as good as, if not better, than anybody else in Germany. [03:04:00]

Yeah, the Jewish community didn't want it. They objected to it, you know?

I didn't know that.

The Stolpersteine. Yeah.

Yeah?

Yes, because they thought it was offensive that you walk on the stumbling stone.

Yeah, you see.

Yeah, you learn something every...

Look, you get ten shoes, you get twelve opinions. You know that as well as I do.

Yeah. But it's interesting that in Munich, you know, all over Germany, you have these stumbling stones.

Yeah, yeah.

They – I think there were discussions to do a stumbling, kind of it's called Stele [stele], you know, sort of on the side. But I don't know what happened with it, but...

I think they've got plaques on the walls, yes.

They have some plaques, yeah. Yeah, Rolf, is there anything else I haven't asked you, you'd like to add?

No, I most likely could think of something sooner or later. But no, we've talked long enough.

I mean, maybe Rolf, I was going to ask, so you spoke to a school in Germany. Did you speak to schools in England or do you...?

Oh, yes.

You have spoken to some?

I speak to a Catholic school every year. They have me back. I even got a copy of that on a disk.

And what's – when you speak to the school children, what is the main message you want to give? And also, the message you want to give to people listening to this interview in the years to come?

To learn from it, to remember and be careful, those things could happen again, if you let them get out of hand. There is no good dictator in the end. A dictator is all very well, but he can be voted out again. But if he gets a free hand, look at Putin. [03:06:00] Maybe he knows he's dying, and he wants to do something before he dies. I don't know.

How does it make you feel to watch now this Ukrainian situation?

I think it's terrible what's happening there to those people. They didn't ask for it. But on the other hand, I can see Putin feels like they're ganging up on him. Remember, he was boss right to our side, Berlin. Then pushed back, then Poland going – then you've got Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria. It's a whole circle pushing him back all the time. Putin should join NATO, that would make it easier.

Yeah, that's a good idea.

Then we could start on the Ukrainians and get rid of them. But –

Rolf, just to say about the – maybe something about the AJR. Do you feel – how – are you surprised that the AJR is still around after so many years? How do you see its future?

Well, I think it's a good thing what the AJR have done and what they're doing, or trying to do. It's something within the Jewish community, it's a section of people who are from that background. And we're very lucky, these people who came in 1980 and '90 and in the early 1900s, they've got no sort of organisation anymore. [03:08:09] Now, you've got the – there's still something going on. What's Sokolov called? I don't know what they're called.

[Lucy] The Brady Boys' Club?

[Rolf] Yeah, I – Brady, yeah.

Brady Boys, yeah.

Brady Boys, yeah. My friend is a *macher* [Yiddish, influential person] in there, he's a [inaudible] *macher*. He's got plenty of money to – so he keeps going.

But do you think AJR should still exist for the future generations or...?

Yeah, they should keep on. Why not?

And now it's moving into education, Holocaust education,

Oh, yes. That's one of its sections. But they should keep those people in touch with each other. It's good for them to know their background, never does any harm.

And Rolf, maybe one of the last questions I have for you. What do you think now we have this issue of the Holocaust Memorial near Westminster? What do you think about that? Have you got an opinion or...?

That's very difficult, but I think it's a good thing. But I can understand some people objecting to it, because we're only a small section, you know. We're not a big percentage. When you look at some other things, what goes on in China, in Ukraine even, the percentage of the

population affected. But I think it should go ahead. It never does any harm to look back, if you can learn something from it.

[03:10:03] People are playing with fire now with the global warming and everything like that. God knows what it'll be like in a hundred years' time. It'd be interesting to come back, if you could, to have a look at it. I'm afraid we can't. I would like to see what it's like.

Yeah, in the future.

What people go and predict, or what actually happens.

When did you – one thing actually, I forgot to ask you, when did you become naturalised?

