IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
AJR
Winston House, 2 Dollis Park
London N3 1HF
ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Sovin
Forename:	Edna
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	10 August 1938
Interviewee POB:	Berlin, Germany

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV201
NAME: Edna Sovin
DATE: 1st March 2017
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]
[0:00:00]

Today is the 1st of March 2017 and we are conducting an interview with Mrs. Edna Sovin. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London.

Can please tell me your name?

Edna Sovin.

And your name at birth?

Edna Beermann.

And when were you born?

On the 10th of August 1938.

And where were you born?

In Berlin - Schönefeld.

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

My mother was a doctor, and my father a businessman. And they were both born in Berlin. And… What- where to start? What are the most significant things?

Your choice, at this point.

I'm an only child. And I have no cousins either. Each of my parents had a brother, much married in both cases, but no children. So I was the only child of the whole family. My maternal grandparents were very active members of the Jewish community, both of them. My grandfather Hermann Falkenberg was a religion teacher. And my grandmother was a sort of social worker-cum- organiser and educator. Very, very active. Her brother called her '*Das große Weib'* as a sort of joke. She was, you know, a 'big' woman. Not physically so much as significantly. They lived very modestly. The things that were never discussed were health and money in that family. My mother said they knew exactly what they had and how- the standard of living with which they had to manage. My father's family were small business people. Except he had one uncle who was a millionaire. But the previous generations of course were much bigger. They were well established Berlin families on both sides. And part of my father's family came from Cologne. And somewhere there is a photograph of his great-grandmother. A Victorian lady in an enormous crinoline with great swathes of hair. Very ugly. Very, very ugly. But her claim to fame was she was the first Jewish child allowed back into Cologne after years of expulsion. And, you know- when the- and I think they came up the Rhine from- Maybe they were Sephardim on that side. I don't know. We're all a bit dark so it's possible. …Mnn.

Where did your parents meet? How did they meet?

[0:03:23]

They met- my mother was working in an *Erholungsheim* [convalescent home]… somewhere outside Berlin. This is already the Hitler period. And my- her mother was visiting. And at the same time my father's aunt was visiting. I don't know why she- who she was visiting. But the

two ladies were both big leaders of the *Frauenbund* [women's league]. My aunt - great-aunt - in Cologne and my grandmother in Berlin, and so they knew each other. And they met up there, and they introduced my parents to each other.

And when did they get married?

They got married- now this is an interesting story. I was always told their anniversary was the 1st or March. I was born in '38, so I always assumed that it was in '37. But shortly before their deaths they said that they had something to tell me. That actually they were married in '38. In March '38, and I was born in August '38. How very premature! [Bea laughs] They promised me there were no other secrets that they hadn't told.

They kept that for a long time, yes.

Yes. By the time they told me it wasn't such a big deal anymore, but it obviously had been. Yeah… and…

And where did they get married?

[0:05:00]

In my grandparents' house I think, in Berlin. And …when- can I jump a bit?

Sure you can.

When my son was at university, he became interested in becoming religious. And he went to Israel to *yeshiva*. And then he realised that because we were married in a Reform synagogue, he had a problem. So we went to the United Beth Din to try and get him a proper *'hechsher'* [approval for certification of kosher food] so to speak, which is just as well because he ended up marrying a very Orthodox girl. And it was very, very difficult, because my family were- on my side, were- married Reform for generations. Generations. But in the end they discovered a letter, written when my …about the *hesped* [eulogy] given over my grandmother's grave. My maternal grandmother's grave, which was in Switzerland. And there were two rabbis who gave the *hesped* at her funeral. And the Beth Din saw the name of

those two rabbis and said that if they talked at her funeral, she was a real Jewish lady.

And that was enough?

He was kosher. He was OK. But I have it in writing because- [laughing] for the future generations if they need it.

Because your parents got- it must mean your parents must have got married in a Liberale synagogue?

Well they weren't- it wasn't a synagogue. It was at home, but it was a- yes, a Liberal rabbi. And… and any of the rabbis that we had they had their community rabbi. None of them were kosher enough for the London Beth Din. So, but fortunately these two guys who spoke at her funeral were. So we have to thank them, whoever they were.

Yeah. …You were born in 1938. Have you got any memories at all?

No. I was only eight months old. And no, I mean, I was- Kristallnacht was shortly after I was born but I was too young. I have no memories.

You left as a small infant.

Yes.

[0:07:28]

So just before we come to your leaving story, tell us a little bit more about the life- maybe of your parents and grandparents and what you know. What you found out later.

Well, the last years were very difficult. My father couldn't find work and he and his father set up a small insurance company. …A very small-time thing, because you could only sell to other Jews. And my mother worked in the Jewish community. But she originally- she'd qualified in the 20s. And she- she studied in Heidelberg and Berlin. And I have her dissertation. When she did her doctorate she did her medical degree and then she did a

doctorate on top of that. And so I have it if anybody wants to read it.

And what was her topic? Do you know?

It was the… combination of lung cancer and two- two different- the occurrence of a heart condition and a lung condition at the same time. I- I haven't read the actual dissertation. But she got her doctorate.

And what was her name? Your mother's name?

Her name was Hanna Falkenberg before she married.

So that's when she studied. That- as a doctor?

Yes.

That then was her name?

Yeah. She was one of four Jewish girls in the *Gymnasium* who all became doctors. She went through school and university with these other three Jewish girls, who scattered of course, as soon as the Hitler era began. And she very occasionally saw them. One in particular lived in Israel, and she could visit her from time to time. But her whole- her whole life, circle of friends and family disappeared. I mean, some of them survived, but they were scattered around the world. My father was well had cousins all over the- the world. And after the war slowly began to find each other.

Yeah. And how religious were they on both sides or what sort of Jewish life- you said your grandfather was a religion teacher?

[0:09:58]

Yeah, my- my mother's father…

Yes…

… was a religious teacher. Yeah. And they were religious. They had- he wrote prayer books and they were very active in the synagogue.

Which synagogue?

Am- *Synagoge am Norden* I think it was called- some- North Berlin. It was a small one. They- they were characteristically people who never lived in the- in the wealthy areas. They always lived in humble circumstances and… did things on a small scale.

But he was employed by the community?

Yes, I think so. I assume so. They must have lived off something.

Yes.

And I think he taught in the Jewish orphanage - the boys' orphanage - in Berlin.

Where? In Pankow, or where was it? Where was that?

It could have been Pankow; I'm not sure.

That's the sort of famous one. I don't know. There must be- or maybe there were others.

Well I've been there and seen the site, but it didn't really register with me. I never really knew quite where I was in Berlin… because I'm not- I'm not familiar with the geography. I mean where they lived was…oh, I knew the name. A double-barrelled area. Never mind. It will come back to me – or it won't.

And how close were your parents to the grandparents? Did they- did they live close by or…?

Well, when they married they moved in with my maternal grandmother. My maternal grandfather died in'36. …And my grandmother and her sister lived in Charlottenburg. So they moved there after my grandfather died. And my parents moved in with them. And I

think they lived you know, very, you know- I said, "Where did you….?" They slept under the dining room table. People made all sorts of shifts to survive in those days.
[0:11:58]

This is until they emigrated?

Until- no, until they were deported. My grandmother and great-aunt were deported. My parents- yeah, my parents left in '38- '39.

Yes. So they stayed…?

Until they were deported… yes.

And that was your grandma who was known for her communal work?

Yes. Yes.

And do you know more about it? What communal work? What did she do?

[0:12:21]

She educated people for emigrating and she was a general teacher. Also on the religious side I think and she- she had to do with social work in some way. She was very, very busy; I'm not sure of the detail. She knew everybody and everybody knew her. And there were the women's'- the *Frauenbund.*

Yes.

She was very active I that.

Tell us a little bit. What is the Frauenbund? What do you know about it?

Well, I thought it was WIZO one time, but I'm not sure if it was a distinct- a separate thing, or if it was an early version of WIZO. You know Bertha Pappenheim? Who was an early

patient of Freud?

Yes…

She was the- she was the first great lady of that organisation. And my grandmother's name was also Bertha. So, she followed on. But I'm very vague about it because my never told me anything about it.

No…

So they're just sort of empty words, really.

Yeah.

But I don't know when she- I don't know where I read it- when she was in Theresienstadt, and they were given work allocations and she was told to go to the kitchen and do kitchen work and she refused. She said, "There are plenty of people who can do that. I'm an educator. And that's what I'm going to do." She was a tough lady. It's probably why she survived.

Yeah.

And my great-aunt who was her- her acquaintance was also- she was a teeny-tiny woman but with a personality of the size of a planet. And that's probably why she survived as well.

In Theresienstadt?

Mnn.

But she died shortly afterwards, or…?

My grandmother did, yes. Yes. She was weakened from all those years of hunger. And she had a fall, and she broke her arm and- and, just generally she succumbed. She was seventy.

Yeah. Where- where did she die?

[0:14:18]

In Switzerland. That's a whole story. I think there's a piece of paper there with it all written on, by my great-aunt.

Shall we keep that…

OK.

… when we go after the war? Yes?

Yeah, that was at the end of the war.

At the end of the war. Let's- if you don't mind-

No, you're in charge.

Let's come back to you… And your own emigration and how- what you know about it?

Well, my mother was very proud of me. She said as we were leaving, the German customs officials checked that we weren't smuggling anything out that we shouldn't. And they even opened my nappy. And I gave them a big present. And she was very proud of me. [both laugh] That's a story she liked to tell.

Yes. And how- was it difficult for your parents to get visas? What sort of…?

Very… very difficult. I don't know any detail because they didn't speak about it. But I gathered it- well, we nearly went to Ulan Bator, so you can see how difficult it was. It was a last-minute thing to get the transit visas.

And do you know how your father managed to get them?

No, I don't.

Was he at all- was he arrested on Kristallnacht because he was…?

[0:15:33]

No. My parents told me they- what their circle did is when the- when the police came to arrest people, they came with a list. They went to an address and all the people who lived there and they arrested who was there. So what the men did is they went and stayed in each other's houses. Because they were very bureaucratic and they didn't take the wrong people. If they weren't on the list, they didn't take them. So that was how they managed to get away with it for a while. So they were running around. And my mother said she had a terrible time with my father because they had to give up their cameras and their bicycles and their- their rifles and so on. And he didn't want to give these things up and she was terrified. She had to bully him to- to hand them in. So they had to shift all the time to survive.

But did he- some of their friends must have emigrated already?

Well, this- when- when they came to London, they moved to Finsbury Park because there was already a sort of boarding house there with a lot of refugees in it. So they knew people in that neighbourhood.

And your father's brother?

My father's brother also. He was here already, yes.

When did he leave?

Where did he live?

When- when did he leave?

I'm not sure, but a bit earlier. They got this domestic visa.

Yes, so he was a cook, or…?

Well, he was- the wife was supposed to be the cook, but his wife was extremely neurotic. She was a prima donna. And she- when she was here, when she was a poor refugee she had to have a maid. And she was something else. She looked like one of the 1920s film stars and used to sit on the sofa covered with velvet cushions and tassels and things and do like this all the - you know - roll her eyes to heaven. And so he had to do the work for both of them. This- this comes from my parents who couldn't stand her. [laughs]

[0:17:29]

But they had a domestic position somewhere?

Yes, they worked for some prince – some Russian prince, in London. And before they left – there's another story - my uncle married this lady. And everybody was very upset because she had a very bad name. She had already been married, but she was known to be slightly crazy. And when they were- my grandfather… My father- my father's parents- my grandfather had some sort of problem with his taxes. He thought he might have, and he got very scared. So he and his wife decided they had to get out of the country quick, quick, quick. So they went to Hungary, and my father went with them. My- he wasn't married yet, then. And they went to Hungary. And they couldn't earn a living there and they couldn't... And they didn't get any help from the Jewish community either. Probably cause my father was always very rude to religious people and would boast of the fact that he wasn't religious and- anyway, so they had to come back because otherwise they would have starved.

From Hungary?

From Hungary. And those two grandparents were dest- were killed in the Holocaust.

They were deported?

They were deported to…

You can find out.