As soon as you could after the war. I don't know if we did that automatically or did we have to do something? Yeah, we were naturalised in batches, weren't we, after the war? Yeah, because I've had my British passport – first time I went abroad was in '47. I went on my motorbike to – I went to – Pforzheim and to Munich and to Milan, to dig out my relations. But I remember it was late at night and I wanted to sleep somewhere. And I was in the area of Verdun, in the – sort of part of France, where they should be able to speak German. And I remember being in the centre, in the village there, and I asked a fella in German, "Do you have any place where I can stay?" [03:12:08] Well, he said, "*Non, non.*" It was late at night already and I wanted to get somewhere. And as I was going to move away, I thought, oh, go to hell. He said to me in English, in fluent English, "Who are you?" I'm a Limey, I've come from London on my motorbike." "Oh", he said, "Yeah, yeah, *oui*. Sorry, sorry", he said. "I thought you were German." So, he – I said, "I don't speak French." He said, "You don't have to, I speak English. What do you want?" "I want a place where I can stay for the night and maybe get something to eat still." "No problem." He took me back into the village, into the hotel there. Went in there, the woman came out, rushing out. "Yeah, come in. We'll look after all that." They couldn't look after me better. In the kitchen, she took me out the kitchen, "Would you like this, this or this?" All of a sudden everything was fine. [Laughs] I'll never forget that.

Didn't like the Germans.

Yeah.

And did you visit your parents then in '47?

Pardon?

Did you visit your parents then, before they came to England?

No, no, I couldn't go down to Italy. Was my parents...? No, my parents weren't in England, were not in England with me. My parents were still down in the camp. I couldn't get down there. I knew they were alive, I don't know how much. But I remember then I got to my cousin's place. [03:14:03] Now, he lived in a part where the Americans and the French were in control. And he couldn't move outside his village, my cousin, the one who was a wireless operator in the submarines. And I know I had him on the back of my motorbike and I said, "Well, we can go and see them." He said, "I can't go in there." It's a French zone and he was in the American zone. I said, "What's the matter with you? Come and sit on the back of the motorbike." And we were driving along, all of a sudden, some bloke, maybe he was a policeman, jumped out from the side of the road with a sort of a stick and round thing on the end of it. "*Halt!*" And well, he was too close to me and I was going to do an emergency stop. And he had to step back. And he came after me, yelling at me, "*was machen Sie denn da eigentlich!*" [what are you doing!]. I said, "Hey, take it easy, mate." I said to him – he said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm an Englishman on a motorbike." "Oh, oh, oh. All right. Well, carry on, carry on, carry on." You know, officialdom.

So, you could pass as an Englishman in '47 in Germany?

Oh, yes. I could easily pass as an Englishman in Germany or anywhere else. [03:16:04] That's no problem now, not at all. But how they lived... I remember my – that fella's parents had a house and when the allies liberated their town, my cousin, which was another cousin, was ten, she was raped by a French legionnaire. And they ran riot for two days in that town in

Pforzheim, 'til the old – they called it the old military police, pulled them in. They shot a few of them themselves to bring them under control. They acted, you know, not very nice. I remember sitting on the steps on the hillside, overlooking that place with my cousin, the one who got raped, and looking over there. That was pretty – razed to the ground three days before the end of the war by the Americans, wasn't necessary anymore. But they made a mess of that town. Well, you know this thing happened, you can debate about it. [03:18:02] But I didn't know where about my people were in Pforzheim, because Pforzheim was literally still – they billeted them out into the villages very methodically. I went to the German police, which was overlooked by the Americans. There they kept the German police, not like they did in – when they invaded Iraq and got rid of them all. They kept the German police to keep order and look after things. And slowly weeding out the Nazis. We went to them, they could tell me where my people live. In this village, in that village, and so and so.

Did you still have – what happened to your grandmother, your mother's mother?

She died a natural death in Pforzheim. Yeah.

You were in an unusual situation, where that you still had family in Germany.

Yeah. I had the non-Jewish family from my mother's side, yeah. And not were they not Jewish, most of them were Jehovah Witnesses on top of it.

So, they had their own stories. They had their own –

They had their own miseries, yeah. If they didn't keep their mouth shut. Yeah.

Okay, Rolf, well, anything else you'd like to add, I haven't asked you? I think you –

No, no most things will come to your head, but you can keep on and on. No, that's it.

Okay. In that case, I'd like to say thank you so much for sharing your life stories of almost a century with us.

Yeah. It's a long, long time ago, looking back.