Yes, I know. I know. I went to the Wiener Library and found it. I didn't- I only realised very late about ten years ago that I could do that. I didn't know that there was a way to find out. But the- the Berlin Jews are all recorded in the Wiener Library. So they were deported in '42. And it says "verstollen" [verschollen- missing] - destroyed. My feeling is, they would have died on the journey. They were in their sixties already. They'd already been under great pressure for years. And the conditions that were on those trains, I can't imagine they would have survived. But if they did, they would have been killed immediately afterwards.

And was your father- was there- is there any correspondence before they were deported?

Yes, there was some. Yeah. But I can't read it. It's…

Yeah. So tell us a little bit now about your emigration, since you can't remember it, what- what happened? What- when you left Berlin? What could you take? What…?

[0:19:54]

I think you could- we had some cutlery. I think you could take a set of cutlery for each person. And my mother, when she knew she was going to emigrate, had a suitcase of clothes made to bring with her, which was stolen on the journey. So she came with nothing except what she stood up in. And, I have no personal memories of it apart from my little trick with the German immigrat- German officials.

Yes.

Apparently I was wearing a beautiful knitted suit that my mother had knitted herself. And… Yeah. That's- I have no memory of it.

No, but you left- they left Berlin on a train or…?

Yes, we left Berlin on a train to Cologne. And from there, we flew.

And were there some relatives in Cologne?

Yes, we stayed with a- a cousin of my mother…

Aha, so you stayed-

…who- who eventually- who was in Theresienstadt as well. And who then got- after the war managed to get to America and she lived and died in America after that. And I'm still in touch with her grandson. And my daughter and her grandson are sort of contemporaries. And they keep in touch.

So from Cologne they- they took an airplane?

Yes. Mn-hnn.

So they must have got tickets for the plane.

Must have done, but how they- I mean none of them had any money so it can't have been easy. And the uncle in America also had no money.

So where- how did they get that money?

I don't know.

Did they ever talk about it? Why didn't they come by train? Or- did they think it was safer?

I suppose it was what you could get.

Yes. So what date was it please when you left?

[0:21:42]

It was May '39. I know that's- I have it somewhere, but I- as I said, I- I couldn't find certain things while I was looking. So somewhere else I must have hidden some more stuff.

So they arrived in Croydon, probably.

Yeah. Croydon. Yeah.

And from there what did they do - and you?

They went- they went to Finsbury Park, I think, and had a room in Queen's Drive, which was at right angles to where they later lived. They had a room in a Scotsman's house. A friendly Scottish gentleman. And… And that was until- until the war broke out. And then, you know, everybody was here- here, there and everywhere until we were interned.

Just in terms of work. What did your- did your parents manage to- once they came?

They weren't allowed to work, but they did work.

What did they do?

They made- they- they bought a sewing machine, and they sewed knapsacks for the Army. And they made hair grips and I don't know what else. But those are the two things I remember. And at one point my mother got the needle of the sewing machine through her thumb. But, they worked like that. Illegally.

Yeah, but they managed to…?

They survived.

And how good was their English when they came?

[0:23:13]

They both spoke good English. My- they both had a good education from that point. My father was- had a very good ear. He could flirt with any woman in any language. And, you know, after two minutes he could speak in any language. He was very musical as well. And my mother went to G*ymnasium* and had a good education. And her mother spoke several languages, so it was sort of in the family.

Yes.

Yeah.

So she did work as a doctor immediately or…?

Well, it couldn't be immediately. Yes, she- in the internment camp she worked as a doctor as well. And many, many years later, I had a contact from the people who ran the museum in the Isle of Man. They introduced me to a lady who had been a nurse… and had known my mother and worked with my mother. And I corresponded with her until she died.

Fantastic.

Yes.

OK. We're not quite in the internment. We are still in London. You went to a kindergarten or were you sent to [inaudible]?

Yes, I was sent to a little kindergarten near my home. I have some memories of that.

So what are your- what are your first memories, in fact?

My first memories are of the Isle of Man. I remember being brought to my mother's room and opening the door and she was lying on the bed. I think she'd been crying. She had plenty to cry about. But- and also I remember on my third birthday we were- at the centre of the women's camp was a small hotel. And there was a dining-cum-ballroom. And I remember on my third birthday I had a little pretty dress, a little organdie dress with pink and green ribbon trimming. And I remember dancing around with this little dress. And when we went back in the 90s I danced around the ballroom, to remember.

Nice…

It was nice.

And what was the name of the camp where this was?

[0:25:17]

Port Erin.

Port Erin.

It had a- I think it was called Ballaqueeney – the camp.

The Ballaqueeney Hotel.

Yes, that was the name of the hotel.

I've heard about that.

Yeah. And it was still…

There is somebody else- there is somebody else in our Refugee Voices…

Yes?

… who stayed in that hotel. I can give you the name afterwards.

OK. Yes, it was still standing when we went but it was about to be pulled down. Although I was very glad it was still there. And I remember… for some reason being in the building and looking for my mother and someone told me she was on the other side of the garden which was a big lawn. And there were some buildings in the distance. And they said, "She's over there." So I toddled off and bumped into a whole flock of chickens that all flew up in the air, and I was terrified, I remember. I was sobbing and howling by the time I found my mother. And I also had chicken- whooping cough. I remember being very ill one night and howling and being sick and my mother come- no, a nurse coming and finding me. My parents were downstairs, and they must have come up afterwards. Just little tiny snippets. And being taken

down on the beach; it was a lovely place! With a beach and a gorgeous bay. And being taken down the the beach in a pram, all bundled up, when I was convalescing.

So, nice memories!

Yes. And a little boy coming up and saying could I play, and my dad saying, "No, she's not well enough." And one night- one morning we got up and there was a plane ditched in the bay. Don't know if it was a British plane or a German plane. I don't know.

So just to come back to- to London. The war started. And what happened to you and your mum? You said you were evacuated?

Yes. To- to the country. I don't know exactly where.

So your father stayed in London?

My father had to stay- well they didn't have permission to go – you know. He had to stay. …And then he was rounded up in London. And they kept them in a barracks in Camden Town somewhere. And they were sent separately to the Isle of Man.

So, who was sent first?

I think my mother and I were sent first to Ballaqueeney. And my father was sent- I don't know. I think they went to Liverpool and they were in the sports stadium or somewhere. They were always… shuffled around. We were very lucky he wasn't sent to Australia.

Yeah…

In fact, I think at one point he was going to be. And my uncle had got a job in the office where all this was going on. And he managed to shuffle the papers around so that my father didn't get sent.

What about the tribunal? You said you were in a tribunal in- in the countryside?

[0:28:09]

In the country. Yeah. Well, this is what my parents tell me, that people there weren't used to foreigners, so they just put us on the worst category.

You and your mother?

Me and my mother. Category A, yes. The most dangerous people.

And because you were Category A you were…

Probably sent first.

In fact, if you were Category C they wouldn't have taken you.

I don't know about that. Maybe not, yes

And your father was which category?

B. …But he was in a different camp. In- in Douglas. Again, I know it, but I've forgotten it for the moment, the name of the camp. And… he got very busy. He was- he became the cook for one of the houses. They took over a whole terrace of houses.

Yes?

So in his house he was the cook, because he loved his food and he want- he wanted to be in charge of the food supply. And he said he had terrible problems with the Austrians cause they always wanted different dishes from what he wanted-

From the Germans?

From the Germans, yes. But my uncle got busy. You know, he became assistant to the commandant of the camp.

What was his name?

Hans.

Hans.

It became ‘Harold’ later.

Beermann?

Beermann, yes. And he- he wrote letters for everybody and organised….and… he was- and he made himself very useful. But my father always told me, “Ugh. He used to run around with a clipboard trying to look important. Ridiculous man!” He always put my uncle down, which is why I didn’t have a relationship with him. Because my father was so jealous. And… I mean we saw him all the time but I never formed a relationship with him.

And how- did your parents talk about that time in internment? How did they see it? At- difficult maybe to define it later in their lives.

[0:30:09]

They talked- my mother didn’t talk much about it. …Very little. My father talked more about his business you know of- of having to cook for these difficult men. My mother hardly talked about it at all. I think she must have been very unhappy. I mean she didn’t know where her husband was. She didn’t know where her family were - anything. Was just she and I, you know. And… I do remember when the- the men were brought to the camp…

Yes?

I remember we- there was a sort of big barbed wire fence that cut off the end of the street. And we stood by the side of the road. And my mother pointed- the men came in formation, you know, six abreast or something. And my mother pointed, “Look darling, there’s your daddy!” And there was this man carrying a big parcel that turned out to be a rocking horse he’d made for me. And they were marched in, and then at some later point they must have

been reunited.

So how long did you stay in total in- on the Isle of Man?

I think two-and-a-half years. Something like that.

So of the two-and-a-half years, how long were you just with your mother and how long were you together?

I don't know. I don't know. …Somewhere there's a document, but I don't know.

And you said your mother started working as a doctor?

Yes. …Yes. That was the best thing in her life.

So for her that must have been a good thing.

Yes, it was.

And so it means there must have been some childcare for you?

Yes, there were these, these girls took me off…

So who were they?

They were these German girls who were in the camp with us. They weren't Jewish. They were just Germans who hadn't bothered to get British- you know, naturalised. And they set up this little nursery school. I don't know if it was a *Kindergarten*, not a nursery school. I was only eighteen months old when I got there.

[0:32:00]

Because I know that in the women's camp they put together the Jews and 'the Germans'. You know. Were there any Nazis in there…?

There were some, I think. Yes. My mother said there were some. But of course the Jewish women sussed out who they were. And there were tense- I think there were a lot of tensions.

Like what? What-?

Well, between …the different groups. And you know the Jewish people who knew that some of these people were Nazis, were not happy to be in the camp with them.

No.

But I don't know what they- if they did anything about it. This sense of discomfort came across from my mother.

And who- were there any other children? Did you meet other children?

There were other children, yeah, but- yes, and I- I acquired a fiancée. There was this a little boy with golden curls, I remember, who was a few months younger than me. And I announced that I was going to marry him. And I followed him around. And when I was evacuated, it was through his family that… that I used to occasionally be invited for tea or something to that- to play with him. But not very much.

And what was the food like? What other memories have you got?

I don't remember the food at all.

No.

No, food didn't figure very much at all in my life when I was little. I- I didn't eat at all. Well, I- my mother said she got fat because she had to eat what I wouldn't eat. There wasn't very much and it probably wasn't very nice. But there was enough, I think. I don't think they were hungry. I got the impression that most of the women spent all their time playing bridge. And one day I wandered up this little road towards the gate, on my own. I don't know how it came about. And there was a hall and someone was playing a piano. And I went in. And there was

a couple rehearsing a dance, obviously for a- for a show, sort of like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire-type dance. And I sat on the side and watched them. I can remember, I could feel my eyes dropping out of my head with excitement at this beautiful glamorous picture. And eventually they noticed me sitting there. And somebody took me back to my mother. I don't know what she thought I was doing at the time, or where she thought I was.

Because there was quite a lot of activity the refugees organised themselves...

[0:34:34]

Oh yes, yes, of course. Otherwise they'd have gone crazy.

But you were too small…

Yes. No, but that I saw.

Later. There was a newspaper and there were cabarets…

Yes.

…and lots of- there was a lot of activity.

Yes, and you know, those who had professions that were useful. The artists did art. Especially there was a camp in Douglas - there were several camps - on a certain square where all the artists and the professors were. And that was- that was a story in itself. But it wasn't- none of us were there. I just heard about it in the 90s.

So did your mother…

Hutchinson Camp… that was it.

Hutchinson.

Yes.

Central Square, Hutchinson. So did your mother- were- her patients were from the camp or…?

Yes, the women in the camp.

Just the women in the camp?

The women and the children presumably as well, yeah.

Did she go to the other camps as well or…?

No. She was- she was just there. There were presumably other doctors in the other camps. If you intern a lot of Jews there are usually a lot of doctors.

Yes…yes. But for you it was a- a happy time or?

[0:35:46]

Yes, I was with my mother- I was with my mother, which is the most important thing for a small child. And as my mother said, "You were very lucky, you missed the first bits completely." And it was summer. It can't always have been summer. But I remember summer and I remember sunshine and the beach. And the beautiful scenery. …I had no complaints. And dancing in the ballroom on my birthday.

Yes, so when you went back there it was a- important for you to see it. Yes?

Yes, everything of course was much smaller [laughing] than I remembered it.

Yes… Your perspective had changed.

But it was in the same relation to each other. But the barbed wire and the gates weren't there anymore.

Yes. And was your uncle released earlier? Who stayed longer? You or your…?

I think my uncle may have been released earlier, but I'm not sure. But he was- I know he was settled in London before we were- oh, no this was before the internment; I'm- I'm getting confused.

And did you all leave together with your father and your mother and-?

No.

No.

No, we didn't live with my uncle.

Leave together – from the camp.

Oh, *leave*.

Yes.

Yes. Eventually yes, because we were together in the camp. And then we left together, yes.

So you were released…

Together, yes.

So when was that roughly? In '42, or…?

Yes. I assume so.

And then where did they go from there?

[0:37:08]

We went to Kilburn and… had a room I think or maybe two rooms in a- in a big building. An old building. All full of- I think a lot of… refugees. And I had a very vivid experience while we were living there. My mother took me up the Kilburn High Road shopping. Can I tell you this now?

Sure.

And at some point she said to me, "Wait there, while I go into this shop." And people were- it was- Kilburn High Road was a very busy place.

Yeah.

And for some reason, I must have moved. And I started walking up the street. Then I realised my mother hadn't come back. Where was she? And I started to look for her. I went into the nearest shop which was a Woolworths. And of course she wasn't there. I don't know what shop she'd been in. And I started to cry, and the shop girls were very sorry for me and they took me into the staff room. And they talked to me. And then one of the girls said, "I know where there's a house where a lot of foreigners are living now." I must have sounded German. And I remember she walked me home. And my mother says she - I didn't see it of course - she said she was frantic. She said what was she going to tell my father? She'd lost me? And that was a- I remember that experience being lost – abandoned and lost.

Yeah. But they- they- it was the right house, they…?

Yes, this clever girl from Woolworths. Yeah, there was only one place like that and it was there for years and years. I'm not…

Where was it?

It was I think Queen's Road or King's Road off… near the station. Opposite.

Near Kilburn station?

Yes, I- I would- I think if it's still there I could find it. But I have a feeling it's probably been

pulled down and a new one...

So it was a boarding house?

[0:39:07]

And then I went to school there… And… I was in the playground. That's the only memory I have of that school. And I was in the playground sitting by a sort of step- staircase that went up into the street. And a little girl came up and was speaking to me. And I couldn't understand what she was saying. And, and I know you know, from my memory she was asking me to come and play with her. But I didn't understand. And apart from that, that I didn't speak English, the kids around there had very strong Irish accents.

Yes… yes.

So… but I didn't know what it was. But I remember this feeling of alienation which is something I've carried with me to this day. I never quite know if I've understood things correctly. And …I think that's probably why I chose my profession the way I did.

It's possible…

Yes.

But it's interesting, because it shows that at that point you didn't speak- you probably didn't speak that- much English.

Wasn't that confident. Yes. I must have spoken a bit, because I could ask for help and- a bit but probably with a strong accent. Cause everyone in the camp would have been speaking German.

But anyway you were still very young.

Yeah…yeah.

Yes, in the camp probably it was German and then- and your parents probably spoke German.

When they were together, yes. But in the paper I wrote about my- my forbidden mother tongue. I explained that they told me when we moved back to London that I mustn't speak German in the street. And… It was a very strong injunction.

You remember that? The feeling?

[0:40:56]

Yes, and I remember them saying it, as we were walking it the blackout, to visit some friends one evening. And I started speaking, and- "Don't speak German in the street."

And what effect do you think or what impact did that have on you?

Well, it made me aware of my otherness. And that there were things about me that people wouldn't like. So I had to hide them. Of course, then later, I was living with people who weren't Jewish in a- in a milieu where there- without Jews. So that was another thing I think that… I was hardly aware of actually. As a small child. But when I was sent to convent school, I was the odd one out. But I didn't mind that because I always came top in the class… And …I think they must have been very generous children because I never got punished for it.

Right. But speaking of otherness, you… did you know you were Jewish? I mean was that- did your parents talk about that? Also, I wanted to ask…

Yes. Some point, but I can't remember when it became… yeah. I was sent. One of the papers I found was a report from the Hebrew school… in Finsbury Park…

Aha- right.

… when I was eight, I think, and- which they made me go to. And it was so terrible that I refused to go after a while. And they said, "You've got to go-" and pushed me out of the

door. So I just went round the side of the house and waited there until they noticed that I hadn't come back.

On the Isle of Man was there anything? Do you remember any Jewish festivals? Or any…?

Not that I'm aware of. There may well have been. What I remember from there is Christmas.

Aha.

[0:42:45]

Two things. I remember standing with my parents by the side of the street and there was a parade. And there was Father Christmas. And then there was the most terrible noise. And I was so frightened and I started to scream and shout. And it was bagpipes. You know eventually they came up over the hill, so to speak, and you saw it was men with the… But I was so terrified.

You'd never seen those before?

Well it's not so much hadn't seen them – hadn't heard them! It's a terrible noise if you don't know what it is. It must have put the fear of God into their enemies. And I remember screaming. And the Father Christmas frightened me too. And I've always had a horror of people in masks ever since. I can't stand masks. I would never go to the carnival in Venice or anything like that.

Do you think it stems from…?

I think it stems from there.

…from that?

Yeah. Well that's one of the things, yes.

Would you like- we can take a break now, because it's a natural break. Or we can continue a

bit. What would you like?

Well a bit would be all right.

OK. Shall we continue a little bit more? And then you tell me when…

OK.

Yes, so Kilburn. And at some point they moved…

[0:44:00]

To Finsbury Park. And we had the middle floor in a small terraced house. They had a- a sitting room and a bedroom and a kitchen. And we shared the facilities with the rest of the house. And I slept on an old sofa in the living room. And… we had a cat cause there were mice. And one night I heard something in my room and I thought it was something very supernatural or very frightening. And then eventually it jumped on me. And I thought I'd die of fright. And then it went "Meow". [laughs] But it was the cat. But those were very nasty moments. And there were one or two children in the street that I could play with. I was friends with a little girl, but she emigrated to America soon after the war.

Were there quite a few refugees in Finsbury Park at that point?

Yeah, there were- there were some; there weren't a huge number. My parents knew all the refugees.

Yeah. And did your parents have any contact with Bloomsbury House or any organisation?

Yeah, I think when we first arrived in London they went to the Bloomsbury House and they were given sort of directions where to go and where to find a room. And they must have done. Yeah. I don't remember it at all but I know- I remember hearing the phrase 'Bloomsbury House'. It was part of the language.

And work-wise? What did your parents do when they came back from- when they moved back

to Finsbury Park?

[0:45:39]

Which was in the war still…

Yes.

So then I think my father got war work in a- in an engineering works in the East End - in Barking. And he had to get up at six every morning and go off to Barking. And my mother got a job with …Edith Summerskill, the Minister of Health. I don't know if she already was then. She was later in the Attlee government after the war, she was Minister of Health. But she was already you know, quite an important woman and she had better things to do than look after her patients. So my mother was her assistant.

How did your mother get that- quite a…

I don't know; somebody must have introduced her.

…an important job.

Yes, well the job wasn't impressive, but Edith Summerskill was impressive.

Yes.

And- and she lent us furniture as well I remember in our little flat. We had some furniture that she lent us.

What was the name of the lady? Edith?

[0:46:42]

Edith Summerskill.

Summerskill.

She was an imp- very important woman afterwards. A politician. And I think her son or her grandson is still in Parliament. I'm not sure. She was in the Labour government.

So your mother's… medical degree was accepted?

Yes, because she worked for her. Most people had to re-qualify.

Yes.

But because she got that job and she worked in that capacity, she managed not to have to do that. And she said she'd never have passed the exam, she said. She always made herself out to be not very bright, which was nonsense. But this was part of their marital set-up. My father was very under-educated. And… my mother always played this game that she wasn't- she- it was a pure fluke that she ever qualified as a doctor. But it wasn't.

And she- what was- what did she have to do in this- in this job?

What- a GP?

[0:47:47]

Yeah, she was a GP…

She ran surgeries. Yeah, well she ran the surgeries herself and she had to visit the patients in their homes as they did in those days. And this was during the Blitz and the blackout. And she had to go around London, in the East End, in the Blitz in the blackouts visiting patients. And I just picked this up gradually, you know… She never talked about how her work was awful or anything. She never talked about it. She just did it and… It was only afterwards I realised what she- what it really meant.

So she was working full time?

I think so, yes.

And what happened to you when…?

I was in this nursery. I got into terrible trouble in the nursery. Every day we had to have a sleep. And there were sort of like canvas cots on little legs. And I got a piece of plasticine from playing in the morning; I found it in my pocket. And I rubbed on to this canvas. It made such a nice- you know, it fitted nicely into the web- the weave of the canvas. And I spread it all over the top of this bed. And of course when the staff found what I'd done, I was in terrible trouble. And I also had a little ring that must have come out of a Christmas cracker or something and which was got full of plasticine. And this was taken and thrown away and it was my punishment. So I was always getting yelled at for doing terrible things which I didn't understand why they were terrible. So… Yeah. I remember we had sun ray lamps. It was a health thing. We were all vitamin deficient. So we all got orange juice and cod liver oil. And malt. Do you know that is?

Yeah.

Yes? You've tasted it?

Cod liver oil.

No, but cod-liver oil of malt. It was a sticky- lovely. It was delicious. It was sugary. And it was- we didn't get much sugar but loved it. And, yeah, we always got that as a supplement. And then they gave us- we walked round and around these sun ray lamps which, we had to wear goggles. And we took our- just in our little knickers we walked around and around these things. I don't know, for ten minutes, probably. So we got our vitamin D or whatever it is you get from the sun.

Yeah.

And… they had a funny smell. I still remember the smell.

[0:50:23]

Were there any other refugee children or were you the only one?

I don't know. I don't remember anything about the other children. I don't know how long I was there either. It can only have been until – yes – until it was time for school. And my birthday was in August so on my fifth birthday- my parents had learned that the English children started school on the- when they were five. So on my fifth birthday they took me down to the school, but of course it was August so there was nobody there. [laughing] They eventually found the caretaker who explained to them that it was school holiday time.

They took you on your birthday, or…?

On my birthday, yes. I'm sure in Germany people didn't go to school in August either. But… And then I was there for I think a term or two. And then- then I was evacuated.

Was the whole school evacuated, or…?

Yes, I think- I think everybody. All the children were actually- from London were evacuated. And…

To where?

[0:51:30]

Well, I went first to Shropshire to a large village called Wellington. And the school I was sent to was on a lovely green hill with woods nearby- it was really lovely. And it was summer time. Is what I remember anyway. And I remember I had a big argument with another child. Cause we were drawing on the blackboard in the- in the school break, waiting for the teacher. And this child - I can't remember if it was boy or a girl - drew women with a triangle and then a head. And I said, "No, no." And I drew my- well there were two triangles with a waist. And we had this big argument about what was the right way to draw …women. But I always remember, you now, I loved the… It was such a beautiful school. And it was all modern and fresh and nice. Whereas the school in London one of the old Victorian buildings.

And you didn't mind to be separated from your parents? Or can't remember…?

I don't remember whether I minded being separated from them. But I found it quite difficult to know how to behave. I was always doing something I shouldn't. I- I was handed over to this family. They had a teenage daughter who was put in charge of me. And I remember the first night she- she took me into the bathroom and I dropped the toilet roll in the loo or something. I don't think we had toilet rolls where I came from. And- and things kept happening like that and I always felt I was doing something wrong. They were very kind to me; I can't say otherwise.

What were their names? Do you remember?

Its gone. Something with a 'B'. I've forgotten… no. But the father- my connection was with the grandmother. But the father of the family was a manager in a wood place. They had a- I don't know if it was carpentry or if they were just selling raw wood. And outside the- the house – there was a little group of houses where these people lived – there was a big stack of wood planks built up. And I played outside with the other children, which I always loved. And one day we were climbing up on this pile and of course Edna drops- Edna falls off. And I still have the scar. And …But I remember they- there were sort of marshes and things and there were paths and little bridges. And playing hide-and- you know, follow-my-leader. And I- it was so exciting to be with all these- and I always got terribly overexcited when I was with other children. For- for- as long as I was a child and- and beyond. Being so only…

[0:54:25]

Yes. You were an only child, with lots of adults around.