[03:20:03] *And you – you remembered very clearly and very well.*

Some things I remember, like some things they are a bit doubtful. I can still think about, of course. I've got records of it. But no, if I had my life all over again, I wouldn't change it. I was very lucky. Extremely lucky with finding that woman there, which grumbles at me now and again [laughs]. No, not at all.

Okay, Rolf, thank you. Well, maybe if Lucy wants to, she can appear now, if she wanted to. But let's just – one second, we'll finish. Thank you again and we're go to look at some photographs now.

Yeah, help yourself. There's a photograph album up there.

Okay.

Family album.

Wonderful. Just one second.

You're working overtime soon.

Not yet.

[Laughs] Do they pay overtime? Oh, dear, anyhow. Thanks a lot. Thanks for being patient. And that young man must be getting fed up looking at me. No? [Laughs] Thank you for what you're doing.

Rolf, can you please introduce the lady on your right?

Well, this is Lucy. My partner, my love and my life. I've known her for about thirty-five years.

[Lucy] That's right.

[Rolf] It's a long time, longer than you knew your husband and I knew my wife. And we're still not married, but we've been together, very happy. I've been very, very happy. I call myself happy that I found you. I know you grumble at me now and again. But still, we had a lovely time together. However much we still have, I will enjoy it.

Lucy, you said you had listened to Rolf's story. And I wonder whether you have any comments or whether you'd like to add something?

[Lucy] It's wonderful and very moving to hear all Rolf's recollections and how able he is to describe everything. And how he's able to accept what has happened and look at the positive side. And let's face it, he still has so much to give, and so much *Lebenslust* [zest for life], and so much joy in living and giving. That's Rolf.

That's lovely. [03:24:00] I know you said your experience is different and you have a different experience. But maybe we'll come back and interview you or would you like to say just briefly something?

I should have drunk something, because my voice isn't very good. I still feel that we were all affected, because one is affected by one's life's experiences. So, to be a Kindertransport, an ORT boy, or just a refugee, it is what one has seen and been through that makes you who you are. Well, it enables, you know what you know. Whether you try and blot it out, that's up to you. But you know certain things and that is what makes you, in the end, who you are, what you ex – what you are going to do for yourself, your own life, and how much you intend to give to others. Because even among all the horrors, and I really mean horrors that one has experienced, there have been some remarkable experiences with remarkably good people, who've done so much for life, for other people's lives. And one must always bear that in mind

and try to see the positive side. And give, if possible, to someone else to brighten their lives, as people have done to help us. Or again, some of us, a lot of us wouldn't be here at all.

[03:26:03] *And you are a refugee yourself.*

Yes.

How old were you when you came to this country?

I was five. And sadly, my mother died three months later. I had a most wonderful father, who managed to bring – excuse me, my mother's parents over from Vienna, where my grandfather, mother's father, was an advocate or a lawyer, but had been unable to practice then from 1933. And every – all his rights were taken away and he couldn't practice anymore, as I said. And my father managed to get them out to England and looked after them. But sadly, my mother had passed away from pneumonia before penicillin was on general release. It was known, but not on general release. And I must say, we were brought up in a most wonderful home. Mother's parents, these Viennese grandparents, very Orthodox. My father, not at all Orthodox. He'd been to university in Hungary, he was so-called enlightened, because he said that a lot of the ultra-Orthodox people in Hungary where he came from, he said, they weren't actually such good people. He thought that governing, etc., etc., etc., it's perhaps not as useful to community life or communal life, than learning something or giving of yourself and your studies for the community, or for general living conditions.

[03:28:03] *And where were you born, please?*

I was born in Gütersloh, northern Germany, where my father was working at the time.

Okay, thank you for sharing a little bit of your story. If you want to, we're happy to come back and interview you properly.

Maybe if I really think about it, because I have very strong opinions. And as you can see, I find it very disturbing that within one family there are those that say time you forgot about it.

“Don't show you're Jewish. Don't let my children ever know that I'm Jewish”, and I found that very difficult to accept really.

[Rolf] Well, it takes all people to make a world, Lucy.

[Lucy] When I know –

[Rolf] And it never changes.