Yeah. And all these adults - my parents' friends - had no children, except much older ones. Ten years older, you know. So they weren't of an age I could play with.

So in that sense, yeah…

There were very few children for me.

And where was it? Where were you evacuated to? Do you remember the- that- that second evacuation?

The second evacuation was to Birmingham. And I've seen the house where I lived. We- my husband and I took a trip there. We went to the school and everything. And I lived with a widow and her son. She was very kind and I don't remember an unkind word from her the whole time I was there. And I went to school. And we had to walk- we had to cross a great big main road. And at some point in 1944, there were armoured vehicles and tanks going down this road when we went to cross it to go to school. You know, quickly cross the road cause there was this horrible- this was the beginning of D-Day. The preparation for D-Day. All- and a dog had got squashed by a tank and it was completely into the tarmac. You know, it was just a flat- flattened piece of fur. Made a big impression on me.

Yes. Did you realise that the war was going on? Did you even…?

Well, the war had always been going on as far as I was concerned. But I mean, we didn't have a- we didn't listen to the radio and hear the news and so on. What I had to do- we all had gas masks. And I had a little child's gas mask which was pink. And when I turned six, I was supposed to take it to a- a building near there and change it for a 'grown-ups' one. And I forgot to go and I got told off. But I remember these horrible gas masks. It was really quite a frightening thing. And I think we probably had drills at school. That I don't remember; I just assume we must have done.

And did your father continue the war work, or what did he do?

[0:56:37]

Yes, he would have done.

Throughout the war?

Yes. Most of the war. And once a month, one of my parents would come for a day visit. Just for the day. So by the time they'd done the journey from London they didn't have much- you know- much time with me. And I don't think I was very pleased to see them after a while,

you know, they were just interrupting my life. And I didn't know how to respond to them. I do remember once when it was my father's turn. The boy in the family- he started to play with the boy. [whispers] And I got very jealous. And I remember saying, "That's my daddy!" And I got told off for being selfish.

But you accepted that your parents didn't try to get you back to London, they, they… ?

I never questioned anything, cause life kept changing, you know. I had no idea of what changed it and who was responsible. I just accepted things as they came.

Yeah. And how long did you stay there?

Until… I think virtually the end of the war. As soon as, you know, it was obvious that the bombings were over. I came back just in time for the victory parties in the street.

[0:57:56]

Do you remember them?

I do remember, yes. And… yeah, my parents found a flag that they hung out of the window. And- which I found many years later. There was anniversary - I can't remember which one – of the war. Maybe the- what would have been the fortieth or fiftieth one- anniversary. We found it in a cupboard somewhere and hung it out the window again. Yeah, there were tables all the way down the middle of the road and all the- everybody contributed. Cause nobody had much. There was still very severe rationing. But… there was not- it must have been an enormous relief. And I remember during the war, before we were- before I was sent away, I remember the air raids. And we used to have to get up in the middle of the night and go down into the coal cellar. And my father had a magnificent coat. He was quite a- a gay young man with a- it was a wonderful tweed coat with a fox fur collar- great big fox fur collar. And lined with fur, as well. And they'd put this down on top of the coal and wrap me in it. And I would lie there until it was safe to go back up to bed. And I don't remember ever being frightened. But I didn't see anything horrible. But there- there was- there were bombs very near us. A lot of- a lot of destruction just around our- where we lived.

Yeah… Because it was towards East London, well almost- not quite, but-

Well, yeah- yeah, there was an important- there was a waterworks very near and I think they were aiming for that. But …Yeah, you know, we all collected shrapnel. And I collected the, the glass crystals from chandeliers that of course all got broken or smashed. That was what I collected.

When was it? That was before- in the middle of the war?

In the middle of the war.

Not at the end, when you came back?

No I think it was during the war. Maybe I was still collecting when I came back. I don't remember.

And did your parents still live in the same flat when you came back, or…?

[1:00:15]

Yes, but when I was eleven they moved- they bought a house just around the corner, a whole house. But- which was in very bad condition. But the government gave people grants to repair war damage. And my mother opened her own practice there.

In the house?

In the house. Yes. This was- the health centre wasn't built until a couple of years later… so she started off working at home.

And did she ever have any difficulties as a refugee doctor? Did she talk about it?

Well we- I used- we used to tease her because her- she- she had some very funny turns of phrase in English. Some very strange ways of saying things. I said, "Mummy, how do your patients understand you?" She said, "Well, most of them don't speak English anyway." You

know, a lot of Greek Cypriots at that time. And… they were an international community. Different sorts of refugees.

Yes, so she didn't…

She managed.

…have any problems?

She didn't seem to think so. No. She- she actually did speak very well, but she just had some funny turns of phrase. We had this thing- at home, she would confuse 'bowl' and 'bowel'. It always made me laugh. I think she was quite a clever woman, but she hid it, because of my father. And the tension in the house was that if a patient phoned up, my father would grab the phone and try and tell the patient what to do. And my mother would have to physically fight him for the phone... and say, "I'm the doctor here." He'd say, "Oh, I know as much as you do." He always claimed he would have been a doctor, only his parents couldn't afford the fees. Which isn't true, because he missed a great deal of school and was actually unteachable as far as I could tell. He- he was very talented in certain ways. He could make anything with his hands. He could play any instrument. He could read- speak any language. He could paint, he could sculpt… but you couldn't teach him anything. I think he either picked it up by himself or he didn't, and that was... And he- as far as he was concerned, he was as qualified as my mother to be a doctor.

[1:02:38]

But your mother found a way of dealing with it?

Well, she struggled with him. Yeah. And I think she was a different person when she was at work. When she worked outside the house, then she was in charge; she was the boss. When she was in the house with him, it was impossible.

And your father then after the war he- you said he created a company or…?

Yes, he started his own company with a Mr. Chadwick, who was from a family that he'd

known in Berlin, and who was a- who would have been a lawyer but for the Hitler- and they formed a partnership. But Mr. Chadwick didn't like getting up early and coming to work. And the partnership didn't last, but the name did.

Which was?

Beecha- Beermann-Chadwick: Beecha Products Limited.

Yes. And what did they do? What did they produce?

They made bags out of plastic material as sponge bags and tidies for stockings. And at one point they made cush-chair covers for cars and all sorts of things that you could make in that way. And they had outworkers. And they had cutters and packers and what have you. I used to, in the school holidays I used to go and help. I don't think I was much help. They had a little factory in Newington Green. My father kept that business going until 1960, when he was bought out, to his great delight. It was a going concern and a bigger one bought him out. And he retired on that. And then he took up art in a big way. He went to different- he went to painting and sculpting and enamelling and all sorts of classes- and language classes, every day of the week. And he was happy as a sandboy, yes.

And how was your… How were your parents emotionally, post-war? I mean they- did they try to find out what happened? When did they find out?

[1:05:07]

My father went to Germany. He went to a trade fair. He used to get a lot of his ideas from going to trade fairs in Germany. And I think one of the first times he went he found out what happened to his parents. And he came back and he told my mother. But they didn't discuss it in front of me. They didn't tell me anything. They just said, they- he found out. But I gathered that they were dead. That's all I gathered.

But you'd never met them, so... it really…

I'd never met them. It meant nothing to me, no. But when my mother heard that her mother

had died, she actually put her - you know - her head down and her pinny over her face and cried. But very shortly. And my father stood there and put his hand on her shoulder. And then she stopped crying. And that was- I said, "What's happened?" And they said, "Oh, your grandmother's died." But I'd never- I didn't remember her. But I then found out when I got- I got all my mother's letters. She'd thrown them all into the bottom of a big sideboard. She couldn't bear to hold them, but she didn't destroy them. She threw them all- they were all in a big jumble in this drawer. But there were- were letters written to me by this grandmother. They- her mother's mother, when she was in Switzerland. And I'd sent her pictures and I'd sent her poems and I'd sent her… And my mother had sort of conducted this correspondence with her mother through me. And she'd written to me and always referred to me as 'the Little Darling'. And I had no memory at all of writing to her so I must have done it like a school exercise. And- my mum must have sat me down and said, "Now, write and tell your grandmother what you've been doing." And so on.

And you said you were the only grandchild?

Yep.

So you have these letters somewhere?

Well, yeah, her letters, yes. I have stacks of them. Some of them I filed for when I went to Berlin. And they were all crumpled up. I used to iron them all. And the smell used to drive me crazy. I used to get so depressed; I could only do about an hour at a time. The smell of these old papers was… and what was in them.

When did she write them from? From Theresienstadt as well?

No, I don't think – No.

Or before and after?

[1:07:32]

No. Before and after, yes. And- but she was- afterwards, when she was in Switzerland she

was writing, it was very difficult, because everybody wanted to know from her who she'd seen. Who she knew was alive. What had happened to their relatives? Everybody was doing this- you know, wanting to trace each other. And this is when my father found so many of his cousins mostly in America and in South America… and one in Australia. And I can't remember where they all were. And in Chile and Uruguay…

Scattered.

Scattered, yes. And they gradually all found each other again.

And did they have any plans after the war to go elsewhere, or…?

Well the plan had originally been to go to America. And the visa for America finally came through in 1947, by which time my father had set up his business and my mother had her practice. And they didn't want to go anymore.

Yeah.

They felt OK in London.

And were they naturalised already when this…?

In '47 they were naturalised.

And you, automatically?

Automatically with them, yes.

And was that important for them, do you think?

Maybe. Wasn't- we didn't have much conversation about these things; I was still only a child.

Yes.

Yeah. And then I got to meet my uncle, my mother's brother, who was a film editor. He'd worked with Fritz Lang in- in Berlin before the war. And he'd made all sorts of movies.

What's his name?

[1:09:15]

Paul Falkenberg. I've got stuff about him. I didn't come across that when I was looking. I don't know; there must be some files that I've misplaced somewhere. And he'd made a lot of films in Germany afterwards, you know, much more recent times- about the architecture of Berlin and things like that.

And how did he survive?

They got out before the war. They- they, I think in '33, '34 they went to Paris. And then they moved on to London for a short while and then they went to America. And his wife worked with him.

So he stayed in a film career in America?

Yeah- yeah.

Where were they live? In California?

I think they were in California at some point and then- but then they were in New York. And… they visited them- the year that I was twenty, my father took me on a trip to New York. And I met him-them- and I met them and I was invited to a dinner party with all sorts of artistic people. It was very exciting. You know, a sculptor looked at my hand and said he would like to make a sculpture of my hand, and all this sort of nonsense. And there was a question whether I should go and study in New York. This is before I actually managed to go to university. And… I realised very quickly that- that they didn't have any sort of maternal or paternal gifts, my uncle and his wife. They had no children and they didn't want any children. And I knew I would be very much on my own. So… There were also some cousins of my

father's, but I didn't like them very much. And so I didn't. But when I started studying, my uncle got me some textbooks and sent them from America. Some big, fat, expensive textbooks.

I think, let's take a break now and then we shall…

Good idea.

Yeah?

[1:11:25]

Yes, so we were talking about your life post-war. …And maybe tell us a little bit about which school. What happened to you after you came back- back to London?

My parents had to find a school for me and they didn't want to send me to the state school - big old Victorian place where I'd started – bit rough, it was. So first they took me to a 'Dame school' which was two old ladies in their- in their lounges. And it was so gloomy. And when we came out on the pavement I said, "I don't want to go there. Please don't send me there." So they were very disappointed. But then they sent me to the French convent school in Crouch Hill. St. Gilda's Convent High School, where I was quite happy. Again, I was always doing the wrong thing because I didn't know it was the wrong thing. And… I had several sort of incidents of embarrassing things where I was- do you want to hear the details?

Go on.

Once I needed to go to the toilet in the middle of a lesson. And when I'd done what I'd gone to do, there was no paper in the stall. And nobody was around, so I crept into the next stall to get some paper, at which moment the Mother Superior appeared and wanted to know what the hell I was doing. And she made me feel like I was the dirtiest girl in the world. It's obviously quite perverse- you know this feeling that I was '*yuck*'. Anyway, she had- she peered into my loo and saw that I really had been doing what I said I'd been doing. And she told me to hurry up and get back to the classroom. Anyway, she made me feel very dirty. And then another time- at that time I wanted to be a knight in shining armour. I think I'd seen the

film of 'Henry V' and had very romantic fantasies about knights on horseback. And I was charging around the playground with the boys, going "b-dm-b-dm-b-dm", you know, and waving my sword. And I got hauled in front of the Mother Superior again and was told that this was not the way a girl should behave. And the next day they separated the girls from the boys in the playground. We went into two separate playgrounds. So I had been disgusting again. Anyway, I kept- this kept happening. I had no idea what I was doing wrong until it was too late. And this sort of followed me around this feeling of not knowing what the rules were. Not knowing what the mores were.

But did you feel it was unfair or you felt that you…?

Well, I felt hurt, but I felt mainly confused. How was I supposed to know? Nobody told me that you weren't- you know- there were boys in the playground. Why shouldn't I play with them? And… that girls weren't allowed to play like boys played. I didn't know that till they told me. And…You know there were lots of those sort of things that happened to me at all stages of my life. I always thought I didn't- as if I didn't speak the language. Or I certainly didn't have the social- the social background to know the meanings of things.

You didn't quite understand…

No. Didn't understand how things worked.

Yeah.

It's as though there was always a language I didn't understand. Though I spoke you know, perf- nothing wrong with my English. And… But I got over it. I mean it didn't- I didn't go into deep depression or anything.

Yeah.

But I was always puzzled and- and a little 'off'. Whenever I let myself go like with this charging around on a horseback, I seemed to get into trouble.

[1:15:22]

Yeah. But were there- were there any problems in being a refugee or from Germany or did that…?

No, that didn't seem to be…

Or did you keep that quiet or…?

Well, no, my father- my parents must have made it perfectly clear. And they were very considerate to me in many ways. They didn't- they didn't make me feel bad about being Jewish. That was never brought up. And I didn't recognise at the time, that there was- Probably some resentment that I always came top in scripture. I could recite the Catechism. I knew all the- all the apostles and every- everything. Which was a bit tactless, but I didn't know about- tact was something I never learnt. And my mother was always telling me to be tactful, but I never knew what it meant. My father was the most tactless person on God's earth, so… There was often a clash between my parents' points of view. They were very, very different.

On all kinds of topics.

On all kinds of topics, yes.

In which way? How…?

Oh… Just in- in their temperament. The way they lived in the world. My mother was sort of very middle class. You know, from a family who were poor but intellectual... very cultured. My father, much more rough and ready.

So do you think they adapted also differently to their migration or being refugees in different ways?

Yes, I mean, my father opened his business and his workers were all English women. Working class English women. And, and- and he had a sort of paternalistic flirtatious relationship with all women. He was a- he was a menace, frankly. Whereas my mother

worked with working class patients, but she had a role that gave her dignity. And she respected them in a way, but she didn't have an intimacy that my father tried to build up with people. …What else do I tell you? Ask me something.

The schooling- so you were in the convent school?

In the convent school till I- then I did the 11-Plus. And got a place in Owen's Grammar School [Clerkenwell], which had been- the buildings were- little bits of building were scattered all over the place, because the area had been badly bombed. And it wasn't a very comfortable building. But the most uncomfortable thing were the staff. Half of them were the leftovers from the First World War - the unmarried ladies. You know, old fashioned schoolmarms. Very… correct and cold and so on. And I was always in trouble about some stupidity. Because again, I didn't understand the expectations. Nobody said, well they did tell us how to behave. We were- had to wear our uniforms, especially in the street. And we had to always wear our beret. And if you were in your uniform you weren't to be seen to be eating. To be seen eating in the street was a major sin. And all sorts of things that I couldn't understand why…[laughs] But all sorts of things. And- and once we got flashed. I went with three other girls to the Jewish- we had kosher meals at Woburn House, so- which we had to get a bus from the school down to Euston, which was wonderful, because nobody made you eat it if you didn't like it. Whereas at the school you had- everybody- you had to eat every last bit of nasty gristle and everything. It's the only reason I went, cause I wasn't brought up kosher at all.

[1:19:25]

So every lunch you went to…

Yes.

… Woburn House?

Yes. That was our bit of freedom. You know – unsupervised. And then one day a flasher accosted us. Didn't even know the words for it. We knew something- this was- this was bad. So when we got back to school, we told the headmistress. And again it was sort of like, it was

we who were the dirty ones. Trust you- you know, trust you Jewish girls to get- to have this exp- anyway. It was always this feeling of whatever we did, we were in the wrong.

'We', meaning the Jewish girls, or?

Yes, or me personally. I was always in trouble about some bit of nonsense.

But maybe you didn't want to accept the rules in some way?

I didn't know what they were! No, it wasn't that I didn't want to accept them; I just didn't know they were there until I'd broken them. And we start- and we started a discussion group in the sixth form, no fifth form. And we used to meet and discuss school affairs. And I made a speech that was very critical of the…the… what's it called - prefect system. Cause I thought we were supposed- this was supposed to be about free speech this group. And my next- I was hauled up in front of the headmistress and given the most terrible telling off. For disrespect. I'd apparently insulted her. I had no idea how I'd insulted her. I was obviously a complete idiot in social- at social levels. Kept- this kept happening. I mean not every week, but at regular intervals throughout my life.

And how did your parents react?

[1:21:10]

They just thought I was stupid. My girlfriend- my girlfriend and I did this together. And she's still my best friend. And we were both told we would not become prefects; that was our punishment. And her parents who were very anglicised, generations of – you know, her parents marched up and thumped the table and said, "You can't treat our child like this." And the- the head backed down and made her a prefect. But I always, you know- my parents said, "You've obviously done something wrong. Why should we intervene?" It was a learning curve. I mean I always- always felt myself to be a stranger. That's never changed. I don't think I'm so paranoid these days. And I wasn't paranoid. This is the point. If I'd been paranoid I wouldn't have got into so much trouble. I just- as I say, I never found out where the minefields were until I'd stepped on them. Anyway, I managed to stay on at school. And also blotted my copybook because I had a big romance with a boy from the boys' school.

There just was a little tiny path between the two schools. And my subject in the sixth form was botany and zoology – and botany. And the boys came to us for zoology. And we went to the boys for botany. So here were these little girls trotting in- sixteen-year-old girls trotting in among all the boys. And of course we got very friendly with the other sixth form. And I was away. That was it; I'd entered the world of romance. And it was a very big affair. And everybody knew about it because it was conducted as- between the two schools.

Yes…

And I failed a lot of exams as a result as well. Oh, and I was picked for a starring role in the school play that year - which the headmistress also disapproved of. But she couldn't- she hadn't got in place in time to actually stop it happening. And… Yes, so it was quite dramatic.

And the school disapproved of it?

She sort of didn't- she was a bit concerned, you know, what might happen. And would it… would it interfere with our studies and- there was one scene where I had to kiss a boy because we were playing a wedding scene. It was Thornton Wilder's '*Our Town'*. I don't know if you know it?

Yes? No.

But we were the two- young boy and a young girl and it was the wedding and...

Yeah?

And it was very funny because my boyfriend brought all his family to see me in this play. And as- there was- in the wedding scene, we had to walk all through the whole auditorium, through the audience as we were going up to the altar for the wedding. And as I walked past, his whole family stood up and said, "Hello," [laughs] And I was very embarrassed. But- yeah, and there was- there was a, a newspaper strike at the time, so we never got any reviews. But I wasn't a great actress frankly. But it was- it was nice to have done it. And that romance lasted for another year, and then he broke my heart. And I was very thrown very badly after that. So then I went on to the polytechnic to re-take some of the exams which again, I didn't

pass. And I was looking for a new boyfriend and that was full-time occupation. It took me several years to catch up with myself again.

[1:25:02]

What were your aspirations? What did you want to do?

I wanted to be a doctor like my mummy.

Yes?

And I had no idea. I couldn't understand the most simple physics. Everybody tried to teach me about electricity and I could not understand it. Not the most basic thing- it just made- and they kept making analogies about water, you know, pressure in a pipe and so on. I couldn't make the connection. And I still can't to this day. I love zoology. I love botany, but physics and chemistry absolutely not. And I never did. So- I wouldn't have made it as a doctor. And anyway, I couldn't work hard enough to- I was a very lazy girl, always. And my children all tell me I'm still very lazy. And they must know. But anyway so that was another year gone. And then I went to the secretarial school. I didn't want to, but my parents said, "You've got to decide on doing something." It's not what I wanted to do but couldn't think of anything else acceptable. So I did it. And I became the worst secretary there ever was on God's earth. Looking back I feel so sorry for my boss. I was there for two-and-a-bit years. And I was sort of playing a role. The only thing I knew about secretaries was what I'd seen in the movies. So it was all about dressing up smart. Prancing around, you know- but it was terrible. Absolutely terrible. And then one day I went to- oh, sorry, forgot about that. One day I went to a party. And I met somebody who I'd known very slightly, who was a friend of this girlfriend of mine from school. They were in *Hashomer Hatzair* together. And he was asking me what I did. And he said, "You know, you should go to university." And I said, "Oh- I failed all my exams." He said, "Well come to my department. They're not worried about exams. If you get the bare minimum." And it was the psychology department at London- at University College. And he told me they do their own selection process. "And they'll like you. Don't worry." So I did and they did and I got in. And I had to take the exams and I passed them. And for six months while I was at the grammar to get the extra exams I said to all my friends, "I can't have any social life for six months. I've got to get my head down." And I had a- a couple of

ex-boyfriends who were friends with each other and there were three of them altogether. And they said- they were very thrilled that I was going to go back to university cause they'd all thought I ought to. And they said, "If we are free on a Saturday night we'll take you out. And we'll take it in turns." So every Saturday night, one or the other or sometimes all three of them would take me out so that made it all bearable. And then came the end of the- of that summer, when I got the exam results and I was in. I was launched. I threw a party the- the weekend before term started. And I told everybody I knew in my- everyone in my address book they could come and bring anybody they wanted. And somebody brought the guy who became my husband.

[1:28:28]

And it was the same week that I started university. So, half way through the second year we got married. And my mother had been going crazy when I said I wanted to go back to university. She said, "What about my grandchildren? What about you getting married?" And I said, you know, "I could get married. It doesn't- it happens, you know. People do at university." But she was absolutely frantic that she had to have grandchildren. They had a lot of kids to replace. And though I don't think about it in those terms. It was only my mother who was so neurotic about it, I thought. And- and that's what happened. And so I had to re-take my last year because I wasn't well in between and my mother-in-law was dying. And as the daughter-in-law it was my business to sort things out for her. And I did get clinically depressed then. And- but I got help and I was alright. And I got through my finals and got a good degree. And then I had to have my children or my mother wouldn't shut up.

Was she so adamant about it?

Oh, she was frantic. And… I had no buffer, you know, there was no one to say to my mother: "Calm down." You know. Anyway, it was time. I thought it was time because I was by then in my twenties. And- so I had the three children and then I started to get very bored and I decided to get back on the horse. And I went to become a marriage guidance counsellor which I did for some years. And then I thought it didn't go deep enough, that training. We were getting more and more people - not just couples who needed a bit of help, but people - with really deep problems. So I decided to train as a therapist, which I did. And Bob's your uncle. I had several very happy years as a therapist. And I did another course and became a

supervisor, which is my favourite part of the work.

Really?

Yes. Cause it's the combination of being a therapist and being a teacher.

Right.

So I really enjoyed that.

And did you work privately or for an organisation, or…?

[1:31:00]

No, I worked- my clinical practice was private, but the supervision I did for the Raphael Centre which is a Jewish organisation.

Yes.

And I knew the head of it at the time, Ruth Barnett, who's always in the AJR, everywhere.

We interviewed her recently.

Yes. Yes, she's a very prominent person… in her field. And I'd known her on and off- I'd been a member of another little organisation, before, which folded. But I knew her from around all these things. And so she was the clinical director at the time so she allowed me to join. But she said I had to train as well so I did this other training which was very interesting. So there we go. And now I'm retired. Meanwhile my children grew up. And they all went to university late- as well. They all didn't have- all had difficult starts on their careers. Difficult times with their- their schooling and so on. But they all managed it in the end.

And I mean, obviously as a therapist, how do you think your experiences… You must have thought about it- affected you, in later life?