[Lucy] Such lovely, good German people. Oh, just when we were getting to the German border once, showing my passport, Gütersloh, UK passport, born in Gütersloh. And the official there said, “*Gütersloh? Ach, das gibt's in England auch?* [There is a place called Gütersloh in England as well?].” [All laugh] Sorry about that, but there are some such good, kind, thoughtful, considerate people everywhere. And in the moments of gloom, of which there are plenty now, not for me, but for other people, one must bear in mind that there is a light on the horizon, because of the goodness of a certain number of people who do exist and who are out there.

[Rolf] We'll always –

[Lucy] Who give of themselves.

[Rolf] Yeah.

Okay, on that note, I think that's a nice note to finish. Thank you again.

Thank you.

[03:30:00] *Thank you for sitting here with us and coming to the end of this interview.*

[Rolf] Thank you for putting up with us.

[Lucy] Maybe I shouldn't have said some of those things, but –

No, that's –

[Rolf] Yes, you say what you think. Why not?

One second, one second.

[Pause]

[Rolf] Is my mother's mother, my grandmother. Katarina Schult geborene [nee] Bauhofer in Pforzheim, in 1912.

[Speaker 4] *Yes, please.*

Yes, please, Rolf, can you describe this photo for us?

This is my father's family, which has got my grandfather and grandmother and siblings on it. My father is the boy in the middle, in – where it is, I don't know, but it's taken in 1904. [sic]

[Speaker 4] *Yes, please, Rolf.*

Yes, Rolf.

This is my mother, Mathilde Penzias, in the last school year, with her doll in Pforzheim, 1912. [sic]

[03:32:03] *But what was she called then? Mathilde...?*

Mathilde, yeah, or Tilde.

Schulte?

Schulte.

Thank you.

Samuel Penzias in Munich, in 1920. My father, Rolf's father.

Samuel Penzias and Mathilde Schult on their wedding day in Munich in 1922.

Rolf, I wanted to ask you, you have these wonderful photos. How did you get all these photos?

They were sent to me when they sent this stuff from Germany in that trunk and I put them in there.

And when was the trunk sent?

The trunk came to me in 1939. Sometime in 1939, the trunk arrived. Now, where the hell did the trunk arrive?

And what was in that trunk? The photos?

There was loads of stuff in that trunk. My dad's typewriter, the photos, a lot of stuff which they could not take with them. Oh, that was long before they went to Italy, they sent that trunk. [03:34:04] They must have sent it soon after I got to England. But where did I get the trunk? I must have got that trunk in Liverpool, when I was in that boarding school in Liverpool.

Thank you.

1928.

Yeah? Who's in that picture, please?

Rolf and Walter Penzias, two brothers, in Munich 1928.

It's Karl and Inge Penzias at their wedding in Munich synagogue, in 1933, with the rest of the Penzias family.

Rolf Penzias, Liverpool 1940.

Rolf and Walter Penzias in London 1943.

[Speaker 4] *Yes, please, Rolf.*

Rolf Penzias and his brother, Walter. Ramsgate, July '47.

Rolf Penzias, cousin Lesley, Aunt Lola, 1947, with my first car.

[03:36:00] *And Rolf, this is the family you stayed with when you moved to London? This is your father's...?*

Yeah, yeah.

Younger –

Youngest brother.

Thank you.

Siegfried Penzias, yeah.

Thank you.

Samuel Penzias and Mathilde Penzias in Crowborough, with their employer and their mother, in 1948.

[Speaker 4] *Yes, please.*

Rolf Penzias with my wife, Edith Alice, and my parents, Samuel Penzias and Mathilde Penzias, in London.

When?

1960, we said.

Yeah.

Rolf Penzias with HRH Prince Charles at his palace in London, 2005.

Yes, please.

Rolf Penzias with my partner, Lucy Bernheim, in Munich in 2005.

Two thousand and....?

2007.

And where are you there?

In Munich, I told you.

In a shop?

God knows.

[03:38:00] *Okay. Rolf, well, just to say thank you again for your interview and sharing your photographs with us.*

Don't thank me, quite enjoyable, some of it.

Who should I thank then?

[Laughs]

[End of transcript – 03:38:22]