Well I think this thing about never- never knowing the rules until I've broken them goes with me through life. …It doesn't happen so obviously anymore, but it's still there. And… the fact that I've always been very lonely. I don't have my cohorts. I had my one lovely girlfriend from school. She made Aliyah. I met another very nice girl when I was about eighteen. We were very close friends. She went to New Zealand. While I was training I made friends with another girl; she went to Ireland. So the few friends that I had just… all melted. I mean the two main ones I'm still in touch with, but I don't see them very often. And… always a sense of- of aloneness. And…There was a time in the early days of our marriage where we became friends with lots of other newly married couples. And we all had our children at the same time. And I was so happy because this was- at last I had a community and I belonged somewhere. And- but then things went wrong with that group of friends and I wouldn't see them anymore. They all got into drugs and adultery and messing around. And I didn't feel secure enough to get into that. So I stopped seeing them. And I was very, very low for a while. But then we slowly made new friends.

Did you join a synagogue, or…?

And eventually I joined Alyth.

Yes? Was that a community for you, or was that…?

[1:34:23]

Yes, that came about- I went- when I was training as a marriage counsellor, through that training, things came up emotionally which made me realise that I wanted to be part of the Jewish community. And… And I ended up with Alyth, because by then we had moved to here. So it was my local.

Where did you live before?

Well we lived- when we first married we lived in Primrose Hill. And my husband came from a normal Orthodox- you know, a standard Orthodox family. But he had a difficult family history and he didn't want to know. He- he upset his mother. He wouldn't go to *shul* and so on. But because of what happened to me on my training, I said I wanted to become a member

of a community. And he said, "OK, you can. Just don't involve me. You can do what you like." So I joined the community and I became a member of a council and so on. And gradually, gradually he began to come with me. And then he wanted to become a member on the council and they said, "We're terribly sorry. You're not a member of the *shul*. [laughing] Only your wife is." So he joined. But then- then I wanted the children to go to Sunday school. Oh, and they never forgave me. They were so upset with me. They hadn't expected that. That was a terrible imposition you know, and we had to have Friday night dinner. And you know they had to be there. They couldn't go out with their friends on Friday night when they were teenagers. That caused a lot of ructions. And then later on my son became Orthodox – really Orthodox. Much later. Cause he was the youngest anyway. And the two older girls are still not- my oldest girl is completely uninterested. And the middle one, if she lived near a Reform shul, she would go. But she doesn't; she lives in Swansea where there isn't one. And it's an hour to get to Cardiff and she doesn't travel. So…

So how old were the children when you joined Alyth? Was it…?

They were sort of- just sort… the little one was five. Sort of five, seven and nine.

Right. So you made that decision already?

[1:36:52]

Yeah. And so- no it was the age when they needed to go and learn something about the religion. But they didn't want to.

But what was it - for you - which sort of brought you back to religion, or what was it...?

It was like a sort of revelation that I had in, in the- during the training. There were a lot of very emotional sessions and so on. And… I don't know. I can't even remember what the exact moment was but I had a lot of emotional upheaval in that. And this was one of the things that- I knew suddenly that I needed a community. It wasn't enough to just be 'us' and a few friends; it wasn't a big enough world. And I was very excited about being a member of Alyth for a long, long time. I was very enthusiastic. Until two years ago I went every week nearly and… participated in all sorts of things. But suddenly- I think this is one of the things

that's happened in the last two years- partly it's lack of energy, but it's partly also something's shifted. And I no longer can work up any interest. Though it's so near. And I miss it, in a way. And also it's changed.

Yeah…

It gets bigger and bigger and…

…different faces.

Hm?

Different faces, different people.

And I realise that I don't actually have any personal friends. I mean, there are lots of people I'm friendly with if I'm there. But I haven't made real friends. I had a big birthday party for my seventy-fifth there. And I invited people that I'd met in the Al- in one of the classes that I'd been to and- But afterwards I couldn't even remember who it was that I'd invited. And I thought, somehow it didn't work. And so it's not like- I used to go when I was- had some friends there. And I used to go and sit with my friends cause my husband wouldn't come. But then recently I've felt- I've got one very good friend who's a member, but she never goes to services. I just felt no, there's nothing- it- it feels very lonely now when I go there. And I have a very stupid prejudice. I can't stand rabbis with guitars. And it's becoming more and more- a man who's wearing a *tallis* and playing a guitar just makes me squirm. I mean I can't ap- I must apologise for it; it's not rational. It's just…[laughing] how it affects me.

And are you drawn, were you drawn, to something in the German Jewish heritage. You said you went to Berlin. When did you? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

[1:39:52]

Well I went- I was contacted – I can't remember how it came about - by a lady who's active in Bet Devorah… because of my connection to my grandmother. And they were doing- they were doing exhibitions and then they wanted to put that plaque up to my grandparents. And

so I got involved with her. And she came and she looked at the letters that I'd accumulated. And she took them away and they- they published a book and all sorts of stuff. But I never felt at my ease… with the, with the German setting. I- it creeps me out. And though I speak the language, I- I always want to get away as fast as I could.

So when was it the first time you went to Berlin?

Well the first time I went with Stanley in- in 1977. We went- it was when the government was inviting- the Berlin government was inviting refugees back. So we went in that way.

And what was it like?

It was alright, yes, because there were the two of us. My father had made a sort of a map of all the family sites. Where he'd bought his cigars and where they used to live and all this sort of stuff. And it was nice and we had-

He didn't come?

My father?

Yes.

No, he'd been- he'd been a number of times- mainly to trade fairs. But…No, it was interesting. And we went over to the east- no it wasn't before the- before- no, the wall was still up of course. We went through Checkpoint Charlie and that was very creepy indeed. And they took my passport away. And I was hysterical; Stanley had to hold me back. I have a thing about my passport. You know, it's- it's a lifeline. And it was so difficult to get it and I- I treasure it. You know- if there was a house fire, that's what I'd save. Except that I've now got to get a new passport because a scammer tricked me into giving him all my details. I had a phone call a few months ago. Someone caught me on the phone and you know it was the usual nonsense that they're phoning from BT or whatever and that something's wrong with my- my equipment and they want to check it out. And before I knew what I'd done, I'd given them everything, practically. So all my documents had to be cancelled. And I haven't yet got round to renewing my passport. And I'm debating with myself whether I should apply for

German citizenship again. Not for myself, but for my grandchildren or great-grandchildren if they want to work or study on the continent. Cause it covers Europe, not just Germany. So I need to do that. But I feel very uncomfortable in Germany. When Stanley and I went that time, we were- we were given free opera tickets by the city. Went and saw '*Der Fledermaus'*- not *'Der Fledermaus'* - *'Der fliegende Holländer'*. And we sat in the front row of the balcony with a Russian delegation. They just slept all through it. And then we went for a coffee somewhere and there was a group of middle-aged people sitting to one side. Very jolly and singing and joking. And they saw us sitting on the side and said, "Come and join us. Come and join us!" And we said, "No thank you. We're British." And my husband said, "Are you a club or something?" And they got very quiet and they said, "We're a travel club." And Stanley said that meant they were ex-military or something. You know, there was something they didn't want to tell us about. And that just confirmed our whole, horrible- because you never knew who was what.

Yeah.

I don't have to tell you that, I'm sure.

[1:43:56]

And how do you feel about Germany today?

I'm very fascinated. Yeah. I'm very worried as well. I mean I think Angela Merkel would- should be given the Presidency of Europe actually. Except she made this mistake with getting carried away. Her instinct was right but she was stupid.

Have you decided what you're going to do about your citizenship, or…?

Well, I've sort of decided but I find I haven't done anything about it because of the still- There's still- it sort of feels wrong in some way, you know. It's that conflict. To actually ask to have it back. You know- if somebody- if somebody doesn't want me then I don't want them.

Yeah. And what was your parents' attitude to Germany?

My father loved going there because he could- he- he was somebody who loved German social life. He used to go to the nightclubs and the cabarets and everything. You know the film *'Cabaret'* where they're sitting with telephones and talking to girls across-?

Yes.

That's what he used to do. He was a- he was a 'Good Time Charlie', my father. And he just felt well in Germany, despite everything. My mother, less so. But she would also go there. Whereas I felt miserable all the time I was there.

Which is interesting because you had no direct…

No actual memories, yes. But the whole cultural thing. You know, the way the buildings are. They layout of things is just... I just feel very uncomfortable. If feels hostile to me.

And was the past something you talked to- with your children? I mean the- the history?

A little bit but they- they lose interest very quickly. My grand- one of my grandchildren is obviously doing something at school. And she said I should tell her what it was like in the Second World War. And after two minutes she's already switched off and she's gone somewhere else. I don't know if it's cause I'm boring or what it is. But I don't know quite what it is they wanted to know about. I found it very difficult. A sort of- a bit torn in different directions. I mean the reason I- the only reason I would go for the citizenship is to give my children the freedom of Europe. I don't go…

I think your children can apply themselves.

They can, but they probably won't bother. You know. And it's for the grandchildren I'm thinking; my children, it isn't really relevant for.

[1:46:43]

Yeah.

But- have you done it?

I don't need to do it. I need to apply for British citizenship.

Oh, I see- yes.

My situation is the other way around.

Yes.

And how- you came as a very little child. Do you see yourself as a refugee? How would you describe yourself?

I realise from the way I behave; the way I think, the way I feel that I'm still a refugee. Which is ridiculous. You know, I was eight months old. Now I'm seventy-eight years old and I still feel like a refugee. Not all the time. And not around here so much, because you know, it being a Jewish neighbourhood there's this feeling that everybody's come from somewhere else, even if it's only Manchester. But… Yeah, I'm very, very grateful to Britain. They saved my life. It's only recently I've realised how many people they refused to take in. You know- my parents- my mother gave me this sort of rosy feeling that you know, they saved us; they took us in. And I hadn't recognised that- how many people they didn't take in. And America as well. I've only recently understood that. Well, my friend William, whose details I gave you, he's written a book about- it started off as a- a stamp collector's book. But it's- it used the Holocaust- it's about postage from camps and DP camps and…and Lisbon and all the post that went- from- you know, in the war. If you interview him he'll probably show you a copy. But that's how he's dealt with this 'stuff'.

And …how- you said that you suffered from depression. Do you think that was related somehow to your refugee experience? Or you think it was not?

[1:48:55]

Well that's always in the back- that could have been sort of like the base level. The

undercoat. There were other things that have happened in my personal life that- …I'm sure that was part of it. I mean it is really like the base coat…

Yes.

My personality.

But also why I'm asking- it's a topic which often is not discussed. And also many people didn't receive help…

I'm sure.

…before, for all kinds of issues. You know. I don't know whether you have a view on it in general for the German Jewish refugees. Whether they should have talked much more, or they… you know-

Well my can't make people talk. I mean there's the Holocaust Centre. The Raphael Centre [Raphael Jewish Counselling Service] was set up to help refugees. I mean, that's how it came into being. I don't know if you were aware of that.

I wasn't.

Because it came about in the 80s when the first generation of refugees were beginning to get old. Because when they- those who sort of survived the whole experience, had families, had businesses, had professions. And when they began- when the children left home, and they began to retire, they began to collapse. Then it all came out. And there was this very clever social worker who- whose name I've forgotten. Ruth Barnett would know. Who saw that something needed to be done for this body and that's why she started the Raphael Centre with a few other people.

And did people use it in that way? I mean-

I don't know. It wasn't- well, you didn't have to.

Yes.

But one of the things that I always explain to people when I was doing supervision, you know, cause they were all younger than me. And I used to say, "When you're dealing with Jewish people you need to… just find out if there's any Holoc- when they-". Very often if they were troubled and they didn't know what was troubling them, I said, "Find out if there's any Holocaust history in the family." However many- it goes- it's transmitted down through the generations.

You think it is?

Yes. And- and I've- I've seen some of it in my kids.

In which way? Without being too personal.

Yeah, it's tricky. With what they haven't been able to do and with the choices they've made and their social attitudes. Like my, you know, two older children have great difficulty dealing with being Jewish. They never would deny their being- they never would deny being Jewish, but they don't know how to deal with it. And the girls- you know, people were trying to find them husbands and so on and they never wanted to go out with Jewish men. And my middle daughter lives with a non-Jewish man. Lovely boy. I adore him. Gorgeous, tall, handsome. But they had some problem about it and their Jewish identity's a mess. And my son went the other way.

That's really interesting.

Yes. Well he was the least disturbed because I started him off at Sunday school when he was five, which, so- he- he came into it at the same age as everybody else. He didn't join later. And- and he was a different temperament to the girls. So it's very much there. And… I think they have very ambivalent attitudes to my stories and- they see me as very neurotic, I think. And they're not wrong. [laughs]

[1:52:25]

So in which way, in terms of your own - I'm quoting you, I'm not saying - do you see yourself as neurotic?

I worry a lot. And in the last two years my daughter has pointed out to me that since the stroke, I've changed. I'm not as worried as I used to be.

What did you worry about?

Everything! I mean the archetypal thing was throwing a dinner party. We- there was- in the 70s we all had to throw a dinner party; it was the culture at the time.

Yeah?

And I would drive myself round the bend. It would take me a week to decide on the soup- you know. And I was in therapy for years and years and years with a whole string of therapists. And my last therapist, I said to him, "It's very strange. If I'm inviting people for dinner it's a big production. But I have this girlfriend who if she's invited people, at five o'clock she goes to the shops, at six o'clock she starts cooking and at seven o'clock she welcomes her guests. And she's as calm, and the food is lovely." And he said to me, "She's French?" I said, "How did you know?" He said, "I just knew." And she's had quite a difficult life but she's not a refugee. And that's one of- that's just one way.

And do you think your parenting was affected?

I'm sure it was. Yeah, I was a very anxious parent. Overprotective. Got very upset with them about things. And …didn't know how to do it. I only had my own parents as models. And one or two- you know, my girlfriends' parents were very, very different so they didn't seem relevant somehow. And I think I've been very much affected by having such a small…

Yeah- Family.

Family. And I tried you know, by joining the synagogue I tried to extend my family. But it didn't quite- in the long run, it didn't work out. Though they did so- it did serve a role and I was happy with it for a long, long time. But somehow now it's gone. But I think it's- half of

it is down to the fact that I have no energy these days. And that's physical. I have some health problems.

[1:54:50]

Yeah. And what about the AJR? You said you- do you get the magazine and…?

Yes I do.

Is that something? Are you a member of the AJR?

Well, no, I went to the conference where we met but I don't normally- I don't know I find it very difficult to…to be among people of that background. I belong and I don't belong.

Why, you feel you're not…?

I don't know.

…quite a…?

Not quite part of it. But this is my fault because I don't engage- involve myself. I watch other people and I see how they do it. But I somehow can't do it.

It's also age-related isn't it? Because you're almost second generation.

Yeah, because I was so young. Yes. Yeah. But I mean I look at someone like Ruth Barnett… and she's- she's everywhere. And she throws herself in and she's active and she gets a lot out of it and she gives a lot. And I think, What's my excuse? Why don't I do that? But somehow I can't. I don't- I feel I don't belong; I'm neither '*Fisch* nor *Fleisch*'.

Neither in these circles nor in those circles.

That's right. I'm a visitor everywhere. I don't actually belong. And I'm very- I very easily feel rejected.

Right.

[1:56:12]

So…So you know I have my few friends and they're very precious to me, but they're beginning to die off as well. I've lost three friends of my own age-group so far. And others are losing their spouses, you know. And it's only going one way. And I'm not one of these old people who have the talent to be friends with the young people, which is another wonderful thing. I had a neighbour when I lived in Corringham Road, who was a Danish lady. Orthodox. With six children. And we were very close friends. We used to go for walks together first thing in the morning. And- she also moved. She only moved to Hendon, but it's too far to go for walks together. You know, we didn't have to get in a car or a bus. We just lived opposite so it was wonderful. So everything is drifting away.

Yes. Do you think- sometimes do you think how your life would have been if you hadn't had to leave Germany?

Yes I have- one of my little scripts. I said, this, you know if- if we had lived in Berlin with my grandparents. One lot of grandparents would have connected me to one kind of Jewish community. And my famous grandmother would have made darn sure that I got a good Jewish education. She would have pushed and shoved me and slapped me- you know, she would have held me in. And there would have been the extended family all around. And a- a very rich cultural life. Which- I mean my parents liked music and they went to the occasional opera. But there wasn't that richness. You know, there wasn't- you couldn't have an intellectual discussion at our table cause my father wouldn't tolerate it. If he wasn't in control, he would stop it. He was a difficult man. In many ways a very- very loving warm father but a very difficult man. And very controlling. And so, you know, I couldn't- I couldn't try things out on them. When I started doing psychology, they were very, very worried that it would make me antagonistic to them. And when I started doing psychotherapy they were absolutely petrified.

They were not supportive?

Well, I was a married woman by then. But, they just felt that I would hate them. That I would blame everything on them. They weren't wrong. [Both laugh] But I also had enough insight not to blame them for everything. I had *rachmones* [pity] for them. They had a very difficult time.

[1:59:18]

And what about- was hour husband supportive of your psychology and your psychotherapy?

Well he came from a very troubled family background. And I think he picked me because I was- he met me when I was a psychology student. I think he needed somebody who would understand. I'm very sad that I didn't understand well enough what was going on for him. His father suicided and though I- he didn't- my husband never told me. I found out through his brother's children, who told my children who told me. And… Only just before he died did I realise that this had dominated his every working moment and that I hadn't seen it. I don't know what I could have done about it anyway. It was locked inside him. And I think it's what killed him in the end. He- he died of lymphoma, but he himself just before he died- I was taking him for a walk. He was very, very frail by then. He was crossing the road down there. And he said- he said out of the blue, "My father is killing me." And as we got to the other side, I sort of took a deep breath. I said, "Did I hear you correctly?" He said, "Yes."I said, "What do you mean?" "I can't talk about it anymore." And that was it. It made me realise that, that all the times that he was withdrawn or in a mood that I couldn't understand, this was going on. And at one point when our son was about fourteen he began to hack at him. He used to- he was driving him crazy. In a way that he had told me his father did to him. And I saw it happening and I said, "You're not going to do it to our son." I said, "You- you either go to therapy, or I'm going to throw you out." His brother had been thrown out by his wife for similar behaviour because she- he was destroying his children. So my husband went to therapy for years. And I once said to him, "Do you ever discuss our marriage?" And he said, "No. I only talk about my father." So this was- this was spiritually the cancer that- that governed his life. But for all my psychology training, I… I didn't- I didn't have the skill or the knowledge or the understanding to pick it up.

And you married somebody Jewish. Was that important for you?

[2:02:06]

Yes, my father would have gone absolutely…

Aha.

Every boyfriend that I had, he didn't like; he hated them for this reason or that reason. Either they were too frum- but they had to be Jewish. And they wanted me to marry a nice refugee boy. And I went out for- with a few, but the only one, they- I liked was too old. And they didn't like him and they didn't like his background and they- it was- they really were very, very critical indeed. And by the time I met Stanley, they were getting a bit desperate. But he was a lawyer from a decent family. He could earn a living, you know, and he was Jewish. [half-laughing] And so- I think they decided they had to make do with that.

But for you it was also important or not?

Yes. Yes, it was important. But he wasn't *frum*. And so it was very easy. And he wouldn't even join a synagogue but you know I schlepped him in gradually.

You said, yeah. And how would you define yourself in terms of your own identity today?

The wandering Jew. I'm- I'm a member of a Reform synagogue, but I'm no longer an active member.

That is quite a statement?

Yeah.

But… yeah, I'm quite low in a sense but it's… it's… I have no more ambitions except to somehow tidy myself up before I go. Because there's too much stuff hanging about that I need to clear up. And… I'm down- I- I'm on the list for a sheltered flat at the Selig Court…

Yes.

Which is- looks beautiful and wonderful but I don't want to go. I want to stay here. But my daughter tells me that I can't stay here much longer because- can't afford to. You know, I'm living off some capital that I inherited from my husband. And she said it won't last indefinitely. So I'm going to have to sell the house. So I need to find- you know, the whole thing hangs together. But the thought of new neighbours, and- and I don't want to go.

No. You like it here.

However nice it is.

It is nice.

It couldn't be nicer.

No, it is lovely, and they're nice people.

[2:05:04]

Yes. Lovely. But it was just you know, since- just recently I've felt I haven't got the strength to- to go through a change. This is home and I don't want to leave it. But- so- It's not really up to me, is it? I'm going to have to go.

See what happens.

Yeah. I'm not very well. I've got lots of things wrong with me. But probably none of them are going to kill me. So I'm going to schlep off. And… I'm- I- I've withdrawn to a considerable extent, from life. All I want to do is watch television or read a book and see a few friends and not do much else. I'd love to go to exhibitions and concerts and that, but I haven't got the strength. If you weren't here, I'd be asleep now. I'm very glad you're here.

It's difficult… to get old.

To get old?

I mean, to accept one's frailty or however you want to…?

Yeah. Well, I feel I've- I mean, since that little stroke… I can walk and I can talk and, and so on, but I'm not the same person anymore. That's how it goes.

But you're not interested for example to have somebody visit. You know, like the AJR, for example, they [inaudible] can visit.

Well, I get a carer from Jewish Care every morning…

Aha.

… because my children insist that somebody has to check whether I'm alive in the morning. I mean, actually, I- I need somebody to speak to. You know, they could phone and see I'm alive.

Yes.

But I should have to get up and get dressed and talk- no, I'm not always dressed, I have to admit. I should have to talk to somebody in the morning. Which, it is- I can understand that. Cause otherwise I might never get out of the bed. And… yeah. I just- there are so many things. I mean I could go to Selig Court and to- to- what's it called, the place where Selig Court is?

Yeah, to the lunch and to the- Yeah.

[2:07:16]

Yeah, I could go there. I could go to the activities.

You're nearby.

I know I'm nearby, but I don't fancy it somehow. And I don't know why I don't, but I just don't. I don't have the emotional energy to make new friends. I- I'm quarrelling with myself

in my head. I say, "Come. Pull yourself together, woman. It's all out there for you. Really, where better could I live?" On the doorstep of Alyth. I could be there every day of the week, there's so much going on.

And is the past something- do you think- do you think about the past or…?

Yes, I don't obsess about the past. I mean I spent all those years in therapy obsessing about the past. You can't undo the past. …I'm just OK. But there's nothing more that I feel I can do about it or want to do about it.

Yes. You don't feel like you have to write an autobiography? You have written…

Well I've written chunks, yes.

Or do something with the letters and- or all the material?

Well, I've also gone through that. But I mean it's a huge job to do it thoroughly. I did spend quite a lot of time on it at one time, but I haven't got the strength now. My kids aren't interested. That might make a difference if they were interested. But I didn't get interested until much- you know- I was a good age. And they might be interested in it later, but not now. Now they're preoccupied with …their children and so on. But I- I've lost the impulse to do it. I mean the syn- our synagogue puts out a remembrance book you know, and I should have put my relatives that died into it.

Yeah.

Haven't even done that. I suppose I'm mildly depressed, but… I can't make myself young again. Can't bring back all the people that are gone.

No- no.

And I'd like to try- I'm working on getting more energy so that I can at least enjoy myself more.

[2:09:42]

Yes.

But I've been doing less and less these last two years. You know, we have the Proms at St. Jude's.

Yes.

This year I only managed to go to one instead of six or seven. You know, and I haven't been to the Festival Hall now for a long, long time. And all the wonderful exhibitions that are on. I haven't got the strength.

Well it might come back to you.

Yes.. I'm working on it. I am, I mean I spend my life at the hospital having treatments of one sort or another. I'm personally bankrupting the NHS all by myself. But it gets very exhausting as well, trying to communicate with people. I've got to actually make a phone call, and I'm just dreading it because it takes at least six attempts until one manages to connect with the right person. And…

You said you always felt quite anxious in Germany. Is there anything- for you what is the most important aspect of that German Jewish heritage? Is there anything? Do you feel connected to something in particular?

I think it's the mixture of stuff. It's being- being here, being part of British culture. But with that little extra something different which is in itself- the Germanness connected with the Jewishness. But I always feel I haven't- I haven't given enough to those things. They're there and they're very much there. And I feel them emotionally, but I haven't worked hard enough at it. You know, I could have made myself a whole circle of friends that way. And… But- but there's something and I back away when- you know I- several years running I went to Belsize Square for the Holocaust Memorial thing and I usually went with my friend William.

Yes.

And he's up there lighting candles and talking to everybody. And I find I back away. And don't- sit there quietly and don't talk to people. I might talk to people that I know through my work…

Yes.

… but not through- not directly to do with that. It's a conflicted sort of…identity.

Yeah, you're not…

[2:12:16]

And my husband wasn't part of it either. So that was also something that affected my relationship with him, I think, because it was something that we didn't have in common.

But you said the synagogue- he did come to the synagogue.

He came but not in- not in my- yes, he came. Well he was brought up to go to synagogue… but- but he needed it from a different angle. And because he found that the place was full of people he'd been to school with. They used to be neighbours- he used to have as neighbours. [distracted:] Sorry…Cause he grew up in Hendon. And so they- people would- everybody would jump up and say, "Hello!" when they saw him come in. And I felt very jealous because I hadn't had that. Nobody knew me.

Yeah.

And… as I said, though I was friendly with a lot of people after I'd been going so regularly and… was greeted. You know, could greet people. They didn't become real personal friends. And I think that's… I don't make real personal friends easily. And I think every time I lose a friend because they leave the country or they leave the earth, it becomes more difficult to try and replace them. It's a huge effort. And I'm- I can't tolerate rejection. You know I was, I was rejected by the whole of Germany… so…

That's how it feels to you?

Yes…yes.

You were, yes.

Yes.

Not you personally, but-

Well, me and my- me and mine. I mean I was thrown out. I lost my- my nationality was taken away from me.

Speaking of throwing out. Did you ever get- did your parents get restitution?

[2:14:19]

Yes, very little, because they had nothing- they weren't wealthy people, they had nothing. But for the- they were paid out for the people who were killed. There was a set sum for- if you lost people in the camps. But again, there weren't that many directly in their line. And oh, there was a thing a few years ago where they- the- the AJR I think discovered that there were insurance policies… that hadn't been claimed on. So we claimed. And found one with our name on it. It was probably one that my father and grandfather had set up.

Yes?

But it was such an itsy little itsy thing…

What did you get from it?

I got- I don't know. They- they gave minimum amount. And my- what I was actually entitled to, was very much less. But I got this minimum amount. I can't remember what it was, but it was very nice. I think I may have given it to somebody as a, to help them. I can't remember. Yeah. But that was nice.

Do you have any sense of nostalgia at all or… I don't know, not for Germany because you said you feel you were thrown out, but...?

No, not really. I'm- I'm interested… I'm interested in what goes on there. But I don't identify with it. Because I didn't grow up there. I didn't go to school there. And I didn't grow up speaking the language. Well, I spoke it at home. But when I went to Germany for these various meetings…

Yes?

…And I was able to speak German to people, which I enjoyed very much, alas my German was not grown-up German. You know, there were a lot of words I didn't know, and expressions, because I stopped speaking at a- at a very early age. And also the culture had moved on. But it didn't matter, I mean I could- I could talk. But- then I didn't have anyone to talk to again. You know, when I came home there was no one I could talk to until- after my parents died.

Yes. Yeah. When did your parents pass away?

My mother in '87 and my father in '93… '94.

So he lived on?

[2:16:44]

He lived to ninety-and-a-half exactly. He always talked about his grandfather who became ninety-one. And I was trying to encourage him to… hang in there. But he couldn't make it to ninety-one.

And was that difficult for you? I mean, being such a small family and as an only child?

Yeah, it was. You mean, when they died?

Yes – yes.

No, by then it was a relief… because they- they were very old. And my mother was very sick. She got emphysema. And she coughed all the time and every time she coughed, my father yelled. It was awful. It was really painful how it went between them. And the more he yelled the more she coughed. And she- she didn't- couldn't breathe very well. And she was really unhappy in the end. She felt bad and she was really miserable because he was making her miserable. You know, people used to come and visit them, and- and be hor- absolutely horrified cause he just carried on with this cough, scream, cough, scream… scenario. And my father… I didn't get on very well with my father after my mother died. I- I looked after him. I was responsible for him and he had, he had a series of carers whom he'd picked up. You know there used to be at language schools for au pairs up in the- he used sort of to go and look for a 'cleaner' it was, ostensibly among the au pair girls. And… he had loads of these very nice foreign girls would come and sort of look after him. But he was impossible to look after. And he got worse and worse and worse. And… and he- he didn't like me anymore. When I got fat and middle-aged, he didn't- he didn't enjoy my company anymore. I was his best girlfriend when I was a child. My mother used to work at the weekends and so I'd go out with my father and he'd like to buy me clothes and he took me to the cinema …went out for tea. And if he was in a bad mood, my mother would say, "Go and cheer your father up." So I'd go and sit next to him and stroke his head and, and flirt with him until he cheered up. And looking back on it, I don't know what the hell my mother thought she was doing. I think she just didn't want to do it herself. And I was pushed to him more than was healthy, I think. But when I stopped being his little girl… things changed. I mean as a young woman I had a good figure and I dressed nicely and so on. But I let myself go a bit later on. And he didn't want me around anymore. And- but he needed me. And so it was not a good feeling. And once, I suppose when I was about forty or so, I came into his flat. I had on a big Russian-type fur hat for winter. Very glamorous hat. And as I came in he said, "Ooh, Halloo!" And he- he didn't know who I was. And I said, "Dad it's me." And he- "Oh…" And that's how it was.

Do you think that your parents would have separated maybe if-

No – no.

If they'd stayed in Germany?

No.

[2:20:36]

Oh, if they'd stayed in Germany, they'd never have married in the first place. They got together- at that time, my- most people just- and the same thing happened with my girlfriends who were making Aliyah.

Right. You think-

People paired off.

Do you think that the situation…?

Yeah. They needed-

You think that normally she wouldn't- they wouldn't have got together?

I don't think so, no. I asked him, you know, he- or I found among his things he had some jewellery. And there was a big ring. Beautiful big snake ring with a stone. Two snakes coiled together. And inside, it had a woman's name. He said his girlfriend gave him that. And he had this girlfriend for seven years and he didn't marry her. He immediately afterwards married my mother. And he said, "She was a doctor. She could support-" you know. She could live; she had something to- to take with her. And- and he was very good at surviving. You know, he could find his way through difficulties. And he worked very hard when he had to. And he was adaptable in many ways. They – you know – they weren't so compatible but they were complimentary in a way. And enjoyed enough things together. Well, they went on holidays together; they enjoyed themselves. The home life was more tricky. But…I don't know. Who knows. Maybe they would have got together anyway. But I somehow doubt it. But they- at the end it was really awful.

And were they in touch with other refugees? I mean did they look for that- for the company of…?

Well, they all- the few friends they had, were all refugees.

Right.

Yeah, without exception.

And did they stay in Finsbury Park or where…?

[2:22:26]

Yes. My father didn't want to move because his business was near there and my mother had her practice there. I mean, the other doctors in the practice would be down- lived in Hampstead Garden Suburb and commuted. But she didn't drive until very late in life. And they both had- didn't want to have to travel. So they stayed there. And when I was having difficulty finding a husband, my mother said, "Would it help if we moved?" It would have done in, in a purely technical sense, except I wasn't interested in somebody who couldn't fancy me because I lived in Finsbury Park. That was too ridiculous for me. But- and it did happen. I remember meeting a guy at a party at a girlfriend's house and- wanted to take me home. And then when he heard where I lived, he suddenly lost interest and backed out. But… Yeah, my mother was very panicky that I might not marry. I mean she was over thirty when she married, which wasn't so usual those days as it is now. But, you know, I was the only one. There was nobody else for them to focus on. Except my uncles… who were forever marrying- one uncle had three wives and ten mistresses. And the other uncle had only two wives but probably twelve mistresses.

And no children?

No children. And… And so they didn't have any family life with them at all. They had nice- some of their friends I was very fond of. But…

And they joined a synagogue? You said they-

Oh, my parents?

Yeah.

Well, yes, they joined their local synagogue immediately when they moved to Finsbury Park. They never went there. Oh- my mother would go in on Yom Kippur morning, or Yom Kippur afternoon, to check that her old lady patients were all right. That was what she used to say. She wouldn't go and pray. That was- my father would have given her hell if he thought she was going to pray. But she- her family were much more religious. They were Reform, but they were religious. They were very active in the synagogue. But.. she was very much- she was very much held by my father. To do something he didn't like would make life very difficult. The one thing she managed to do was follow her profession. And as I explained, she had to fight him over that too.

Yeah. It doesn't sound easy.

No. Well when she went to the surgery, and she was there, you know, then she was in her world. She was queen of the May and- but when she was at home, it was very different.

[2:25:16]

Edna, is there anything else? We've discussed quite a bit. Is there anything else I hadn't- I haven't asked you do you think is important?

I don't know. My brain's gone to sleep.

And also do you have a message for anyone who might watch this interview based on your experiences?

Just think how lucky you are to be here. And …Mnn, there must be more than that but I can't think of it. Sorry, I'm very tired now.

That's fine. In that case, I'd like to say thank you for the interview and sharing your life history with us. And we're going to look at your photos and documents in a little while.

OK. OK.

Thank you.

You're very welcome. It was interesting for me.

[End of interview]
[2:26:13]

[2:26:31]
[Start of photos and documents]

Photo 1
This couple are my paternal grandparents. Elli and Siegfried Beermann, photographed in Berlin in the mid-30s, when they would have been in their sixties.

Photo 2
This lady is Bertha Falkenberg, née Ginsberg, my maternal grandmother. The photo was taken for her sixtieth birthday which had been- would have been in the 30s, in Berlin.

Photo 3
This is Hermann and Bertha Falkenberg, my maternal grandparents. The photograph was taken at a spa of some kind where they're taking a cure. And I think it's at the end of the 1920s.

Photo 4
I know this is a picture of me, Edna Sovin, with my mother Hanna Beermann, as a very small baby, in Berlin. …1938.

Photo 5
This is a picture of my parents, Fritz and Hanna Beermann, and me, Edna, later Sovin, taken outside their flat in Berlin, some time before May 1939.

[2:28:12]

Photo 6

This is a group of Fritz and Hanna Beermann my parents, with me, Edna, later Sovin taken at the end of the war when I was about five years old… in England. I'm not sure if it was in Birmingham or somewhere else.

Photo 7

This is Edna Sovin, at that time Beermann, taken when she was about five. It would have been taken towards the end of the Second World War. I'm not sure if it was Birmingham, but that's the most likely place.

Photo 8

This is Edna Beermann, later Sovin, aged fourteen, 1952, in London.

Photo 9

This is my maternal grandmother Bertha Falkenberg who was the chairperson of the Jewish Women's League of Berlin, and the first woman who represented, who was representative of the Jewish Community of Berlin. It was taken 1945-6 after her release from Theresienstadt concentration camp.

Photo 10

This is a picture of my wedding. Edna Beermann marrying Stanley Sovin. Flanked by my parents, Hanna and Fritz Beermann in December 1962, in London.

Photo 11

This is Edna Sovin with her three children, Jo, Jude and Ben, on holiday in the mid-70s somewhere in the English countryside.

Photo 12

This is the Sovin family in the garden of their house in Corringham Road London, around 1995. Celebrating Stanley's sixtieth birthday, with Edna, Jo, Jude and Ben.

Document 1

This is a template for a certificate of the first prize of a waltzing competition held at the Hotel Ballaqueeney, Port St. Mary, in September 1941.

[2:31:08]

Document 2
This is a sketch of Onchan internment camp on the Isle of Man in September 1940. …Signed by F. Kleinmann.

And how did you get it, this? Your father? From your father's collection?

Well, more likely my uncle's, actually. [Hans Beermann]

Document 3
This is an original drawing of a- of a leaflet form Onchan internment camp, in preparation for thanking somebody in September 1940.

Document 4
This is an original drawing and message to Hans Beermann, my uncle, for the work he did in helping his fellow inmates at Onchan camp in 1940, on the Isle of Man.

[long pause]

Document 5
This is another congratulation to my uncle, Hans Beermann on his thirty-third birthday from his comrades in Onchan camp on the Isle of Man. 1940.

Mrs. Sovin thank you very much again for sharing your story and your documents with us. Thank you.

[End of Photographs and documents]
[2:02:06]